



Resilient Leadership in the Stay-at-Home era and beyond

*Some insights for leaders and professionals
to help them cope with current times,
sustain wellbeing and energy,
and prepare for the world after.*

An introduction

Our world is upside down. The war against the pandemic is fought 24x7 by nurses and doctors in the ICUs. Massively consequential decisions are made by governments in a matter of hours. Company leaders and owners, big and small, are fighting for the survival of their businesses.

Yet, at the same time, our daily lives are at an eerie standstill. Space and time are warped. Our work and life habits get stretched between rushing for basic necessities and unusual slowness.

*Over the past days, we have had multiple conversations with leaders and professionals all over Europe and the Middle East. For many of them, it was challenging to **find a new balance in this confined yet uncharted space – before even starting to think about the future.***

Their circumstances vary a lot: experienced executives working from their “empty nests”, young parents staying at home with their kids, single professionals coping with added isolation, etc. Yet, there were similarities in their experiences and difficulties. We have written this document with leaders and team managers in mind, but we believe that most of these reflections are valid at all levels in an organization.

*We have sought to be practical enough, yet we did not want to stay at the level of the “tips” that are now flourishing in the media. **We can all feel that we are involved here in a deeper type of personal and collective change.** Tips and tricks, however nice, won’t be nearly enough to match the magnitude of this shift.*

***We thought it would be useful to share some of this exploration.** We like to call them “insights”, as some of them might require a deeper change of mindset – which is great!*

This piece of work will now have a life of its own. One thing we’re imagining is that you could choose the page(s) that feel the most relevant to you as a team or your household, discuss them together, find ways to support each other, and maybe hang them on a wall in your home (or post them in a virtual workspace) as a nice reminder.

We are also preparing interactive ways to support executives, leaders and teams at all levels.

We hope you will enjoy this work and benefit from it, and we are curious about your reactions and reflections!





***Remain vigilant
to protect
your colleagues
and clients***

0. The obvious basics first

The message has been hammered into us: Protect yourself, protect others, and in this way protect our healthcare professionals.

Since we all know this, you might wonder why we repeat it and how it is related to leadership.

Well, we believe being a leader starts with being a responsible, engaged citizen.

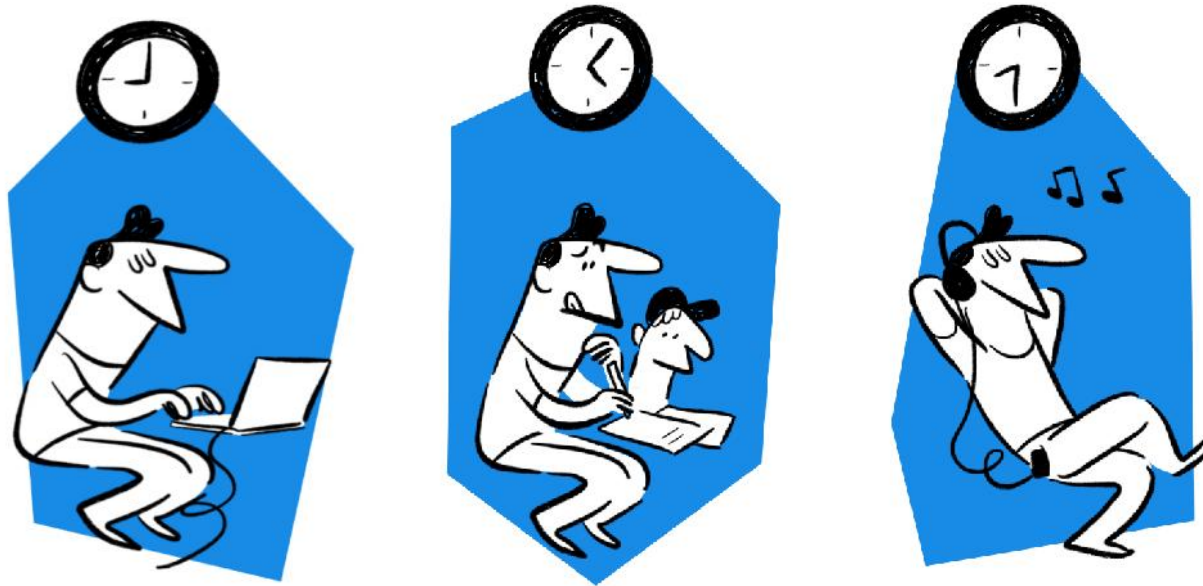
To protect your teams, we trust you already heed the guidance of your local health authorities.

Stay up to date: as confinement measures get cautiously lifted, vigilance will be key.

When in doubt, opt for the safest choice. Go the extra mile.

Never, ever put your team members at risk.





Set and maintain boundaries, rituals and routines into your days and weeks

1. Build discipline into your schedule

Being confined increases the risk that work pervades your entire life.

Define a schedule for working days. Separate work from the rest.

At a private level, protect boundaries around ‘family time’, ‘couple time’, ‘me time’, and... ‘nothing time’ – like listening to the music you loved when you were 17. Remember “commuting back from work”? That was actually a useful buffer!

Building routines and rituals is important for you, and essential for young kids. It will also help your teenagers who may be struggling with self-organizing and self-study.

As a leader, provide your teams with as much clarity, stability and structure as you can. Agree on regular team routines; keep them as light as possible. Clear goals and delegation are essential, now more than ever.



2. Partition your space

As much as your living space allows, allocate separate places for separate functions

This will be a tough one for people living in smaller flats, requiring creative solutions...

Keep a clear separation, even if just symbolic, between where you work and where family life takes place. Protect the place where you sleep. Dress up, a little bit, for work at home!

Younger kids tend to like these kind of cues – boundaries and rituals help them read their environment, build a sense of predictability and safety, and adjust their behaviour. To an extent, the same is true for us adults...



P.S. for team leaders: if some of your team members are young parents, be especially supportive – they are in the trenches of the Stay-at-Home combat!

3. Reach out, stay in touch, support

Go through your list of clients, colleagues, friends, family, etc. Think of elderly and/or isolated people around you. Don't overlook young team members, either – some of them may be confined alone in a new city, and may need your moral support.

Reach out – especially if you are feeling lonely!

Ask how they're doing. If they have time and appetite for it, have an idle chat.



***Listen, show empathy,
laugh whenever you can,
try to help if possible.***

Think of it as an improved version of chatting around the coffee machine, or during lunch breaks: an essential way for you and them to stay connected and sane, and to re-energize yourselves.

P.S. For team leaders: do not underestimate that, for some people, the combination of uncertainty, forced physical passivity, and inability to act on their issue is nothing short of traumatic. Listen, show empathy, demonstrate your support!



4. (Re-)learn to communicate

*Remote communication is a new art.
Explore with curiosity and empathy!*

Even people experienced with virtual teams and ‘hotdesking’ may find themselves struggling with massive, exclusive telework.

As a leader, get some practical tips on how to run tele- and video-conferences in a healthy, open and efficient way.

More importantly: misunderstandings may become more frequent. Don’t let them escalate. Explore the perceptions of others again and again, with a curious mind. Their world is also in turmoil – have them express what concerns them. As weeks will go by, fatigue and irritability will seep in. Don’t take anything personally. Remember to be forgiving to others.

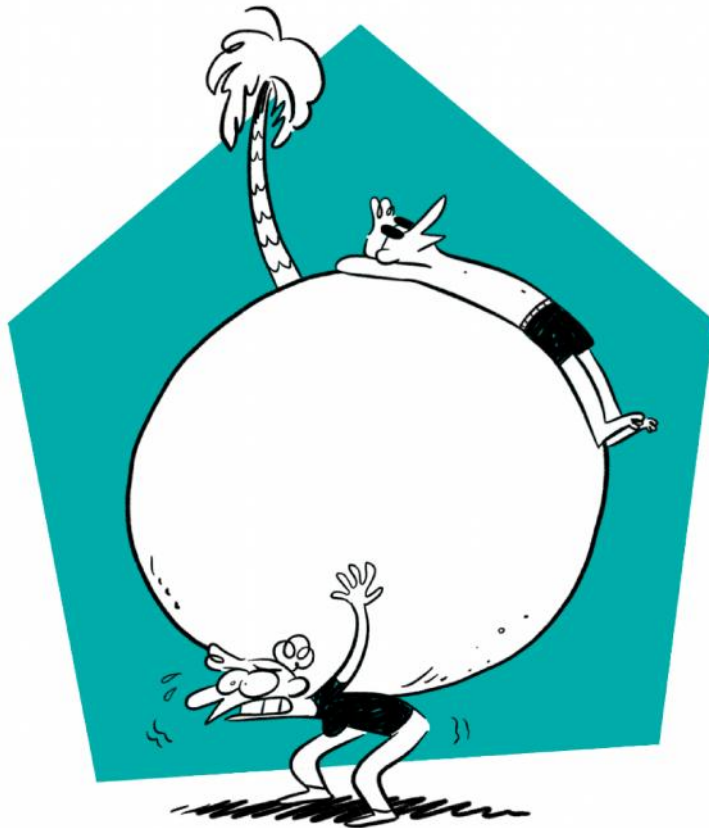
If you feel frustrated at someone, remember Nelson Mandela’s favourite poem: you are “the captain of your soul”. Frustration, like all emotions, is a signal. Something important to you has been touched. Explore yourself: was it just fatigue, or an implicit expectation, or some deeper need or value? Discuss your views and feelings openly. Listen to the other person’s needs. Look together for mutually satisfactory solutions.

PS: Yes, this is Nonviolent Communication. It’s a great idea to buy one of Marshall Rosenberg’s books, or watch his videos. They are not recent, but his humanity oozes from the screen. Concepts are easy, yet practice is tough, so set yourself a little challenge of practicing it daily with your team and family!



5. Adjust your rhythm(s)

*Don't add unnecessary pressure.
Take the time to find your footing...*



We all have unique reactions to this uncharted situation. Even experienced colleagues can show unexpected behaviours under the pressure of the current events.

Some people react by becoming hyperactive. Others, very energetic people in normal times, seem to go temporarily through “lethargy”: a slower pace, or much more sleep. These are, of course, only two extreme examples.

It would be wrong to read these unusual reactions as ‘a motivation issue’ or a lack of performance. They simply reflect how we each adjust to the current unsettledness.

Yes, there are urgencies. But – is it helpful to add pressure to the pressure? Be kind and understanding – to yourself, first.

*...and help others
find theirs*



6. Tidy up!



Every evening, clean up your desk, or whatever you use as such.

***Confinement
is a great time to unclutter***

Having to stay at home means a great opportunity to clear up your home, your garage, your cellar, and... your mind.

Dispose of things that could be useful to others, discard the rest!



7. Identify the positives

*Appreciate small things;
show gratitude!*

We all know life has become more difficult, and maybe there is pain and drama around you.

But there are also good things happening: people who keep everyday things running, gestures of solidarity, or just a ray of sunshine.

New, better alternatives are emerging and becoming meaningful. Did we really need that daily commute, these incessant travels?

Take a moment to pause and notice all these beautiful, valuable small things.

Experience and express gratitude. Say 'thank you'!



8. Take stock

While most leaders we are in touch with are extremely busy, some have to face a slow period. For those ones: this could be a great time to get feedback from your team! There are plenty of ways to do this, like 1:1 calls or mails, or on-line surveys. Better still, ask a trusted person to collect it and prepare a summary.

Once you get this feedback, pause to reflect. Look for improvement areas, but don't overlook the positives: they are your signature as a leader.

Take time to (re)define “the leader you want to be”, “the difference you want to make”, and the “dream team-spirit you want to create” with them.

Then, ‘meet’ with your team. Start by thanking them for this precious gift of feedback. Be honest about what you need to change. Dare to share your vision.

Provide ample time for their reactions; listen, with an open mind and trusting ear. Re-contract with them.

You will engage in the ‘life after’ on a much stronger footing!

*Why not use this period
as an opportunity
to reflect about
your impact as a leader?*



9. Build new, healthy habits



Now is a great time to finally get serious about mindfulness, home workouts, yoga, cooking, etc.

There's plenty of good resources online.

Or, if you can, just go for an early morning walk.

***Experiment, enjoy,
find out what works for you,
and stick to it!***

10. Keep an eye on toxic habits

It's become easier to slip – enjoy the confined life as much as you can, but watch these cigarettes, snacks, drinks, etc.

Over-consumption of news and social media can be toxic too, especially when it is overloaded with negative emotion or poorly verified information. How about a good book, for a change?

Why not create small, fun challenges in your household, to keep toxic habits in check?

Take a little time to make mutual agreements (without getting into blaming and fighting! ;). For example, you could agree on putting smartphones aside during meals, and outside of the bedroom at night.

Then, help each other keep their word.



11. Arm yourself with patience & optimism

It will take time for life to become stable again – and no one knows yet how that is going to happen.

Disruption is likely to be with us for many months to come, a marathon with lots of ups and downs, hopes and disappointments.

***No one can be certain
about the future,
but it is likely to be a marathon
with lots of ups and downs***

Build cautious, realistic expectations. Help others find their footing, again and again, over this lengthy and potentially dispiriting journey.

*Maintain your own stamina and optimism.
Keep your spirits high!*



12. Start planning for the future



*Our priorities have gone upside down,
our personal values get tested.*

*No one knows yet what “normal” will mean
in the future. And yet...*

***...there will be a “world after”,
and we can start preparing
for what we want to make of it...***

...hopefully, a better, more sustainable place.

*Be it a new career, re-training yourself, a two-
months hike through nature, time devoted to a
cause that is important to you... instead of
keeping it at the stage of a vague, faraway
dream, why not start planning for it concretely?*



A (non-)final word...

We've tried to bring some wisdom into this document, but as we conclude it, the only certainty we have is: there is so much we don't know and can't figure out yet. Work in progress...

Yet, we need to start looking towards the future, and in this process we need to find the right balance between realism and optimism.

On the realistic side, we anticipate that businesses will go through rough times, even once confinement measures are cautiously lifted. We imagine something like a post-war economy. Most of us do not know exactly what this means. We will all be scarred one way or another. We will have to endure turbulence for some time to come.

At personal level, we might be tempted to indulge back into our old ways. Some of us will feel compelled to live at twice their past speed, as if "to make up for lost time". Chances are then that this crisis will be another "wasted opportunity".

We'd much rather be called naïve than cynical. The optimist in us sees the opportunity, the possibility: a chance for change at personal and collective levels. Let's take just two of the most significant examples we are witnessing. Look at our Italian friends. They pay a heavy toll to the pandemic, yet are showing us what 'community' and 'solidarity' mean. Look at the ways we have engaged collectively in changing our ways of living, working and consuming – we did not choose it, it is far from easy, but we did it. An Italian bank executive just told us: "we've digitized more in the past month than over many years". Crises reveal our resilience, our creativity.

We all know there is another huge, silent tsunami building up – another curve we need to flatten: the damage we're doing to our planet and its climate. We only have a narrow window to fight it, and it's now. We can do it. Let's tackle it together!



Reach out!

We hope you have enjoyed this, and are curious about your reactions and reflections. We'd like to think of this as becoming collective intelligence.

We have created this document on the basis of our experience and insights as Leadership consultants, most of us being Psychologists. We are currently working on different ways of supporting our clients, individually and collectively, throughout these turbulent times. Among others, we are preparing e-workshops to help leaders and their teams, at all levels, share their experiences, connect, and support each other.

So, don't hesitate to reach out!

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