

4 Problematic Leadership Trends and How to Solve Them

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If you're wondering how you can continue working at this pace, meeting so often, and still find time to be inspiring to others, read on.

Challenges related to the global pandemic continue to morph rather than disappear. As a result, leadership teams are still tasked with performing under unusual, unfamiliar, and at times, unsettling conditions.

As an executive coach, I am often asked how groups of leaders can maximize their collective results while navigating market volatility and exceptional stress. The following strategies offer solutions based on four common themes I'm hearing right now from leaders. They can help leadership teams up their game—particularly in the wake of major change and volatility.

"MY TEAM AND I CANNOT KEEP WORKING AT THIS PACE."

The competing and constant tensions of fiduciary responsibility and caring for your employees can make even the most dedicated leader buckle under the pressure and pace—even during normal times. Add in a global pandemic, which has significantly exacerbated the expected turnaround time for decision-making and deliverables, and it's no wonder leadership teams and employees alike are suffering. Many boards and executive teams that I work with are imploring their teams to "hang in there," in hopes that the situation will soon improve. But current

predictions suggest that COVID-19's endemic status may not arrive until 2024. Can you and your teams keep this up for two more years? Most of the executives I've spoken with say no.

Yet, while leaders across the organization may acknowledge that no one can continue working like this, the first question is, who's going to do something about it? Many companies look to middle management as a way to squeeze more juice from the organization, and their go-to solutions are often to temporarily add staff or explore opportunities to leverage their technologies better—both of which cut into gross profit.

I've found that leadership teams are actually in a better position to become effective change management sponsors than middle managers are; but they tend to be underutilized. When executive teams can get out of the weeds of their functional areas and envision a new future for balancing corporate profit concerns with employees' human need to slow down, it can help ensure that both responsibilities are met while catalyzing organizational innovation and growth.

"OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM DOESN'T HAVE TIME TO MEET EVERY WEEK."

Here's a specific outcome of the "drinking through the fire hose" pace that the pandemic has exacerbated: Many leadership teams are regularly sacrificing their time together so that each leader can focus on their functional areas. Yet, having leaders stuck working in silos—and failing to get the brightest brains in the business together on a weekly basis—is short-sighted. I've witnessed firsthand that there may be some short-term pain when leaders unplug once a week from working toward their own functional goals to establish a shared purpose, measurable goals, and best practices with their peers across the organization.

But the time each leader sacrifices toward their most direct objectives is well worth it in return for the long-term gain of having the entire leadership team working together to deliver next-level products, services, and innovation, which are difficult to create within a single functional area. With this in mind, the CEO or other member of the executive team should hold all leaders accountable for regular, scheduled collaboration meetings to deliver weekly on shared goals.

"I NEED MY TEAM TO THINK ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION FIRST AND THEIR AREA SECOND."

On a related note, while there are almost always opportunities at the C-level to create an expectation for enterprise thinking first and then "team" accordingly, I've found that enterprise thinking is a skill that's often underdeveloped in early- to mid-career executives. Helping leaders develop in this area requires a clear declaration and expectation that they do so, and at least one leader who does this well on the team.

It takes time for leaders to transition from individual to organizational thinking, so the executive team should also take steps to help create a culture of enterprise thinking. Consider using these four questions to shift the focus from "mine" to "ours" at weekly leadership team meetings:

- What is best for the entire business?
- How does this help the organization meet its overarching goals for the year?
- How would making this change disrupt or catalyze plans at the enterprise level?

"I NEED SOMEONE ELSE TO INSPIRE PEOPLE DURING THIS TIME OF EXTREME CHANGE."

Whether the company has appointed a manager, employee, or external consultant to help facilitate organizational change, it's important to think about how leadership teams leverage their change agents and avoid overreliance on them. As someone who coaches executives in high-growth organizations, I've seen this go wrong for many leadership teams, as "change sponsors" expect their "change agents" to single-handedly inspire and bring people with them as they spearhead the organization's initiatives.

But here's a tip: Change agents will never be able to bring everyone in the company along. In fact, it's unusual for them to even bring most people with them since the nature of their job is disrupting and influencing key stakeholders while relying on their leadership team to pick up the slack.

The leadership team has political capital and relationships to leverage so that the change agent can do their best work. With this in mind, change sponsors should regularly sell the vision from the top down, backing up the change agent and requiring internal players to support the initiatives while removing obstacles.

It may be tempting during times of prolonged stress and change for leaders to collectively take their foot off the gas with their leadership skills and strategies, wait for the smoke to clear, and double down in their functional areas. But by coming together as a team, using these strategies, and implementing new ways of thinking, leadership groups can level up, rather than level off.