

# Leading Within Chaos

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The approach you take as a leader depends on the context you are part of – whether you are new to a job or whether you have been leading the team for a long time. Every leader must be able to adapt to the circumstances and provide what the team needs and every team, like every individual, is different. You must be able to adapt to the circumstances you are met with.

Leading a team in the middle with contrasting and often conflicting demands in a highly stressed and ever changing environment is hard – it can seem like trying to control chaos – and can even be dangerous, particularly if there are a range of variables that you can't control. It is in that context that I offer the following guidance points – my eight factors to improve leadership in a chaotic world.

## Commit

Firstly you must commit to what you can achieve – your goals and focus – but also to your team. You need to commit to being the best leader you can be for them. That means becoming the leader they need, not necessarily the leader you want to be or you envisage yourself as. Your normal approaches may not be applicable, your normal expectations may not be fair. You need to commit to understanding their world and to becoming the right leader for them – in short – show up and lead.

## Understand

This comes from observing, listening and feeling. People talk about having empathy but in truly chaotic or high risk environments, your natural empathy might not be enough. You need to extend yourself – an extension of your commitment if you like – and grow to fully understand the pressures and pains of your team. Through this you will learn more of the bigger picture, be able to guide and not command and create real connections.

## Connect

This is about all of the above and then becoming the approachable leader. Over time, open up to them to show your understanding and that you feel their pain. It is about real compassion which

you can only demonstrate with real understanding. Be responsive, give them time and give them some of you – this might mean sharing your fears so they know they can share theirs. Build honest relationships that are reflected on both sides. Show them you understand and share their concerns and then show them what you will do.

#### Action

You need to understand what needs to be done and you need to make sure you do it. Act on their behalf, not just once but consistently. Also be seen to be acting on their behalf but without blowing your own trumpet. It is important they know you share their concerns and, even if you are powerless yourself to do anything about it, you will try and you will share. Fight their corner but be fair – if you fight for one you fight for all – this also helps to build a strong sense of team commitment – you are all in it together.

#### Courage

Have the courage for everything! This could be having the courage to take your time and not rush to judgement or it could be the courage to step back and trust in them. Being courageous is as much about having faith in those around you and trusting them as it is about trusting yourself. In leadership this is also having the courage to say no as well and to disagree. A well led and high functioning team doesn't mean you have to agree- leadership is also, once you have the understanding and knowledge of the team, about standing firm to the right principles and applying them, which can sometimes mean saying no. If you have been considerate and built the right relationships and demonstrated your integrity, your team will respect your decisions.

#### Do and do fun!

Role model the behaviours you expect – never be too hard on yourself or others, be true to your ethics and work hard. A team that sees their leader willing to be amongst them and be diligent, consistently putting in the work required, are much more likely to respond to hard demands from that leader. Demonstrate your integrity and try to have fun. However demanding the environment, in fact the more demanding the more relevant, have fun and encourage others to do so. We work hard and long hours – it's important we can enjoy it too, that we share humour and that we can take the positives.

#### Positivity

Be positive. Encourage and praise everyone when they deserve it – don't miss opportunities and speak publicly about your pride in them. Demonstrate to your team your faith and commitment to them because you are positive about them – not for the sake of it but because it is earned. This will lift others and engage them in understanding they too can be strong and proud. Most importantly though, stay positive. This means to keep looking for answers, keep taking risks and keep being innovative. However challenging the environment and the context try to never be afraid of opportunities and stay positive about the possibilities.

## Intuition

Finally, use your intuition, trust your instincts and learn. You will make mistakes amid the chaos – never be afraid to admit them to yourself and others. These experiences, if you embrace them and are self-aware, will teach you better intuition in future. Having the humility when things go wrong to admit your mistakes shows you value others. Once you have taken on the lessons, your intuitive side will grow. Always remember your strengths and have the humility to take support in your areas of weakness. Mostly though, develop your intuition and be confident to use it.