



Growing Forward Part 2 Notes

April 30, 2020

As the month of April comes to a close, we are adjusting to a “new normal” of living in the midst of (or recovering from) a global health pandemic – a crisis.

Typically, the word “crisis” has a negative connotation. A crisis is a bad thing. However, there are a few positive aspects of a crisis. In fact, some leaders have created a crisis within their organizations on purpose because of the benefits they bring. This self-created crisis even has a name – a “manufactured crisis.”

There are two major benefits of a crisis. First, a crisis brings clarity. It exposes who we are – our character, our values, our beliefs – in a way that isn’t often noticeable when there isn’t a crisis. When we aren’t challenged, it is easier to just go with the flow and get lost in the crowd. But when there are challenges, our true colors shine through.

For leaders, having clarity about who truly supports the organizational mission and shares the organization’s values is powerful. Not everyone will pass the test of cultural fitness. Those who fail should be identified and helped to find employment elsewhere. Only during a crisis will this level of clarity be available.

The second major benefit of a crisis is that brings opportunity. During a crisis, we are able to accelerate organizational change in a way that we probably are not able to do outside of a crisis.

There are some big changes on the horizon due to the origin of the COVID-19 virus. Global supply chains are going to be restructured to reduce the reliance on China. Food suppliers are implementing protocols that will become permanent changes.

In our businesses, we see a big shift in thinking about working remotely. There is more of an emphasis on results and less emphasis on punctuality and how many hours a person puts in at the office. In our industry, this is a welcome change because work-life balance has been historically way out of balance.

Another change that has been accelerated during this crisis is the use of technology. Remote web-meetings and adoption of web-based business management software are two areas that stand out.



A third area of change is the interest in better financial management practices, especially related to cash management. Owners who were comfortable “living on the edge” are rethinking this approach – finally!

A crisis also brings challenges for leaders. During challenging times, my mind goes back to basics. One of the basics is something I picked up from a Gallup research study, which outlines the 4 basic needs of employees:

1. Hope – for a better future. Our people need to know what the future looks like, what the plan is, how they fit into it, etc. If there is no hope, it’s over.
2. Trust – that leaders have integrity, that their actions match their words. When trust is violated, it’s tough to recover.
3. Compassion – our people need to be heard. They need to know that we are listening and understand their thoughts and feelings.
4. Stability – even in the face of change, people need some elements of consistency.

Let’s focus on these basics.

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Thank you!



Growing Forward Part 1 Notes

April 1, 2020

The month of March, 2020 brought an unprecedented situation to the world, at least in our lifetimes. As of today, schools are closed, non-essential businesses are closed, those who are working are at home working remotely, and basically everyone is encouraged to stay home until the end is in sight, whenever that is.

According to Jim Harter, Chief Scientist of Workplace Management and Wellbeing at Gallup, 84% of U.S. employees approve of how their employers have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, employers are doing all they can do and their people are appreciative. I've seen this with my clients as well.

Even so, there is a great deal of fear, anxiety, worry, and stress among all of us. Gallup conducts a large-scale, ongoing research study on workplace wellbeing, asking respondents if they felt certain emotions at any point in the last 24 hours. Take a look at some of the data:

Emotion	Pre-Pandemic	Post-Pandemic
Worry	37%	60%
Stress	48%	65%
Enjoyment	81%	60%

The good news is that there is much research data that informs leaders about what matters most during times of crisis. According to Gallup, the following four elements of engagement increase in importance during tough times.

1. **Having clear expectations about my job.** This is especially important today since so much has changed so quickly. Lack of clarity is unsettling and creates anxiety and fear. Being clear about work hours, deliverables, goals, etc. is key.
2. **Having the materials and equipment needed to do my job.** This is often a challenge during good times—even more so during tough times. Supervisors are encouraged to ask on a regular basis what they may do to support their people.
3. **Having opportunities to do what I do best.** This requires an understanding of the unique talents and skills of our people. We are all at our best when we are allowed to utilize our unique, God-given talents in our work.



4. **Understanding how what I'm doing fits into the bigger picture.** When a person sees the connection between their work and the organization's mission or purpose, the importance of what they're doing increases greatly. They are more passionate about their work, more engaged, and more productive.

I've had many people asking for advice during these times. As a consultant, giving advice is what I do, so that's nothing new. However, giving advice to a wider audience, where I'm not familiar with the specific situation, doesn't feel right.

We were all hit hard. We reacted the best we could. Our people are grateful. But they're also not necessarily in a great place emotionally.

So now what? We're on a new plateau with remote meetings, social distancing, cleaning protocols, and everything else we've put in place. As a leader, what should I be focused on next? This is a critical question for us to answer.

I'm a firm believer in intentional living, which requires us to determine what's important and what isn't. There's no one-size-fits all answer – it's up to each of us to decide.

So, I'd like to share with you what I'm focused on, with the hope that it will inspire you to create your own set of focus areas.

From a professional standpoint and as a leader, there are three areas I'm focused on:

1. **Connection.** Bringing people together has never been more important. The use of technology to connect people remotely has increased exponentially. People with flip phones are now using Zoom. I've never been invited to so many remote meetings in my life, and I work from home most of the time. I'm focused on creating more connections, more discussions, more time together with clients, family members, etc. than ever before.
2. **Transparency.** Clearly stating what is known, not known, and what the plan is. There is comfort in knowing that all of the cards are on the table; that nobody is holding anything back; that voices are heard. Our people are more willing to support decisions when we walk them through our decision-making process, explain the pros and cons, and provide reassurance that everyone's input was considered.



3. **Vulnerability.** During times of crisis, we gravitate toward leaders who are not only courageous but authentic and vulnerable. Being vulnerable requires acknowledging our weakness and fears. Brene Brown has a great line in her book, *Dare to Lead*: “Courage and fear are not mutually exclusive. Most of us feel brave and afraid at the exact same time. We feel vulnerable.” Being “in the arena” is only possible when we are willing to be vulnerable.

From a personal perspective, there are also three areas of focus:

1. **Generosity.** I have been blessed and have the ability to help others. Every day, I have an opportunity to see the needs of others and do something about it. I also can miss the opportunity by being inwardly-focused, oblivious, ignorant. It’s my choice.
2. **Prayer.** I believe that there is power in prayer. There is never a bad time to say a quick prayer for someone or something. And I’ve never been turned down when asking someone if I can pray for them, even if they aren’t a praying person themselves.
3. **Self-Care.** Staying healthy physically, mentally, and spiritually is what is going to get me through this crisis. I’m committed to working out every day. I’m reading for enjoyment, something I’ve rarely done before. I’m intentionally building fulfilling things into my daily calendar. And I’m sharpening myself spiritually. I’m taking care of myself so I can more effectively take care of others.

That’s my game plan. What’s yours?

I’ve had clients literally in tears last week, overcome by exhaustion, anxiety, and helplessness – and these are leaders, responsible for guiding their organizations. Some of you have felt these emotions also. It’s easy to become overwhelmed by the endless checklists of things to deal with on a daily basis.

That’s why it’s so important to be focused on certain areas and to be very intentional about how we spend our precious time and energy – so we are better equipped to be the leaders we need to be.

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