

▶ COVID-19 Crisis

Advice from the Global Leadership
Community of Chief Executives



The impact of COVID-19 has already sent shockwaves through the global economy with months and even years of lingering effects expected. One thing is clear, traditional response won't be enough. Leaders need to act quickly and with purpose.

After 70 years as the preeminent authority on the evolving challenges facing young leaders, the YPO community is unequalled in its ability to navigate the intricacies and impact of this global pandemic. Data from [*The YPO Chief Executive Global Survey on the Business Impact of COVID-19*](#) shows YPO members are uniting under seven key leadership topics.

This document spotlights early insights, offering invaluable guidance on how your peers are facing this global pandemic.

ACT NOW

With months of unprecedented impact looming, global leaders need to act now to protect employees and stakeholders, and to minimize systemic damage.

“This is the Black Swan event on all our Risk Management matrices. What plans do we make to ensure that our businesses survive it and emerge stronger? Our businesses need to adapt to minimize the impact and need to be nimble in our responses. We will likely all take a hit from the economic impact of it but ‘this too shall pass’ and preparing for ‘what’s next’ is all we can do as leaders to maximize the odds for success.”

“Don’t be afraid to take bold leadership steps, even if your peers and competitors are not. Realize that this is foremost a human crisis, not an economic one. The right time to act is when it still feels too soon.”

“Stop. Detach. Reflect. Take a reality check: what really is (based on data as it updates). Look to what may be: Plan for best case, prepare for worst case. Reframe opportunities.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Make work easier.** Remove hurdles from your workforce, including remote work, technical upgrades, and other demands this pandemic creates.
- ▶ **The new normal.** Prepare now for a new normal in your company or organization, monitor how short-term events will impact long-term approach.
- ▶ **Be nimble.** Reflect on reality of your company’s situation and react accordingly.
- ▶ **Reframe the situation.** Take a big-picture synthesis of the situation and develop a fluid plan around that.
- ▶ **Consider hindsight.** How could you have prepared for this crisis? Don't wait for the obvious to occur.

STAY CALM

In the face of global disruption, it’s vital for leaders to remain calm and set the right tone.

“Now is not the time for panic, which will only get in the way of what you need to be doing. While it’s completely understandable to be worried, your best bet to getting through this unscathed is to channel that anxious energy into doing what you can to stop this pandemic from spreading. And to do that, you first need to have the most complete, accurate information on the situation as you can.”

“Don’t panic. Stay engaged with your clients to give them confidence that you sympathize with them and their circumstances and work together to try and mitigate as much risk and loss of business. This will build confidence, trust and a stronger relationship.”

“Communicate with your employees in a variety of formats – this is the time to be a leader, and to be seen and heard. Whether to stay the course, implement change, rally the troops or calm fears, crisis (whether real or fear-based) requires leadership. A good analogy to our business is that many experts feel that because of the coverage of this virus and the resulting attention to good hygiene practices, the spread of many other viruses will be halted. Similarly, the sense of urgency many leaders feel in their business can create an environment to make changes and focus on improvements (e.g. communication) that could or should already have been implemented. It can be a great time to work ‘on’ our leadership and our businesses, to come out on the other side of this issue stronger than before.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Task-force approach.** Create specific team(s) to manage this crisis and its varying impact.
- ▶ **Reframe disaster into disruption.** It’s easy to categorize this pandemic as the great unknown, but be honest about its likely long-term effects.
- ▶ **Expect resistance.** This is an emotional crisis. Don’t undervalue that employees and stakeholders are being impacted in ways you can’t imagine. Treat them with that respect from the outset.
- ▶ **Take a big-picture synthesis.** Develop a fluid plan to manage the dynamic, unpredictable and potentially unfavorable events.
- ▶ **Stay engaged.** Your people need your presence. Use this time to strengthen relationships.

COMMUNICATE WITH STAKEHOLDERS

To protect your employees and stakeholders, adopt a practice of “over-communication.”

“Act fast with communication related to COVID-19, keeping the same direction and tone. Be sure to spend some time writing in your own words to support, encourage and demonstrate empathy.”

“Monitor local and national decision makers’ responses. The more reactive, the longer the damage to global trade. Cost control, comply with regulations, communicate regularly with staff and suppliers and customers. Have a small task force to be available for your organization’s response to all parties. Utilize the negative to gain advantage over competitors; turn the crisis into opportunity. Use video conferencing as the go-to communications process. It’s so much more efficient. And have a social media strategy. Re-budget for the downturn, ensure credit lines are solid. Have more financing than you need.”

“Watch very closely but don’t overreact. Help employees quantify risks and relentlessly communicate the company plans to address the illness if detected in your company. Address the fears but project confidence in your ability to manage through the pandemic. Bring in outside experts if necessary to help employees differentiate between media hype and facts. Take the same measures with clients.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Consistent communication is key.** How you respond and react determines how employees and stakeholders view the company long term.
- ▶ **Support your people.** The effects of this crisis are far-reaching. Be sure you and your business take the opportunity to support employees and their families as much as possible.
- ▶ **Be present.** In such a difficult time, it's important for an organization to have a leader who communicates frequently and openly, serving as the face and voice of perspective in your organization.
- ▶ **Err on caution.** How you respond to a crisis of this type determines how loyal your team members may feel toward the company in the long term.
- ▶ **Be open.** Unprecedented times like this can test leaders' decision-making and assuredness. Be confident, and share your personal journey.

PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY

In the face of a growing epidemic, limiting employee interactions is vital to stemming the spread of the virus.

“Join in with what your community is doing. In the Silicon Valley, we are working to stop the spread by having everybody stop traveling and going to the office. It's a mini self-quarantine in our backyard. If we can stop it, we'll save our community and the world a lot of pain and deaths. Protect your employees, and they will thank you for it.”

“Assess what you can to cover costs for sick time beyond the current company policy to reduce employee fears. Create a hot spot for your Business Continuity Plan, for senior executives to meet periodically and connect and brainstorm, outside of virtual communication. Assess what functions can't be concluded remotely, such as check processing, and add these functions to your hot spot. Crosstrain employees.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Expect resistance.** Some employees thrive working remotely, others fear they'll feel isolated or unmotivated to work in their own homes. Be prepared to help all employees feel comfortable.
- ▶ **Rely on technology.** Encourage and embrace working-from-home and virtual meetings. Implement home office policies. Send home anyone sick or showing signs of illness. Where and when possible, invest in video conferencing software such as Zoom, GoToMeeting and Skype, and project-management tools such as Slack and Asana.
- ▶ **Business as usual.** Conduct as many meetings via video to ensure employees are more engaged, connected to their colleagues and invested in the success of the team.
- ▶ **Create transparency.** It can be normal, especially in larger companies, for employees to feel disconnected from senior leadership. Under the wrong conditions, this can be especially true in remote organizations. It's vital for leadership to invites regular questions and feedback.
- ▶ **Prioritize professional development.** Just because employees are limiting their sense of community, doesn't mean they can't grow in their professional journey. Companies thrive when employees are consistently learning and working on clear path for advancement at work.

PROTECT YOUR EMPLOYEES

Success over this pandemic is dependent on protecting your employees and stakeholders — work toward a people-first approach.

“Put the health, safety and financial welfare of employees first — that’s your highest priority. Ultimately, this pandemic is about people. Let them know that they are not alone. We are a community and are there for each other.”

“Adopt every measure possible to keep employees safe. It is better to err on the side of caution than to put people’s lives at risk. How you respond to a crisis of this type determines how loyal your team members may feel toward the company in the long term. Support team members and their families as much as possible.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Plan accordingly.** Make decisions around the safety and health of people. How are you prepared to take action for their health and well-being?
- ▶ **Seek care.** Benefits brokers can be good sources of information for health care in this time of uncertainty. Provide every opportunity possible for your business to remain healthy and strong.
- ▶ **Join your community.** Don’t be the outlier in how your business approaches containment and treatment of the pandemic. Evaluate how your neighborhoods, regions, countries are reacting and take notice.
- ▶ **Address mental health.** In this unknown time, people are scared. Make your community one of grace, acceptance and confidentiality.
- ▶ **Be flexible.** Understand your employees’ needs and provide for what’s within your reach. Take care of them, and they will take care of the business.

ENSURE FINANCIAL RESILIENCY

Defend against financial decline through innovation and proactive decision-making.

“Monitor local and national decision makers responses - the more reactive the longer the damage to global trade. Cost control, comply with regulations, communicate regularly with staff and suppliers and customers. Have a small task

force to be available for org's response to all parties. Utilize the negative to gain advantage over competitors - turn the crisis into opportunity."

"Manage costs by reducing marketing spend, audit operational processes and how you can create greater efficiencies, identify the potential length of the impact to the business and take necessary action on overheads."

"It's time to aggressively free up operating expense and de-risk as much as possible. This is a crucial step to creating some level of flexibility, a commodity most organizations will be looking for very soon. The speed and ferocity in which news comes must be addressed immediately with meaningful crisis communications. There will be some short- and long-term adjustments that conflict with the agile, lean, just-in-time world we've grown to love. Despite a healthy amount of progress in the last decade, the newest innovation craze will be diversification."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Stay lean.** Operationally speaking, plan and prepare for the worst-case scenario by keeping focused on global trends and economic predictions.
- ▶ **De-risk supply chain.** Buy from more than one country, and don't allow your business to be overleveraged in singular locales.
- ▶ **Accelerate growth.** Be proactive in finding ways to get ahead of competitors when this crisis recedes. Find ways to leverage your existing structure in new ways by improving efficiency.
- ▶ **Don't deter.** Curtailing investment and pulling back from strategic plans too can spell uncertainty for the long term. Avoid changing your organizational plans unless it's absolutely necessary.
- ▶ **Lean into diversification.** This crisis is likely to force your hand into structural modernization. Don't get left behind. Lean into progress opportunities whenever possible. How else can you make impact? Evaluate how your stakeholders' needs are changing, and create new opportunities for success.

WORK FROM FACTS, NOT RUMORS

With an avalanche of news, it's up to leaders to help define the line between facts and perception.

"Be fact-based in decision making, and lead with patience and resolve. Do not overreact to any given day's news cycle, but do not be slow to respond when circumstances warrant action."

"Many employees are seemingly gripped by what they hear around the world and are already planning for doomsday scenarios. Work hard to see through the fog of media reporting to understand the true underlying causes of the crisis and how they impact you — or not."

"Resist the urge to mimic the reactions of others if they do not make logical sense for your business and employees. Do not make quick decisions based on the latest headlines. Avoid confirmation bias by resisting the tendency to interpret new evidence to simply confirm your existing beliefs or theories. Be the source of calmness for your organization."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Quantify risk.** Be prepared to relentlessly communicate the company plans to detail impact in your business by addressing the fears but project confidence.
- ▶ **Consider help.** In an all-hands-on-deck situation, it might be valuable to bring in outside experts.
- ▶ **Avoid overreaction.** Critically consider facts when making decisions and respond quickly when it's warranted.
- ▶ **Be positive and optimistic but stay rooted in reality.** The short-term impact of this pandemic is still developing, but eye the balance between facts and perception.
- ▶ **Offer resources.** There's no shortage of news, advice and information available across the globe. Dedicated resources to making sure your employees have open access to reliable information.

Click [here](#) to explore full survey results.