



## Forward to a New Normal

-Mark Haeussler, CEO

When will things go back to normal?

Never.

There is no going back. Just like the attacks on 9/11 led to many societal changes – the Department of Homeland Security and ubiquitous airport screenings, for example – the Covid-19 pandemic will alter behaviors in ways that will *not* take us backward in time to “normal”.



Normal is a myth, of sorts. We want to wake up, expect our commute to take the same 22 minutes it did yesterday, know what to expect from coworkers, have a plan for the day, know who is picking up the kids from school, and that the water and power will be working as it always does when we arrive home. *Normal feels comfortable.* Yet, even in “normal” times, things are shifting and evolving, often missed in the very routines on which many rely. In a broad perspective, leaders recognize that there is no “normal”, as it can lead to a reliance on past momentum and allow for complacency to sneak into an enterprise.

At a time like this, leaders must attend to two conflicting needs for the organization:

1. Take on a leadership *presence* that emphasizes a solid container for your team; this means to *be there* for them and being a ground for others as they process the uncertainty. This includes listening at rest, patience, validating concerns, empathy, reassurance, interpreting meaning, asking questions to deepen understanding, and just being present for them.
2. Challenge the past routine and the conventional wisdom. Profound events and the upheaval that they create provide you two opportunities: A somewhat retooled “back to normal”, or an opportunity to challenge current beliefs and norms to climb into a new future. Backwards will not work, or not for the long-term, anyway. Invite new ideas. Challenge old thinking. Begin to shift the focus beyond survival to thriving.

The immediate action to the pandemic was well-defined, either by safety needs, survival needs, or mandates and provided people a clear “something to do”, and thus, a focus. Over time, people’s sense of uncertainty and their processing of what this *means to them* is percolating up in their consciousness.

People want normal. But resist leading your teams *back* to normal, as it ultimately will lead to irrelevance. *Lead people forward* to a new level of performance, one that aligns with the requirements and desires of the evolution of market needs. Support the discomfort that this brings sufficiently while people digest and adapt with your presence and listening. Evolve forward with boldness of belief, supported with boldness of empathy.

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