

EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY

# Dynamic Leadership for Turbulent Times

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We are living in unique times. This has been written before, but this time it's not for dramatic effect. While hyperbole is undoubtedly in great abundance these days, much of what we are experiencing in the United States and around the globe is indeed unprecedented in terms of magnitude, speed, pervasiveness, and the complex inter-relatedness among countries' economies. While I would not go so far as to say we are entering a *new world order*, I would readily say that we are experiencing *watershed change*.

In light of our contemporary realities, a great amount of research and tools – *specifically, in the areas of self-management and organizational leadership during distress* – has become increasingly germane. Having developed a brief overview of this research and these tools in 'presentation form,' this executive summary is provided to walk you through some of the key concepts and strategies that prove helpful when leading yourself and others through tumultuousness.

## DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

*"The proper order of things is often a mystery. It would be so nice if something would make sense for a change."*

*Alice in Wonderland*

Let's begin with a broad overview of the *Current Situation* as many of us see it. In a time when 'psychology trumps the economy,' our group embarked on a research project in February 2009 that involved interviewing a number of executives. In short, we wanted to know, "How are you doing? How's the morale, the focus, the organization at large?"

Though not particularly *surprising*, the findings are certainly *interesting* and *instructive* for many of us. The results are trimodal, with three distinct camps emerging within this representative sample. Some of the respondents are:

1. **Countdowners.** These organizations and leaders are fixated on the countdown clock as it ticks to zero. They perceive an organizational-apocalypse of sorts; the end is near. They hope to divest, sell, be acquired...and are meticulously dismantling their organization for bankruptcy or closure. For the sake of simplicity, imagine them as walking around with sandwich boards that read, "Please Buy Me."
2. **Treaders.** These businesses are treading water, biding time. They hope to emerge healthier one day, but don't know if...how...or when that might happen. They are hopeful yet realistic, and are exerting a great deal of energy to survive. They describe *battle fatigue*, a *bunker/siege/foxhole mentality*, and *difficulty leading through ambiguity*.

3. **Growers.** These organizations are engaged in due diligence. They are reorganized, lean, and hungry. They are searching for and gobbling up as many weak competitors as possible for pennies on the dollar. Their leanness will morph into plumpness as they continue to hire and expand their proverbial footprint.

Whether your organization is countdowning or trading water or growing, we can all be wiser and more successful by studying the behaviors of those in crisis. The purpose of this executive summary, therefore, is to do just that – provide tools based on years of research for those in the positions to most effectively influence others: board members, officers, executives, directors, managers, supervisors...*leaders of every stripe.*

Our outline to achieve this is quite simple, and I believe *simple is good.* After all, man's tendency is to overcomplicate the simple, and this is *not* a time that welcomes more complexity. The first half of this document will describe what we'll call **Smelling Salts**, because we must first explore how good leaders lead *themselves* and *others*. The second half of the document will address **Business Strategies** and describe a proven framework that you can utilize to great effect in your workplace.

### SMELLING SALTS

In any crisis, we see approximately ten percent of employees panic. Another ten percent lead, and the vast majority – perhaps eighty percent – wait for others to lead so they can follow. Those who lead, obviously, are the ones most likely to thrive and survive. The panicked get trampled, and the waiters often miss their turn. So it is this focus on planning and taking action that brings us to the importance of what we might colloquially describe as 'me management,' though it is more generally referred to as 'self-management.'

### ME MANAGEMENT

*"Please secure your oxygen mask before assisting others passengers."*

*Airplane Safety Briefing*

As we all know from the ubiquitous airplane safety briefing, if we do not first care for ourselves, we are useless to others. I know this may sound selfish, but it's quite the opposite. In the case of crisis and distress, martyrs get no points. And while I'm not advocating heroism, heroes are those who, in the face of fear, behave courageously regardless and help others. That's what we're looking for here – not martyrs, but rather, ordinary people who behave extraordinarily and facilitate the success of others. This happens in three key ways. (1)First, through focusing on those things you can *control* rather than simply influence, anticipate, worry about, or regret. (2)Second, through managing your *energy*. Too many people either become overwhelmed by change and expend more energy than they can ever recover (resulting in burnout) or they withhold their energy to the point of rustout. Both extremes are equally problematic. And (3)third, through managing your potential, transition, or survival *mindset*.

### Three Mindsets: Survival, Transition, Potential

Let's start with the **survival** mindset. When we are in a survival mindset, we are focused on the past, the loss, the pain, the triage, and how to stop the hemorrhaging. This is clearly dysfunctional, problematic, and very common.

Better than survival, but still not ideal, we often see leaders embrace a **transition** mindset. Their thoughts in this response are not about 'surviving the wounds,' but are instead about improvement. Leaders and employees in the transition mindset are focused on refinement, creating consistency, and stabilizing, preserving, and accelerating the healing within an organization.

But most ideally, we see people living in a **potential** mindset, asking the question, "How great can we be?" The focus is leading and growing into the future. While ideal, this is also the most uncommon mindset, for reasons that should be, given our current economic challenges, quite obvious.

When it comes to ‘me management,’ we must also incorporate the notion of *modeling* and realize that others (our followers) are easily and dramatically influenced by our behaviors during change. How we behave does not occur within some anonymous vacuum. Followers look to us for cues, just as we did with our parents, so we must guard ourselves against seemingly innocuous *micro-movements* that people amplify and misinterpret. For example, potentially benign happenings like ‘more closed-door meetings than usual’ or ‘whispering in the hallways’ can become huge swayers of employee perception. Secretiveness, or the perception of it, is a very common reality in the midst of adverse change and it leads predictably to speculation, paranoia, and fear.

## THEM MANAGEMENT

### Motivation

The first thing I want to address in regard to managing others through change has to do with a misplaced belief about motivation. To many people’s dismay, I always tell leaders, “Don’t bother trying to motivate people.” Why? Because there is a better, more reality-based, vastly superior approach. Rather than trying to be the stereotypical coach in the half-time locker room or Atlas, carrying the world on your shoulders...arriving each day to ‘prop-up’ and ‘carry’ John, Heather, or Tom on a continual basis, great leaders do something quite different and more permanent. *They work tirelessly to design and create the right sort of environment that is most likely to attract, retain, and develop the right sort of employees.* See the difference? Average managers seek to motivate; adept leaders seek to orchestrate. It is upon this reality, this premise, that we enter the notion of ‘them management’ and will explore how it is that one can most fully influence, lead, and manage others.

The pregnant question then is, “How do I create that environment?” In three ways:

1. *By ensuring that, while you create an organization, you personalize it.* And no, I’m not contradicting myself. What I’m refuting is the tendency of many executives and leaders to think of ‘the masses’ rather than ‘Michael.’ No, don’t seek to be Michael’s sole source of motivation, but yes, know Michael’s name and, when you describe the organization’s future, pursuits, needs, and interests...incorporate Michael’s as well. Employees are all tuned to the same radio station: WIIFM. *What’s in it for me?* So tell them. By understanding their individual needs and aspirations, describe how creating the right sort of organization will advance and partially fulfill their personal interests.
2. *By focusing on proximate issues, needs, and opportunities rather than delayed ones.* One of the greatest disservices that well intentioned organizations do is focus on the long-term and ignore the short-term. Yes, vision is important. But people live in the here and now, and if they cannot survive or thrive in the everyday, they may not remain long enough to experience the great future you hope will come or have gone so far as to articulate beautifully on posters, name badges, mouse pads, or screen savers. Sure, we must describe a vision and work toward it every day and, yes, it is the very dissonance and dynamic tension between ‘what is’ and ‘what we hope will be’ that pulls people forward, but it’s a delicate balancing act and we must not forget ‘now’ as we work toward ‘then.’
3. *By creating some modicum of predictability vs. an utterly despairing state of unknowingness.* Yes, gambles are alluring and keep people pulling the lever, but this isn’t Vegas – this is someone’s career we’re talking about – so work committedly to create even the most modest, daily degrees of, “I control this. Perhaps little else, but this for sure.”

### **Energy and Stress**

Transitioning now, a second consideration in ‘them management’ (beyond motivation) has to do with **energy** and **stress**. Human energy comes in degrees of two common forms: protective and productive.

**Protective Energy** is negative energy; it is a survival approach, whereby we exert ourselves to defend. We see this all the time in organizations that are struggling. And it is part and parcel of the greatest paradox of change – that at the very point in time when we need our employees the most focused, they are the most distracted. Rather than fully engaging and implementing the plans we have prepared for, they instead curl into fetal positions at the back of the cave, adding the least value when we require the most.

This protective energy results in an obvious outcome: distress. **Distress** is negative stress – the sort that makes us anxious, worried, fretful, and very unproductive. Distress narrows our field of vision and results in a fight or flight approach rather than a calm, cool, collected strategizing.

The second form of energy is **Productive Energy**. This is positive energy that leads to high morale, a healthy workplace, and a productive and high-performing focus. Reliably, productive energy leads to **Eustress**. (Words that begin with “eu” are generally positive, as in euphoria, eureka, or eulogy – and eustress is no different.) It denotes positive stress, the sort that motivates us to get out of bed each morning and tackle a new day with a sense of calling and eagerness.

What we glean, then, from productive and protective energy and eustress and distress is the realization that as leaders, we have got to be attuned to people’s current state and work toward creating a more productive and eustressful environment. This is what the military does to reduce post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms among returning troops, and it’s what we are required to do as well if we are to retain employees for the mid and longer term.

### **Perceptions, Feelings, and Choices**

Our third consideration in regard to managing others involves the importance of perceptions, feelings, and choices in the throes of change.

Let’s start with the two primary **perceptions** that people possess as they are faced with change: **Gain** or **Loss**. If I win the lottery, I will experience positive change and, hence, a ‘gain’ perception. My biggest concerns will be taxes, family, and what to do with my money. This process occurs rather quickly, as I immediately want the money, accept it, and begin visualizing and pursuing my new future state.

But ‘loss’ perceptions are different. When I discover I have cancer or that my child is sick, this brings about the sort of crisis mentality that I described earlier. I panic and freeze, or wait for someone to guide me by the hand, or I lead. Remember, approximately eight out of ten people wait. As a result, perceptions of loss typically thwart people’s productivity, narrow their focus, and altogether cripple their ability to perform in the short term.

Our responsibility then, as leaders, is obvious: we must help people to reframe their perceptions, seeing adversity as an opportunity for personal growth, a rallying cry, or a chance to unite and take a hill.

Flowing from perceptions, people possess two common **feelings** during change: **Hope** or **Worry**. As you expect, those individuals who perceive gain are hopeful, while those who perceive loss are worried. We know from decades of research that hope is an energizer and worry is a mental cancer that consumes and debilitates.

Finally then, in regard to the perceptions-feelings-choices taxonomy, we see the two primary **choices** are: **Engage** or **Disengage**. Engagement is key. It is, in fact, the heart of change. Numerous studies reveal that well over half the workforce in the United States is partially disengaged...meaning, they are distracted or mentally elsewhere during large portions of any given day. From internet surfing or outright napping to 'working hardest to look busy,' many employees are not altogether here. As a result, we are paying for 100% of an employee and often getting perhaps 40-60% for our investment.

The three sub-categories of 'engagement or disengagement' are: inactive, reactive, and proactive responses. By this, I mean to say that some people choose to be **inactive** (put their energy on hold, put their head down, or altogether avoid), others choose to be **reactive** (grudgingly comply, behave dysfunctionally or, worst of all, become saboteurs), and others choose to behave **proactively** (willfully comply, enroll, or fully commit to change, much as the pig does at breakfast).

### Behavioral Signs of Distress

Next up, let's review the three most common categories of Distress, so you'll be a keen observer and can more effectively recognize and help people through it. Distress manifests in three distinct ways, and often, employees exhibit all three: **Interaction Mismanagement**, **Task Mismanagement**, and **Self Mismanagement**.

When we see people exhibiting distress through **interaction mismanagement**, we notice three things: irritability, avoidance, and communication disconnects. In essence, people become more readily agitated, they curl into that cave, or they exhibit increasingly poor communication skills. They are distracted, they are not listening as effectively as they typically do, and we perceive a lot of misinterpretation.

When we see people exhibiting distress through **task mismanagement**, we notice three things: forgetfulness, intrusive thoughts, and fogginess. They have difficulty concentrating on the tasks at hand, they seem possessed by feelings of despair and worry, and they behave like zombies – going through the motions but as if in a fog.

When we see people exhibiting distress through **self mismanagement**, we notice five things: self-medication (either through food, drink, or drugs), sleeplessness, apathy, suicidal thoughts, and aggression. When a formerly happy-go-lucky employee begins gaining or losing a great deal of weight, behaving unusually, arriving at work later than usual and semi-hung-over, lethargically wandering through the day, or erratically flying-off-the-handle, then distress is clearly at its zenith. When this constellation of five behaviors comes together, it is a potentially alarming escalation, and one that should be addressed immediately and thoroughly.

### The People Prescription: Fostering Resiliency

To optimally lead through challenging times, it helps to understand resilience: what it is, who has it, and how it can be increased. Let's explore four areas: (1)what resilient people 'are,' (2)how resilient people 'behave,' (3)what resilient people 'experience' [or, said another way, what we must enable people to experience so they may become more resilient], and (4)what we should do 'organizationally and as leaders' to foster resilience.

1. *Resilient people are: Hardy, Interested/Alert, Confident/Expectant, Goal-Oriented, Joyful, and Peaceful.* People are complicated, so it's sometimes difficult to reconcile 'expectant' with 'peaceful,' but that's life – a rich mix of contrasts.

2. *Resilient people **behave***: with a *Sense of Coherence* (life makes sense, I have the personal/social resources to rise, these demands are meaningful and worthy of investment and commitment), as if they feel *Equipped & Masterful* (I can do this), *Engaged & Accepting of Change* (I accept this as a challenge, not a threat), and as *Active Problem-Solvers* (rather than passive victims).
3. *Resilient people **experience***: *Emotional Echoes* (the normal contrasts of upset and sad then grateful and thankful), *Adequate Degrees of Control Over Their Environment* (by gathering information, creating pockets of normalcy and routine, exploring options, refreshing their goals, and building on doable and manageable successes), *Acknowledgement & Affirmation* (for work well done), *Support & Validation* (they are not alone and the work is worth doing well), and the love and encouragement that only *Friends & Family* can provide.
4. ***Organizations and Leaders** who wish to create more resilient people*: make themselves *Accessible, Listen, & Communicate*, orchestrate *Wins & Successful Projects*, create *Group Tasks* and increase *Community Involvement*, focus on *Intrinsic* motivators rather than just extrinsic motivators, and balance back wheel issues (technical prowess) with *Front Wheel* (interpersonal needs).

We can summarize these preceding four categories by saying that what we must do to foster resiliency is *provide a continuum of engagement and care* that increases the likelihood of people bouncing back from the small and large traumas they experience on a periodic or regular basis. Moreover, to the extent we create a unifying purpose that facilitates a 'larger than me' workplace, we pull people into a healthier, more resilient reality that serves as an impetus for perspective and community, both of which remind people of the priorities within life that might otherwise be subsumed by daily tribulations.

### **The Importance of a Unifying Purpose**

In most/typical/ordinary organizations, people approach issues 'from their job description.' If I'm the accounting gal, I attend each meeting and approach each problem from an accounting perspective. Or if I'm the marketing guy, I arrive at every issue from a marketing viewpoint. This is myopic and limiting. Yes, we do need champions to cover their respective bases, but what few/elite/extraordinary organizations do is approach key issues and opportunities in ways that transcend job descriptions, titles, functions, units, divisions, departments, etc. In other words, we *all* own the right to suggest and make improvements and to add more and more value, regardless of position. And don't panic, this isn't relinquishing responsibility or control – but to the extent you allow others to shape, influence, and co-craft strategy, you democratize the opportunities for everyone involved and 'lead with an abundance mentality' rather than by minimizing. Remember the infamous Lao Tzu ideal, "When we succeed, the people will say, 'We did this ourselves.'"

### **PEOPLE DON'T RESIST THEIR OWN IDEAS**

If you celebrate Thanksgiving and have been married, perhaps you have experienced the "which dishes shall we serve?" conundrum. I know that my wife and I did. Her family's dishes included some sort of 'mashed potatoes with corn flakes' and 'apple chunks with pineapple shreds + green cool whip.' My family's dishes included the requisite turkey, a unique Dr. Pepper ham, and a delicious and heart-stopping concoction we referred to as 'pink magic' (cool whip + more cool whip). When my wife and I had our daughter and began to plot out the first big Thanksgiving meal we hosted, you can imagine the fireworks. Needless to say, the years have softened those fireworks, and we now have a set menu that includes 'some of my things' and 'some of her things' and 'some unique things we've created together.' This is what should happen in organizations, too. Inclusion, involvement, engagement, participation...getting everyone's DNA in the solutions.

Henry Ford, despite practically inventing the assembly line and revolutionizing manufacturing also once lamented, “Why, when I want a pair of hands, do I get a whole person?” Perhaps we can all relate to his frustration, because again, people are complicated – but his comment minimizes the tremendous contributions we can leverage when we do indeed seek to involve an entire person, not just the aspects of them captured in a job description.

**“If at first you *do* succeed, try to hide your astonishment.”**

*Harry Banks*  
Author

### BIZ STRATEGIES

And now, in the words of Monty Python, it’s time for something completely different. Thus far, we’ve been focusing predominantly on the human element of change and, more pointedly, change phenomena at the individual or employee level. It’s time to shift our focus to the broader, more macro level: the organization at large. Moreover, it’s time to introduce processes, methodology, and solutions for leading through change. Let’s begin with instrumental strategic ingredients that should provide you with heightened focus and serve as a recipe for leading any change effort.

#### **Eight Strategies and the Consequences of Their Absence**

At a minimum, there are eight key strategic categories that any great organization should address and, particularly when pursuing change efforts: **Direction, Priorities, Structure, Resources, Processes, Alignment, Communication, and Success.** When all eight of these exist and occur, an organization can be quite formidable. But when any of these is missing, it’s equivalent to missing a chromosome in a DNA strand:

1. When an organization lacks *Direction*, expect *Inaction* because employees don’t know where to go.

2. When an organization lacks *Priorities*, expect *Waste* because employees are often doing the wrong things and not doing the right things.
3. When an organization lacks *Structure*, expect *Inefficiency* because wrong reporting relationships exist, there’s overlap or redundancy, or gaping voids.
4. When an organization lacks *Resources*, expect *Fatigue* because employees are constantly striving to do too much with too little.
5. When an organization lacks *Processes*, expect *Frustration* because employees are constantly reinventing, making things up as they go, and altogether wasting time, energy, and money.
6. When an organization lacks *Alignment*, expect *Resistance* because employees who are excluded will pull in undesirable directions.
7. When an organization lacks *Communication*, expect *Conflict* because those who ‘do not understand or know’ create confusion and turmoil.
8. When an organization lacks *Success*, expect *Hopelessness* because employees begin to question whether battles or the war can ever be won.

#### **Change Process**

Upon this foundation, from *the importance of psychology in the economy to the eight categorical strategies all organizations should consider*, we’re now prepared to build a **change process**. This process has proven fruitful across dozens and dozens of organizations for nearly two decades now, and I am hopeful it will prove successful in your organization, too. The process is comprised of three phases: *Initiation, Inertia, and Integration.*

**The Initiation Phase** of change involves three components: *Seeing the Need* (often predicated on the threats or risks associated with not adapting or the value or opportunity associated with changing), *Communicating the Message* (clearly and in a compelling way, in an adherent and sticky way that is memorable and repeatable, and in a behavioral and personalized way whereby each individual knows what is required of him/her), and *Infecting with Urgency* (to overcome the status quo).

To demonstrate all three of these in one salient example, consider John F. Kennedy who saw, articulated, and infected the United States through the moon race.

**The Inertia Phase** involves four components: *Managing the Priorities* (because when we seek to do everything for everyone, we accomplish nothing for no one...and when everything is equally important and urgent, we accomplish nothing), *Creating Tangible Successes* (so people believe), *Including Others* (because only together can we succeed), and *Maximizing Resources* (lest we risk running out of fuel just shy of the finish line).

NASA and a plethora of ancillary organizations effectively prioritized (through one simple goal: a man safely to the moon and back), created visible successes (through highly publicized test launches of increasing risk), included others (by humanizing, personalizing, and inadvertently 'celebritizing' astronauts rather than using unknowns or chimpanzees), and maximized limited resources in what could have otherwise become a bottomless sinkhole.

**The Integration Phase** involves two components: *Staying the Course* (rather than being seduced by countless shiny objectives or competing initiatives) and *Honoring Change – not THEE Change* (lest we run the risk of treating any given change like Linus's blanket and getting stuck at the very time when we must be most open and adaptive).

The United States and the world watched as scientists, engineers, pilots (ultimately, "astronauts"), and other professions focused intensely for years, not just to launch a man into space, but because the task would, in the words of JFK, "serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills."

### Conclusion

If difficult times call for exemplary leadership, today's economic and business climate demands nothing short of extraordinary and archetypal leadership. By implementing dynamic leadership strategies for turbulent times, you can build a lighthouse in the harbor of current storms, providing employees and followers with a beacon of direction and hope to support the ninety-percent whom we know are often panicked, entrenched, or waiting for you to show the way.

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Dr. Blake Leath is the CEO of The Blake Leath Group, LLC (“TBLG”), a successful *content development greenhouse* that grows and nurtures curricula for today’s leaders.

In his 17 years as a for-hire strategist, Blake has worked with over 300 client organizations across 13 countries and over 2,000,000 imprints have been made of his intellectual property. Though he has worked with practitioners and researchers to understand and maximize sales, service, employee involvement, and performance, his primary interests are strategy, culture, change, and leadership.

Blake earned his master’s degree in *Organizational Management* and his doctorate in *Organizational Sociology*. His most recent book is *Cultivating the Strategic Mind*.