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Leadership in the Times of Crisis

Intro

In a region that has been hit by adverse economic and market conditions for a few years now, crisis has become the new normal. Political turbulence, instability, wars, sanctions, corruption, and the list goes on and on making Maslow's pyramid of needs go nuts over what to service first and what priorities look like, today.

On the individual, 'person' level, the reflection of those is even more severe with a duality of roles that stretches the most conditioned amongst us beyond their farthest comfort zone. Leaders, subject to personal, family, financial, life and corporate struggles, are there with an expectation to lead forward. Stress, helplessness, low morale, disengagement, ambiguity to the extent of blindness are among the few conditions the current environment has to offer.

Within all this, comes the pandemic causing a life threat, closing borders, locking social units in, and without any prior warning, disrupting most companies and their teams and putting them in an immediate survival state. They found themselves overnight playing a new game with new rules that almost no one is familiar with, let alone, savvy about.

Now, lead!

In this article, we will attempt to lay down 3 pillars of leadership under the current crisis, and to offer tools that can service plausible outcomes for each. These pillars are founded on the concepts of the paradox theory, and the tools shared aim at exploring ways to balance our approaches to self-leadership, business, and people in business.

| Part 1: Self-Leadership

When we talk about leadership, we talk about people. The equation is quite simple: no people who volunteer to follow, no leadership. And among the hundreds of companies that I trained, and the leaders that I interacted with, the most common traits among the inspiring ones were consciousness and intentionality.

Being conscious in this context is knowing and putting effort to understand what you and those around you are thinking and feeling and therefore doing; and being intentional is acting on purpose.

On that premise, this article seeks to find ways to align the continuum of leadership from self, to business, and then to people in business.

In our day-to-day paradoxical lives, we are constantly attempting to balance values and priorities, and therefore actions that seem contradictory or pulling in opposite directions, and yet, when looked at closely, are complimentary for our internal balance and sanity.

When our days were ran by the wake up, do what you do, go to work, come back, do what you do, go to sleep routine, regardless of how good or lousy that was, the chef d'orchestre of that time seemed to be doing a better job than when we had to run the orchestra ourselves. There is suddenly no alarm to wake up to, no travel to the office, no walls or cubicles around the desk, no desk, no break time to take with others at work, no proper business hours, no drinks with the gang to connect, no timed lunches, no networking dinners, no parties, no kids at school, no partners spending their day at work alone, and the list goes on and on. What used to be naturally running on autopilot is now on manual control and the effort required to balance all these has overnight become monumental.

With that freedom, nothing came for free.

When you research how people are dealing with this sudden change of routine, you see initial tendencies to fall out of pace and out of balance and to spend the available time inadequately on competing priorities, which contributes to overwhelm and adds to the rest of the psychological pressures we're all falling under.

Most dangerous for many whose financial needs are on the line, is that they practically move in to their heads, and start spending most of their time in a conversation with themselves, with little helpfulness, unless of course, that conversation is consciously creative towards enabling one to come up with alternatives to solve the challenges at hand, which we will come back to in the second part of this article.

In all cases, the leadership journey starts at gathering oneself and balancing all priorities so that one is properly aligned and is able to approach business and people in business.

While at that, I remember Lou, a C-level executive who was suddenly made redundant mid career with tons of loans and a shaky family relationship. Lou was working for a multinational FMCG company in Johannesburg, South Africa where I met her. She was heading their tech platform when the company decided to right-structure and cut costs. Lou was attending a workshop I was facilitating on Fierce CONVERSATIONS (based on Suzan Scott's work) and received the news while we were discussing accountability; she left on a hurry, with tears she could not hide in her eyes, and did not join back.

Right before she left the session, we were talking about the distinction between finding yourself in a true victim situation, and actually being victimized by it; and how that is what will dictate your impact on everyone and everything around you from there on, as behaviors always follow

mindset. The major difference between these two mindsets is that even as a true victim of some events, it is your choice to be victimized by them or to remain accountable for your impact, actions and results. Think of the two twin amputees who split to lead very different lives: one of them using his amputation as a reason to prove his ability to overcome challenges and became an Olympic athlete; while the other adopted helplessness, blamed his life on his bad luck, spent his time cursing it and waited for benevolent feeders until feeders came no more, then drugs kicked in, and I'll leave the rest of the story for you to imagine. Needless to say, the victimized mindset is a much more comfortable and even luring place to be, with all the reasons one fetches to justify why they did and did not, and why they are and are not, and upon which they recruit hugging crowds of 'friends' who endorse their victimized state. Yet, the impact of both mindsets is unmistakably and utterly different on oneself, on others and on achievements.

A month later, I received an email from Lou saying she apologizes for leaving our conversation as "rudely" as she did, and telling me that she was made redundant which made her lose her temper at that time, and that she's going insane with the million stresses she must juggle today, some of which she had shared during the workshop, and asked if a coaching session could help. And so it was.

- What's the most important thing you and I should be having a conversation about today? I asked.

She said, "I get it, I was enjoying my act as a victim for so long. I was enjoying it yesterday even. And every time I wanted to step out, I got overwhelmed by the amount of things that I had to juggle with if I wanted to make things right. Make them right for me, you know, not for anyone, for me. I cannot handle the pressure anymore, my life is a mess, I cannot get organized, I cannot find time to think, and I cannot find time to do the smallest things that I want to do. I engage in a thing one day, only to find a backlog accumulating on every other thing by that day-end. I am overwhelmed."

- So I asked again: given all this, what's the most important thing you want us to have a conversation about?

"Let's talk about juggling!" She said.

- OK, let's talk about juggling. What do you find important to juggle?

"I want to make things right, for me first, and I want to be able to do everything that I want to do."

- Good, we can start there. So making things right for you is one thing you want to juggle with. What would make things right for you?

"I need to sort out my financials and I need my sanity! I need to decide on what to do next with my career, I need to get back to work as fast as I can because I need the money really bad, and I need time for me, I need to go back to reading, to exercising, to learning, to meditating, you know what I mean, I need 'personal, growth, me time'."

She continued: "my biggest aha is that survival is not only financial survival, I was so suffocated by the fact that I needed money to pay my loans and get on with my life, and that I wanted a career back, that I forgot that my life needs a lot more than financial survival if I am to survive it in the first place."

- That must have been an awakening aha! Tell me a bit more in the same direction, besides getting back on track work-wise, sorting out your financials, and reading, learning, meditating, and exercising, what else would you want to juggle with?

“Well, I want to play music, I want to connect with my friends, I want to go party, I want to travel, I don’t want to doze into social media for hours without any purpose.”

- OK, and if all of these you want for you, what else is important to you besides financials, your career, your ‘me time’, your leisure time and ‘connecting with your friends’?

“I want to spend quality time with my kids, I want to work on my relationship with my ex-partner.”

And we went on and on, listing things that Lou wanted to juggle with, things that were important to her in her current situation. I kept asking what else? What else? What else? I did that for a bit longer than when she thought her juggling list was exhausted. The objective was to get Lou to become conscious of the things that were simultaneously important to her, and to get her to have a relative weight given to each.

Finally, we ended up with 7 categories with various weights: me time, health and fitness, career, financials, kids, relationship with ex-partner and the social category.

Then we plotted those categories into a disc inspired by Buddhists in the Tibet; coaches call it the Wheel of Life. We drew a circle, split the circle into 7 parts, and named each part after one category. We then gave a grade of 1-10 (1 being the lowest) for how Lou thought she was doing on each one of these categories. Fitness for example scored 1, kids scored 5, financials scored 2 and so on and so forth.

When we were done with that, Lou went on to think how much she wanted each score to ideally weigh in light of the importance she gave to each category in the previous part of the session. She did that aiming to get to that score in 6 months time. Then, with a clear picture of where she was vs. where she wanted to be after 6 months, she brainstormed and set a solid plan with specific, achievable and measurable to-dos that could help her get there for each of these categories simultaneously.

And that’s how Lou learned to juggle her paradoxical pressing things of value and to handle her pressures altogether, one at a time.

Going back to the current crisis, what’s under stress today is not only money: family (elderly, siblings, kids), education, health, relationships, and everything else you can think of. Balance is a keyword, and it can only be kept when kept in sight. A leader is a conscious leader; of her or himself first so that their impact on others is intentional and conscious as well. Hence now is about finding and setting a proper pace, keeping the balance, moving forward, learning and path-correcting, and connecting when assistance is due.

Leadership in crisis therefore starts with balancing self. Then, and before we get to interacting with people in business, let’s make a pit stop at what kind of balance would be resourceful in the approach to business in such times.

| Part 2: Leading the Business

When I want to visualize the stress that businesses are currently facing, I struggle to see the tunnel that people talk about, let alone the light.

In fact, I remember an incident that happened with me many years back on a scuba-diving trip with friends. We were at 40 m below sea level, when I realized that my BCD (Buoyancy Control Device) was leaking and I ran out of air. My buddy (the person one is supposed to be diving with and co-paying attention to), was enjoying a narcosis (feeling high due to the increased concentration of Nitrogen in his blood) and following fish trying to supply them with his regulator (his breathing apparel), and I was standing firm by his side to make sure he does not do something more stupid

as rules state, while the rest of the group was way ahead, and I could barely see one yellow fin in the far horizon. That's when, while inhaling, mid-way through, I ran out of air.

I had a choice to make and I had to make it really fast: go down further for another meter or two towards my 'drunk' friend, risk a possible fight, risk losing breath and risk not making it alive; or, leave my 'drunk' friend behind (huge moral oops for me even then!), venture towards what I could barely see in the horizon, risk losing breath, risk getting cramps while sprinting my way towards the rest of group, and risk not making it alive. Of course, all while holding on to the hope of getting through to the other available air tank before it's too late, and believing I'll be born again and painting a vibrant picture of the if and when that happens. I picked. And, here I am.

Today, business leaders are facing something of that sort: at the time when they were navigating unfriendly economic conditions, they were taking one deep breath at a time with a hope for each one of those to get them closer to shore, when suddenly, they woke up under water, out of air. Most of them took time to accept that the next available air tank is somewhere far they cannot see. Now, they must act fast. They must hold what's left of their breath, sprint forward in the dark whatever direction forward is, risk, hope, invent what it will be like when they can breathe again, and create how to get there on the go.

In the middle of this turmoil, companies are currently facing one major paradox: How to, simultaneously, survive and build fitness, resilience and stamina as fast as dictated by the crisis (commit and act for short term readiness), and reinvent the business in such a way for it to fit the world of tomorrow that is under construction with a debatable shape, as fast as dictated by the time the market will take to normalize (commit and act for long, and maybe medium term readiness). Within this paradox, live many contradicting forces; the most stressing are the ones that look like an 'either-or' and act like an 'and' in a manifestation of the thousand-year-old yin and yang philosophy, and again, leaders must find a way to balance those within a best possible mix to help them win their most important battles.

In response, many are still in shock and are waiting it out, some have fallen into a low moment of helplessness, others started talking about it and sensing their way out, and a few have accepted and moved to action.

In the perspective of a Leader's approach to business, the most important and highest priority thing that you need to do right now while waiting for the future to get clearer, is anything other than just wait. So, lead.

During my 13 years working with clients at "trace, and my 6 years of general management before that, the first question that comes to every mind faced with that kind of strategic decisions is: where do we start?

For Gartner, in their March 19th 2020 "4 Actions to be a Strong Leader During Covid-19 Disruption", the first step to take is to prioritize crystal-clearly, and then use more than just zeros and ones in your problem solving approach.

Of course, some of the things we do, the services we offer, the products we sell, and the way we do them, grow on us in such a way that they eventually define our business and its culture and make it very hard for us to split between them and rank them in a priority list. Pause and scrutinize. As per Google, it means, "examine or inspect closely and thoroughly"; a skill I bet we all have learned from when our grandmothers picked stones and bad lentils from the tray where they spread the quantity of a cup-full they were readying for cooking! It's exactly that sort of exercise that is needed at this moment. Once over, the result will tell you that what defines us is why we do what we do, what we stand for when we do it, why we wake up in the morning and what the people we serve would lose if we do not. Alongside that, are the values we will hold

on to, even if they become a source of competitive disadvantage for us. Outside those, there is nothing that is in the core that should not be let into the opportunity of change and growth. As Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras put in the HBR fall issue of 1996, “The dynamic of preserving the core while stimulating progress is the reason that companies became elite institutions able to renew themselves and achieve superior long-term performance.”

When I talk about the yin and yang of the core to preserve vs. the rest to change for progress-sake, and what to do in the remaining of the journey of a leader’s approach to business once that is clear, I remember my work with Nabil. Nabil had landed in Beirut a couple of months before we met. He had lead a long and impressive career in the US and accepted the move back to Lebanon to head one of the largest Lebanese family-owned business groups. He was there to work the fitness of the group and make it more ready for current-time-competitiveness. As he started his journey, it got clear to him that the place to start is to strengthen the inside. Our team was hired to facilitate the strategy retreat that gathered all C-Level executives alongside different country managers.

“Change is not a revolution lead to get rid of the old, as many believe. It is more Darwinian in nature. It digs into the old ways and builds on them to pick the mindsets, the traits, the aptitudes, and the behaviors that would make the next era’s fittest able to survive and progress when every other similar have gone.”, he opened. “We have no choice today but to change, and for that, let’s start where it matters most, and discover what is it that for us, is not to change.”

That’s how the first day started. We were on a mission to discover what not to change and to set boundaries for the next phase that will be about progress. Collins and Porras in their book “Built to Last” call that “core ideology” and it’s made of core values and core purpose.

The activities started with team members jotting down what they believed were the core values they personally brought to work and would teach their children with the hope that they would hold them when they become working adults. These were afterwards filtered to choose the ones the group members would carry for a 100 years forward even if at some point one or more of them became sources of competitive disadvantage. Then came the five whys of the importance of the group’s existence to help discover the irreplaceable value the group brought to the people it serves. It was a carnival of roles and heated conversations between the truth wardens, the devil’s advocates, the stakeholder ghosts and the Yodas to name a few. Armed with flip charts, colored post-its and markers, everyone engaged in a positive creative chaos and a ‘questionathon’ blended in various system coaching activities, team building exercises, and deep facilitated sessions, to make sure everyone took part and every voice was heard regardless of how unpopular.

“Now that we know what to exclude from change, it is time to look for the opportunity in changing everything else” said Nabil on the morning of the second retreat day. “Our competition has grown, new entrants play with rules we don’t master, they are more agile, more tech-savvy, closer to consumers, faster to act, a lot more scattered than what we are used to.” And he went on describing the context of a SWOT analysis he had prepared with the team through a questionnaire we circulated prior to the retreat.

I thanked him and moved to the most important part of any strategy setting: framing. “A problem named is a problem solved” used to say one of my mentors. In that first session, we defined what was at stake, what we were trying to solve, what were the high dreams, what winning would look like, we defined the boundaries of the conversation, and thought well of all stakeholders that will be impacted.

Once the frame was in place, we moved to brainstorming issues to tackle, business priorities

with direct impact on P&L, pain points, tensions, decisions to take, uncertainties to deal with, evaluation criteria, and reached a set of must win battles. Then, we split into war rooms and we launched creative problem solving sessions. That went from the thorough stakeholder analysis that was initiated in the framing part of the day, to an insight gathering session, to a brainstorming of various possible scenarios, among which were ones that would get people fired, ones that were impossible to execute, and ones that assumed limitless funds. We focused on the quantity of ideas, discussed possible areas where the group can play, various ways it could win in each, the kind of abilities needed for that, be it skill-sets or management systems, and then engaged in an analytical comparison between them all using the set evaluation criteria. That's how each war room team reached their recommended scenario.

We then went into another heated town hall to share and debate the options on the table with one simple rule to abide by: "I like, I like, I wonder" is the feedback format everyone was allowed to use. The aim was to agree on and detail a plan for the way forward.

"What we've done is not set in stone. We've built it to rebuild it as soon as it hits reality and we spot the location of its leaks. And remember, it's not the plan that matters, its the execution of the plan. For that, I recall another quote from Jame Collins, "first who, and then what."

That brought another successful retreat to an end, and "first who, then what" is exactly what the third part of this article is about.

| Part 3: Leading the People in Business

People. People. People.

That's actually the first pillar of leadership even if we discuss it third.

We talked about self leadership and the balance we need to create by juggling all priorities that emerged in the times of crisis, and we explored leadership's approach to business and the needed balance in strategy between committing and acting short term to take decisions regarding the pressing matters of today's circumstances, and committing and acting medium or long term to reinvent a business that ensures future fitness. Now we get to the people-side of the leadership equation.

As we already established, this equation is quite linear: no people who volunteer to follow, no leadership. In this crisis, same as in any other circumstance, it all starts with our awareness of the people we lead, their current mindset, needs, emotions, capabilities, of our relationship with them and theirs among each other, and of our accountability towards all those. Only then, can our channeling of what we, the business, and the other stakeholders need from them, become the glue that brings all parts of this puzzle together.

The key role for the leadership of people in this circumstance, is to create a team with players who are individually and collectively fit, resilient, engaged and somehow simultaneously connected and immune to what is storming on the outside. To establish that, a leader must strike a balance between leading from the front and leading from the back. She or he must lead from the front to create enough kinetic energy to crank the team engine and get it moving despite the storm, to have enough presence to be able to quickly course-correct vision, strategy and execution on the go, and to pick up anyone who collapses during that journey; and must lead from the back to ensure the team and its members are agile and enabled enough to lead through the same by themselves.

Those team objectives are built on three cornerstones: mindset, relationship system intelligence and agility.

Every behavior, and therefore every impact, be it on results, on the ways of getting to those results, or on the people involved in that voyage, follows the mindset that sparked it. Hence, mindset first, always.

The Arbinger Institute distinguishes between two mindsets: an outward mindset and an inward mindset.

Allow me to interrupt the definitions of those to introduce you to Josephine. Josephine was a skillful media team leader whom I met at a training I was delivering in Paris. Her manager thought very highly of her, always pushed her evaluations, titles and remuneration forward, because, at the end of the day, she managed one of his most lucrative accounts. Josephine, on the other hand, was very grateful. She always acted from good intentions, she trusted and believed that the best is yet to come, and she followed directions thoroughly. Achilles' ankle in Josephine's story is that the account she handled was a print publisher, a huge, conservative and lucrative one. She knew her eggs were all in one basket and yet, "this basket was made of golden eggs," she always thought. Success was all over her story with the publisher, until one day, the odds started going against print businesses as people's reading habits changed and they started moving to the world-wide-web. The publisher, as well established as he was, was also arrogant and in denial of what was happening outside his print house; he strongly believed online reading is a fad that won't last past the next generation of Kindle. "There's nothing more euphoric than the taste of paper on a finger turning the page of a good book," he used to say. Josephine, who was a firm believer in her client's business that was there to support her growth in the worst time of her career, bought into that and kept pushing forward, off the obvious-to-everyone-cliff with him. Josephine's manager was also very happy with the money stream that was increased with the intention to reform the ugly online reading habits and save the print business. That went on for some time, until came the midnight of that Cinderella story and all enchantments hit reality. The publisher took the decision to declare bankruptcy and went out of business overnight. The agency money stream was suddenly cut in the middle of investments made upon it. Josephine's technical skills were redundant and fit for a typewriter kind of museum. Her manager was now faced with a cost center that he could not invest in any of the other businesses that required a different set of technical skills, and could not wait for Josephine to up-skill and adapt. Josephine was laid off.

All actions in Josephine's story were taken with utmost good intentions, and with what looked like business priorities. They looked, sounded and felt confident, they followed the direction set by management and by the client, and were built on mutual trust and a firm belief that everyone was doing their exact job. And yet, all those actions stemmed from a sparking mindset that was focused on self almost exclusively, in such a way that made all those involved blind to the bigger picture of the impact of those actions, and the accountability of their ripples.

That kind of "the need of the moment" mindset, which focuses thoughts, actions and justifications on oneself, is a typical example of an inward mindset. A leader of people in today's crisis wants to move, themselves and their team, away from that kind of mindset, very luring to anyone in a crisis let alone to anyone per se, towards an outward mindset focused on impact instead. Josephine was focused on her personal success and her basket of golden eggs, her manager was focused on how that was translated in his budgets, and both missed the accountability bit of doing the right thing at the right moment and standing firm against even the client strategy that they knew lacked a sense of reality. Although they acted with good intentions, their actions lacked accountability, they were not objective in their approach, they did not validate their belief in the client's plan, they wanted to please and they trusted in their and their client's actions without discernment nor consideration but for what they tunnel-viewed as the business and their standing in its bull's eye.

To build a team that is fit, resilient, engaged and with enough stamina that can carry everyone across the roughness of the current times, leaders and team members must first and foremost be in the right mindset, an outward one. That can only happen with constant live readings, consciousness and intentionality of impact. Questions like what's the impact my skills and efforts have on the rest of the team, and what's the impact our collective capabilities and efforts have on our stakeholders as a business, must form the content of frequent conversations and feedback. Remember: behavior follows mindset and there is not a time when mindset should come first like the time of crisis.

All this is not only about emotional and social intelligence. It is also about a third kind of intelligence that CRR Global call relationship systems intelligence. That's the impact our relationships have on us personally, on us together, and on the kind of results that impact produces.

Think of what holds people together in any social system, be it a family system, a sports team system, a work team system or any other: it is the relationship between them. Visualize it as a spider web with system members standing at various intersections of the web. Any action, intentional or not, a person takes, shakes the whole web and impacts everyone else who is on that web. If someone pulls hard, everyone feels it. If someone lets go, everyone feels it, and others decide either to compensate or to let the web collapse. That's how webs work. That's how relationship systems intelligence works. Those relationships that hold people in a system together are what dictate how they act together, how they support each other, how they collapse, how they thrive, both individually, and collectively. It is this web formed by all these relationships that makes a team more or less productive and that holds the space of impact, productivity, engagement, accountability, failure and success. Now to add another layer of reality to it, each one of us lives on multiple webs. Some webs gather us with family, some gather us with friends, some even gather us with people who are not here anymore and their memory still has impact on us, and some gather us with colleagues at work. Mind you, we are impacted by all these webs, and act from the resulting state that impact puts us in, in every one of these webs, and we impact others accordingly in every one of these webs as well.

A leader's understanding and acting consciously and intentionally on the basis of this intelligence is a key success factor at any time, let alone in times of crisis. That sits on the indisputable premise that trust will serve as the pivotal component of all stakeholders' success in maneuvering and balancing the leadership stances from the front to the back of the team, and that trust grows inherently on the strengths of the relationships involved. This is where transparency and communication come in handy. As Suzan Scott puts it in her book *Fierce Conversations*: "What gets talked about in an organization, and how it gets talked about determines what will happen. Or won't happen." and "We succeed or fail, gradually then suddenly, one conversation at a time." If you've heard of the 10/10/10 communication rule, which states that an idea should be repeated 10 times in 10 different ways for people to retain 10% of it, it is the time to use it. While at it, remember that it won't be about what you said, and it will always be about what people heard, and the only way around resolving the discrepancy between the two, is to have a Spanish 'con', which means with, added to the speech 'versation' and making it a conversation.

One more thing you will need as a leader of people in times of crisis in a magnetic field. And there is nothing more gluing than the reasons that got your business into life and made it valuable to it, and that got your people into waking up every morning to come to work. It is "why we do what we do" as Simon Sinek voices it in one of his famous YouTube clips. We've been through that bit in the previous part of this article when we talked about the approach to facing challenges and strategy setting, and we're repeating it here because it is very important to make sure team members are not only seemingly engaged because they fear losing their job, with that risk being imminent in times like these. I remember taking a client's team through what ORSC coaches calls

an “Original Myth” exercise using questions like “what inspired you to work for this company?”, and “what dreams did you have for your work with your clients?” and “what’s important about the work for you?” All of those can help instill the sense of purpose that is much needed for stamina and kinetic energy building.

The final element that a leader must ensure is the team’s agility. Team members are now working remotely and must be able to think, take decisions and act, many times all by themselves. That aims at making all parts of the system as strong as the fittest link, each in their own abilities and passions, and will help get rid of unnecessary bottle necks making way for the much needed speed of maneuver and course correction. Agility, of course, does not negate collaboration. In fact, collaboration is fundamental because it will serve as an important support system, in the absence of the support that people give each other when at the office together, and will be needed for any perspective-rich best-possible-decision-making of the team. Fierce Inc.’s “Team Conversation” comes in handy for that purpose, where you clarify what is expected from a meeting’s participants beforehand, supply them with enough information to make them able to think about it ahead of time, and then, during the decision meeting, ask them to answer “what would you do if you were me” and make sure you hear from everyone even if they disagree with what you think is a good decision. This conversation is not aimed at reaching consensus, the final decision is yours to take and its accountability yours to assume; it is rather aimed to reach a perspective-rich decision and a collaborative approach to moving forward.

During the jumping from the back to the front of the team, leading from where leadership is needed, and while creating and reinforcing behaviors that will ensure the sought short and long term objectives of the business, tough decisions will have to be taken. The toughest maybe is the one when you look in the face of someone you might need to let go of. One of my coaching clients has taught me a lesson about that. She said: “When I know I must reduce the team count to right-size, and must decide which ones of my mates to choose for that, I ask myself three questions.”

“I ask: would you recruit her or him again knowing what you know today? And if you do, would you give them another chance past their probation? And if you do, would you send them to represent you at your best customer while you’re taking care of another matter and won’t be available to support during that call?” She continues, “If my answers are all yeses, I hold on to the person. If I get a no, I become aware that despite my emotional connection and need to be guilt-free, I must do the right thing and focus on impact not just on myself. Then, I have a candid conversation with them and inform them about my decision.”

When it comes to leading people in times of crisis, it’s therefore first about mindset and 360 degrees accountability of impact, then about relationship intelligence, trust, transparency, communication, agility, collaboration and support; and sometimes about making tough calls. All that will happen while the leader consciously and intentionally balances between leading from the front and leading from the back. The objective, once more is to create a team that is fit and able, resilient with enough stamina, and engaged with reasons to be and act that go beyond the chains of the past and the turbulences of the present.

| Conclusion

To sum up, surviving the multi-layered crisis of today while inventing a business suitable for tomorrow, whenever tomorrow comes and however it will be like, requires a team that is more able than average, more resilient than normal, has enough stamina to endure, enough kinetic energy to move forward on its own, and enough agility to course-correct as frequently as needed.

For that, leadership has to, consciously and intentionally, align and balance the paradoxes of its approach to people, those of its approach to business and those of its own pressures. Armed with an outward mindset, a leader must jump from back to forth leading from where leadership is needed. She and he have to build an agile team as strong as its fittest link, have to equip it with a support system that allows it to trust, be transparent, allows all its voices to be heard, make it permeable to urgency, get it constantly engaged, accountable, equip it with a dashboard that permits it to see, connect, collaborate, act, get involved, feed-back, reach out, pick-up those who fall, and win, regardless of how ambiguous the circumstances become.

Times are Darwinian. The role is not easy and it ain't for the faint hearted. If it were, everyone would have done it.

Now, lead.