

# LEADING THROUGH A CRISIS



## LEADERSHIP NUDGES



**LEADERSHIP NUDGES**



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## WELCOME TO YOUR LEADERSHIP NUDGES

‘A leader’s job is to make decisions in complicated and incessantly disrupted business environments. For that, they need a high degree of focus. They need skills. They need their leadership energy to be channelled in the right direction.’ — Gallup Workplace 2019

Even the most highly motivated managers can fall back into default behaviours and become overly task-oriented during times of high stress and constant change. Simple leadership practices like setting clear work expectations, giving effective feedback and showing appreciation can be easily overlooked in the frantic pace of work.

To help you bridge the knowing-doing gap and to remind you of those leadership behaviours and actions that are critical during times of crisis these leadership nudges have been created.

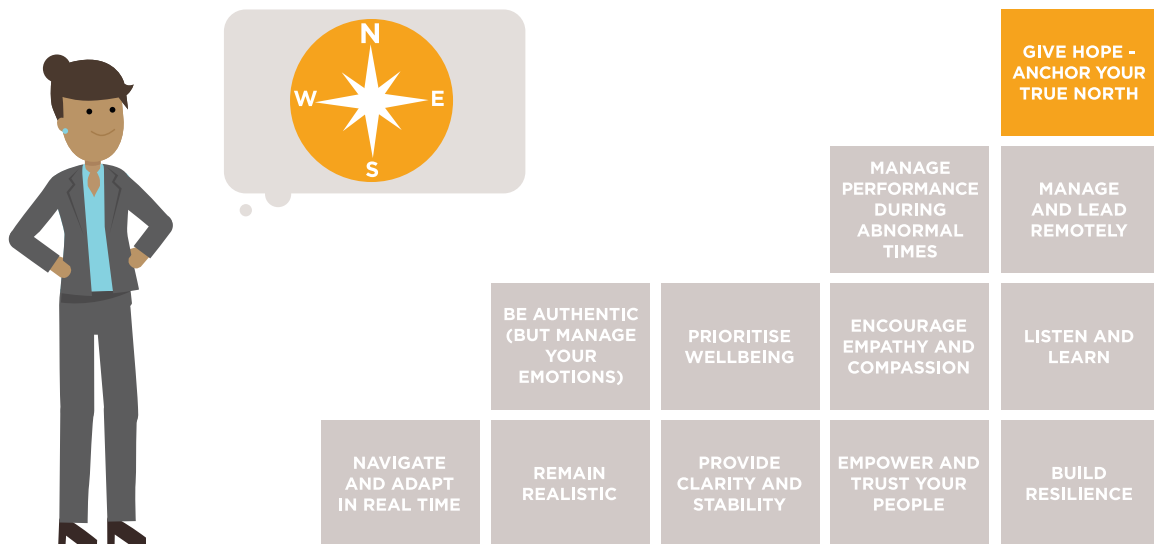
### WHAT ARE LEADERSHIP NUDGES?

Leadership nudges are evidence-based behavioural prompts which aims to serve as a small reminder and gentle push to help leaders reflect on their leadership style during challenging times.

### HOW DOES IT HELP ME LEAD MY TEAM DURING COVID-19?

Leading during times of crisis requires a different approach to leadership — the previous way of doing things will likely not be effective right now (and may never be again). These nudges are aimed at guiding you to new or more effective leadership techniques.

Please enjoy reading, reflecting and learning.



Please [click here](#) for more helpful tips to lead others and take care of yourself during this time. For more information or support, please contact your regional Organisational Effectiveness Specialist.

## A NUDGE TO NAVIGATE AND ADAPT IN REAL TIME

Even when things are going well it is virtually impossible to predict the future; during times of crisis expecting yourself to foresee the future and be perfectly prepared for it is setting yourself up for failure and disappointment.

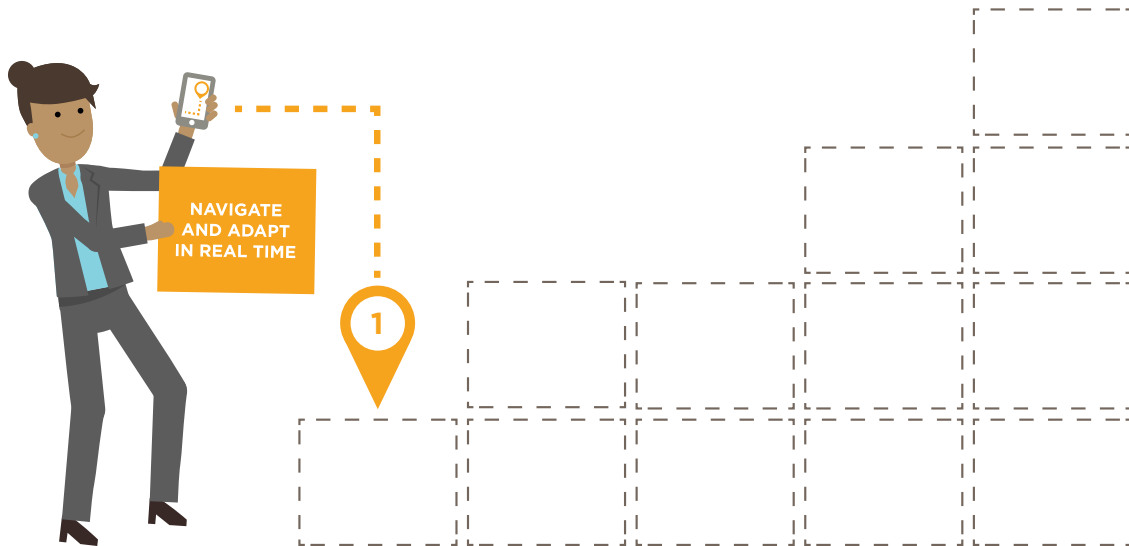
While it is good sense to attempt to prepare for what may be coming, trying to control the situation completely is not reasonable. The best thing that you can do is to make real-time adjustments based on the information you have, and then accept that things will not always turn out exactly as planned and that mistakes will be made. Being flexible, adaptable and forgiving (to yourself and others) is the only way to survive a crisis.

Continuously adapting and changing requires mental, physical and emotional resilience. Try to identify some tools and resources that will help you make decisions and keep you and your team flexible, engaged and connected.

Reflect on these questions to help you adapt in real time:

- What are the most important things that you can take on today, and what should be prioritised for later? (The [Priority Action Matrix](#) is a useful tool to help you. [Click here](#) to read more about it.)
- What sources of information will you rely on to stay up to date?
- Who has already implemented some changes successfully and what can you learn from them?
- What unique skills do your team members have that you can capitalise on?
- Who can you ask for help?
- What aspects of the future can you be sure about and how can you plan for that today?
- Who can you talk to when your energy and resilience dwindles?

It is important to limit the time and energy you spend on pure speculation. Instead, focus on what is within your scope of control and influence.



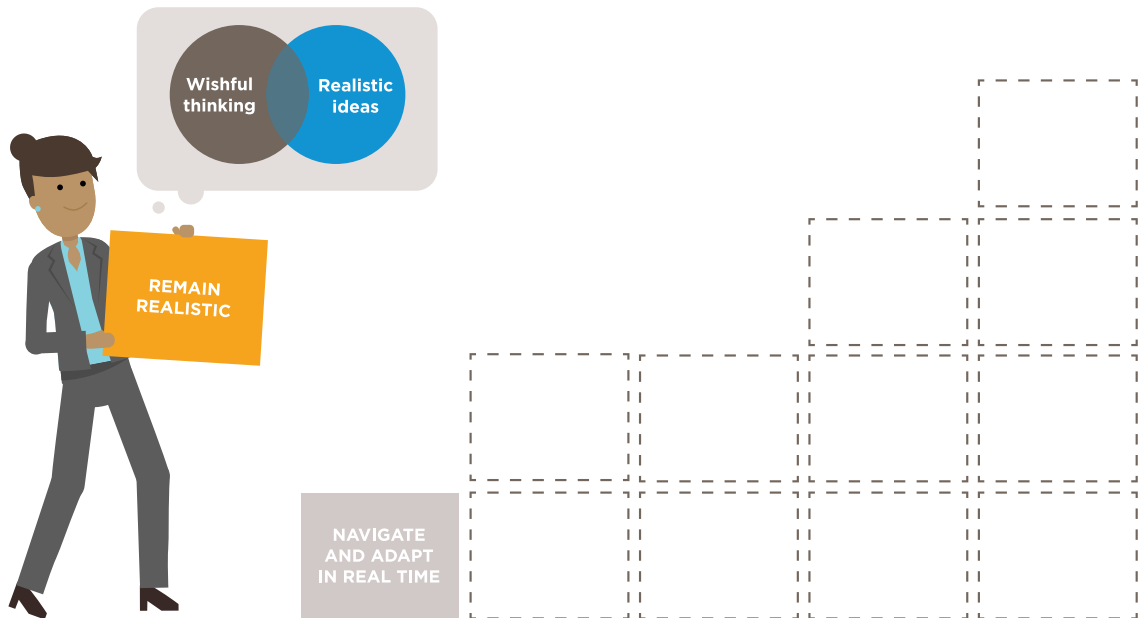
## A NUDGE TO REMAIN REALISTIC

As human beings, we are hard-wired to catastrophise things during times of uncertainty or crisis. This response is rooted in self-preservation; expecting the worst in order to be best prepared. However, fear and negativity can easily escalate and may derail people into a place where they struggle to focus and cope.

In times like these, we cannot truthfully promise that everything will be okay in the end, and people know this. Blind optimism will, therefore, feel fake, dismissive and dishonest. Instead of trying to paint a picture of a perfect ending in an attempt to keep your team positive, rather **model realistic optimism** by planning for the best possible outcome.

One way to plan for a realistic best possible outcome, is to first brainstorm the **worst-case scenario** with your team and then brainstorm the **best-case scenario**. Once you have done that, try to find the middle ground on what is most likely. Once you have identified the **most likely outcome**, outline the steps needed to make this happen in a productive and practical way. Make sure your plan is tangible and visible, and the steps are ones that you can realistically deliver on.

It is important right now to practice and enforce **realistic positivity** with a visible plan so that even if we cannot control the situation, we can control our response to it



## A NUDGE TO PROVIDE CLARITY AND STABILITY

When people are fearful or anxious they cannot focus optimally. The lack of clear-mindedness can, in turn, lead to more panic and overreaction. To prevent this from happening, or at least minimise the effect thereof, good leaders provide clarity and stability during times of crisis.

Clarity will help your team see the same path forward that you envisage, and the means to achieve this together. Here are a few simple ways to ensure that you provide clarity:

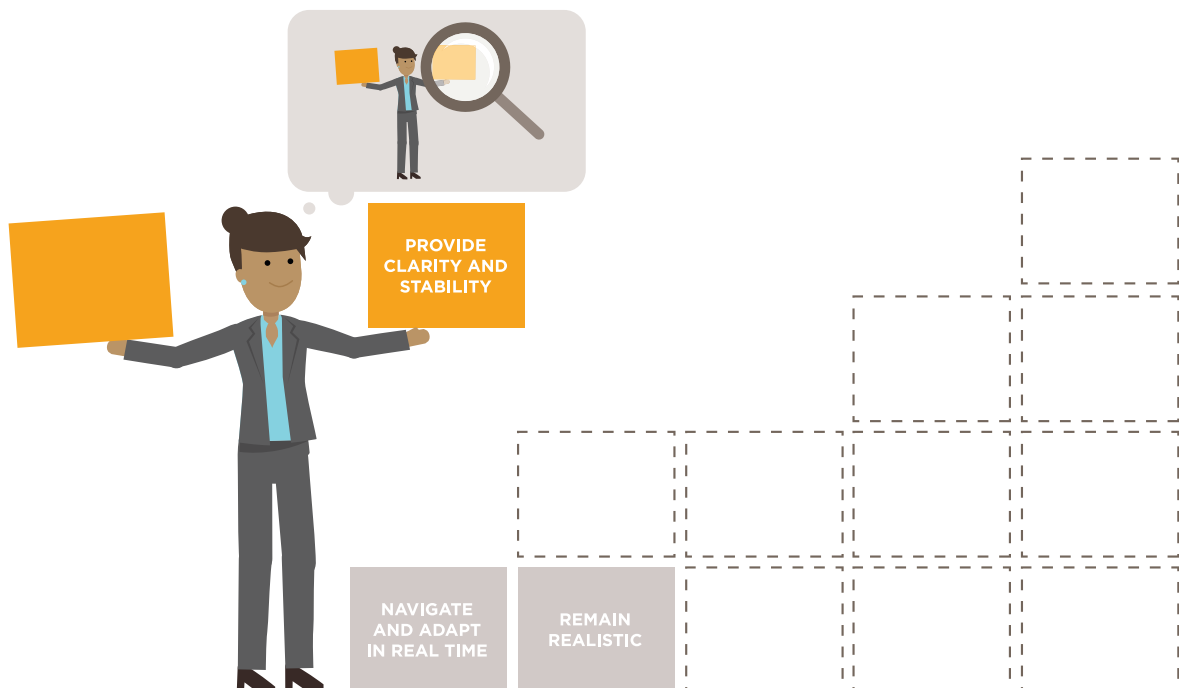
- Even when the future is unclear and information changes often, a leader can provide clarity by communicating what **is** known as soon as it is known. Leaders who are not **transparent with information** become less credible and leave team members feeling even more uncertain and vulnerable. Even disappointing news should be communicated in a clear and straightforward manner. Trustworthy leaders do not hide bad news, which rarely stays hidden anyway.
- In times of consistent change, we receive new, additional and changing messages and information all the time. With each new piece of information, instruction or recommendation we lose a bit of the clarity of what, exactly, we are meant to do. To

mitigate this, your messages should **focus only on the most essential information and instructions**; and it should be communicated in a short, meaningful and coherent manner that will make the essence stick.

- **Leave nothing to interpretation.** Do not assume that people will fully understand or know what you mean, rather, over-communicate every fact and allow people an opportunity to ask questions.

It is hard to trust an erratic leader. Stable leaders generate stability in their teams. Trusted leaders do not need to know everything or have all the answers, but they must be predictable now and in the future. When your team knows what to expect from you, it creates the trust and stability needed to take on challenges together.

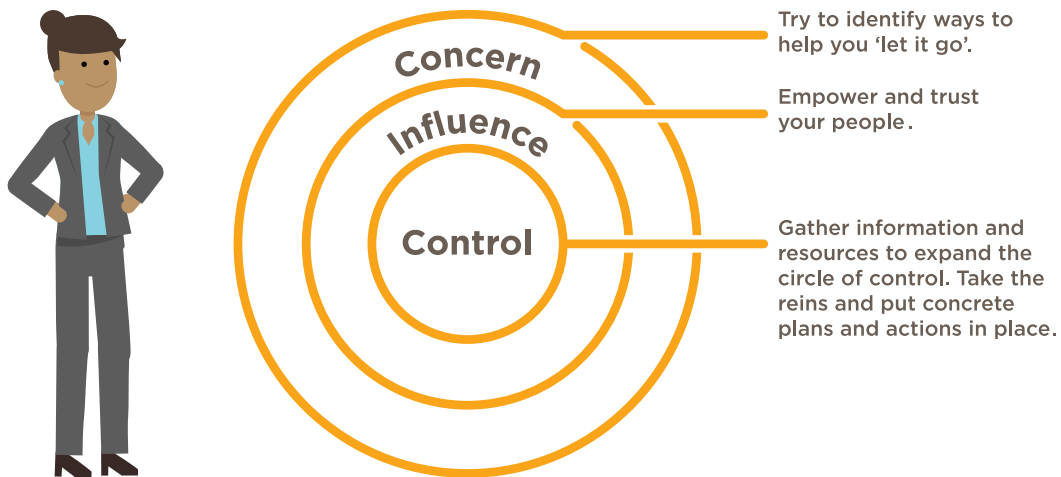
Reflect for a moment on how you communicate: Are you providing enough clarity? Are your messages short, direct and clear? Think about your behaviour: Are you consistent and predictable? Are you generating stability or uncertainty? Speak to a trusted colleague or find the courage to ask feedback from your team; then make the changes needed to be a leader that provides clarity and stability.



## A NUDGE TO EMPOWER AND TRUST YOUR PEOPLE

It is human nature to want to take control of an uncertain situation. From an evolutionary standpoint, if we are in control of our environment, then we have a far better chance of survival. Taking the reins in your own hands gives you a sense of security because it means you get to make the decisions, you know what is going on every step of the way, and you can steer the situation in the direction of your choice.

During the peak of a crisis (and even before and after the peak), it is not possible for a leader to manage and control every single thing that is happening. Things change too fast and decisions and actions need to be made rapidly. In times like these, you need to identify those elements you can control, those you can only influence, and those outside of your control, and then respond to each as proposed below.



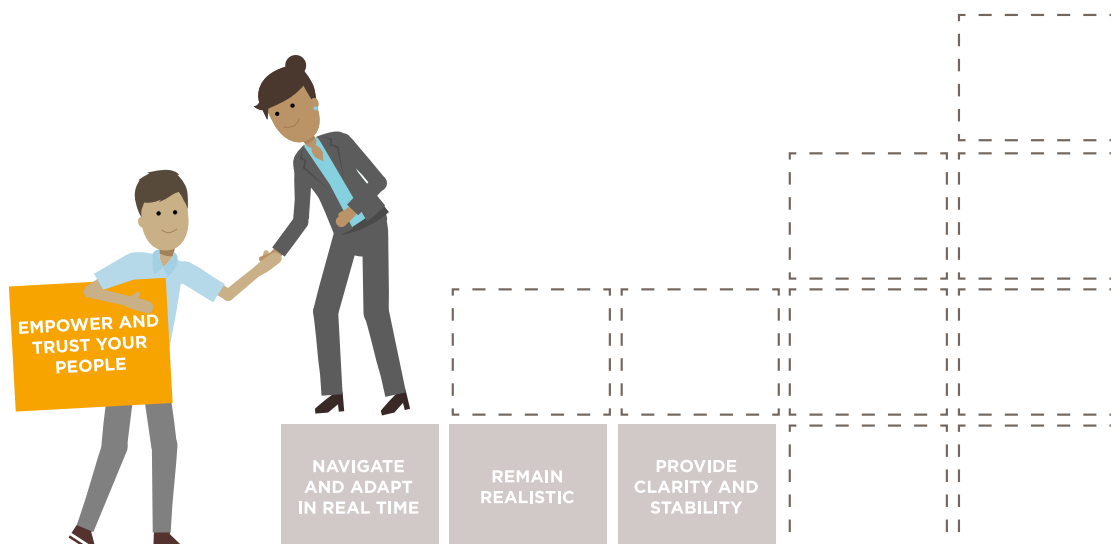
Your most valuable resource during times of crisis is your team. One sure way to be more effective under such circumstances is to give some of the reins to your team members. Allow them to make decisions and trust that they will do their best. Most well-adapted individuals would naturally also want a positive outcome and would, therefore, make decisions and take actions that they truly believe will produce the most favourable results.

go and enable them to run with things. Influence and set the boundaries clearly, but allow your team to navigate the reality within those boundaries. Finally, but importantly, assure them that you will back their decisions and help them correct mistakes without judgement; give them the psychological safety they need to do what is expected of them without fear.

When faced with adversity, accept your own need to exercise control, but also realise that your team members have the same yearning for control to feel safe and secure. Consequently, you will need to find a way to let

You might be surprised at the outcomes, which are likely to be even better than if you had attempted to control and micromanage every decision and task every step of the way.

Refer to the **circle of control guideline** [here](#) to learn more about this tool and how to maximise the value of it.

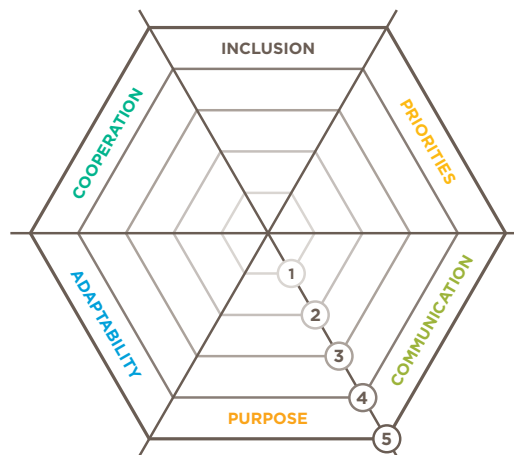


## A NUDGE TO BUILD RESILIENCE

All of us have been confronted with some level of stress, trauma, threat or crisis at some point in our lives; whether it was the death of a loved one, being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, being retrenched, a victim of crime, impacted by a natural disaster or being in an accident, to name but a few. It is normal to respond to these crises with a surge of negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, uncertainty and depression; yet over time we somehow bounce back and manage to accept, adapt, cope and find our 'new normal'. This ability to bounce back is a result of our inherent resilience that is linked to a deep-rooted survival instinct; we all want to live, thrive and be happy, healthy and safe.

Resilience is not a characteristic that people either have or do not have. We all have resilience; some of us are just better at it. Fortunately, because resilience starts in our thoughts, and shows through our behaviours and actions, it is something that can be learnt and developed in anyone.

The web of resilience below, adapted from a framework developed by the Leadership Pipeline Institute, is a useful tool to help you uncover and develop resilience in your team. The tool gives you a thought framework that you can use to facilitate a discussion with your team to unpack elements and sources of resilience:



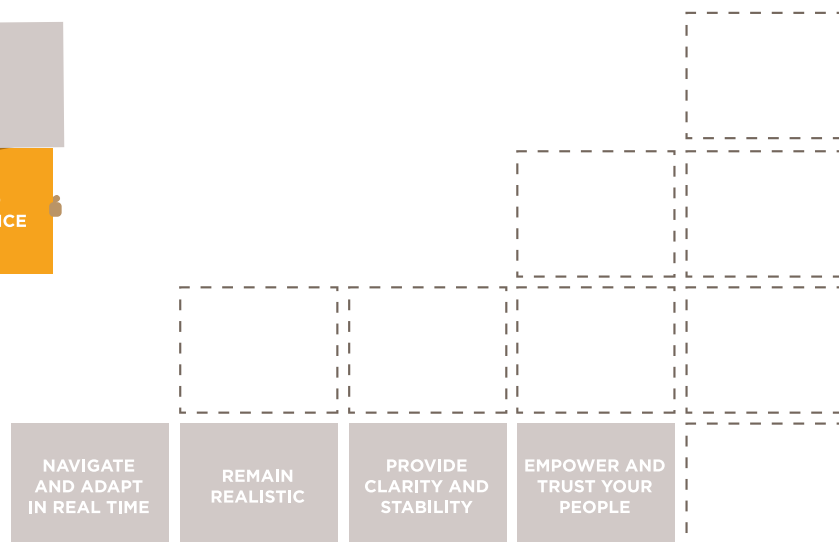
**Rating this scale**  
**0** = This needs a lot of work.  
**5** = We are great at this.

Use the web of resilience as follows:

- Ensure everybody understands and agrees on the definition of each of the six elements.
- Ask every team member to score each element on a scale of 1 to 5 and share their score with the rest of the team, along with their rationale.
- Plot all the scores on the spider diagram.
- Look at the overall picture to determine where the team is strong and where improvements can be made.
- Together, decide on action plans to address what you have identified.

Refer to the **web of resilience guideline** [here](#) to learn more about this tool and how to maximise its value.

Anxiety is normal during times of uncertainty; by building concrete plans to unearth and enhance our inherent resilience we can increase our ability to prepare our responses and effectively deal with challenges, such as the current COVID-19 crisis, and minimise the negative impact thereof.





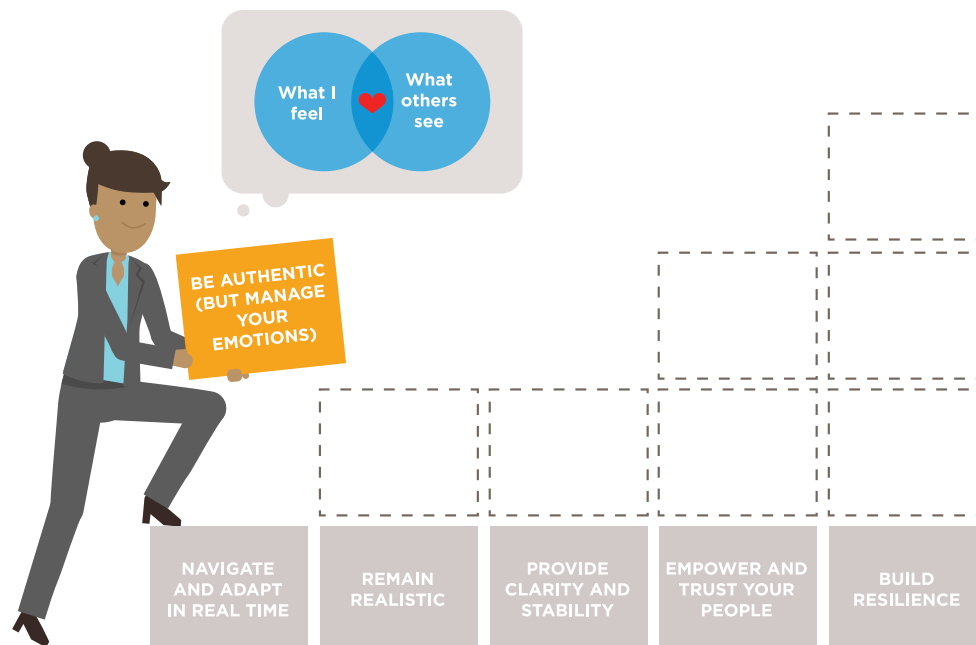
## A NUDGE TO BE AUTHENTIC BUT KEEP YOUR EMOTIONS IN CHECK

Reflect for a moment on your career thus far and identify your favourite line manager; that manager who you respected most and had the best relationship with. Was it the manager who was always right, who never showed weakness, who was perfect in every possible way?

Most likely the answer to that question is 'no'. As humans, we relate best to other, real humans. Natural egocentricity makes it hard for us to relate to someone who we perceive as perfect, because reaching that same perfection is an unattainable goal, and nobody wants to be left feeling like a lesser person. Your favourite line manager is, more likely, the one who was honest about their weaknesses; who showed some real emotion; who used both your and their mistakes as learning opportunities. It is the manager who was secure enough with themselves to say: 'I don't know, but I will find out.' Authenticity builds connection, and connection is at the heart of trust.

While showing vulnerability can create connection and trust, we must keep in mind that people look to leaders to be calm and deliberate in their decisions and actions, especially in times of crisis. Leaders who react to situations of crisis in highly emotional ways can add to people's stress and anxiety. However, the answer is not in hiding your feelings from others; that negates the earlier point about authenticity. The answer lies in slowing down, taking stock of your anxiety and stress and understanding what is causing an emotional reaction. Identify tools to help you truly manage your emotions so that you can provide leadership that is authentically calm and in control. And when you make a mistake, admit it, talk about it and use it as a learning opportunity that will give others the psychological safety to also be candid about their mistakes and emotions.

Susan David, an award-winning Harvard Medical School psychologist, talks about how effective leaders manage their negative thoughts and feelings. [Click here](#) to view the video.



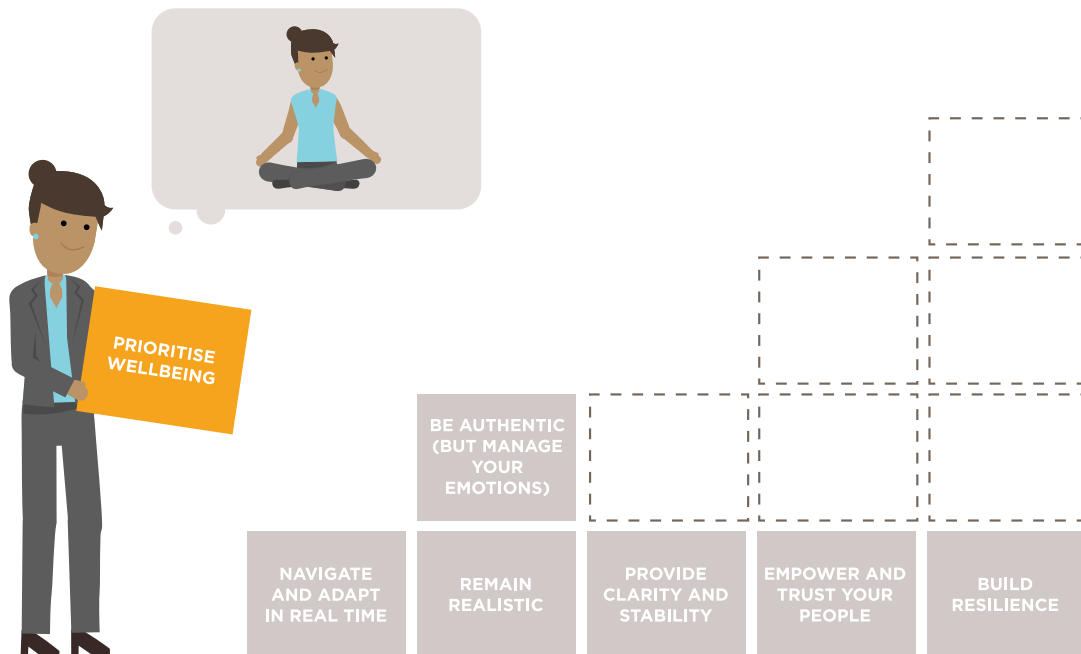
## A NUDGE TO PRIORITISE WELLBEING AMID DISRUPTION

During the current COVID-19 challenge, we have acted swiftly to keep our employees physically safe. While this is of paramount importance, so too, is their emotional wellbeing. Taking measures to ensure that your team members are also emotionally safe and strong is paramount to their performance, engagement and overall health.

Workplace psychology guru Shawn Achor coined a theory that he calls 'the happiness advantage'. According to him, people who cultivate a positive mindset perform better in the face of challenges. Just three positive comments or experiences a day can fend off feelings of negativity or sadness.

Reflect on how you can prioritise wellbeing and create more positivity in your team:

- Check in with individuals to see how they are doing.
- Utilise employee wellbeing tools such as the [emotions thermometer](#) and [heat map](#) to check in on and track the wellbeing of the team. (You can access these tools in the leader toolkit on the Care Courage Compassion web page.)
- Capitalise on the happiness advantage by complimenting and recognising team members for work done well.
- Encourage team members to create positive experiences among themselves.
- Click [here](#) to access a practical wellbeing tool that you can use to support your team.



## A NUDGE TO ENCOURAGE EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

The best time to show genuine empathy and compassion to your team members is right now.

At this moment, your team is juggling new responsibilities, facing a wide array of fears and a range of new challenges. What employees need to see, hear and believe most during these uncertain and rapidly changing times are leaders who truly understand their circumstances and concerns, who are there for them, who will back them up and who will guide them through these times. They need to feel genuine empathy and compassion.

The Your Voice (Gallup) survey results remind us that people want to feel that their voices are heard and that their leaders care about them. Gallup calls this the 'individualised, human-first approach'. Though it may feel wrong or impossible to manage this way during times of crisis the opposite is true. During challenging times, when people are more uncertain and anxious, they need this individualised care and empathy more than ever. According to Gallup, employees need empathy and compassion when they feel most vulnerable, or they may disengage from their work and withdraw from interacting with their managers and teams. Leading with a command-and-control style limits empowerment and trust and is likely to reduce performance.

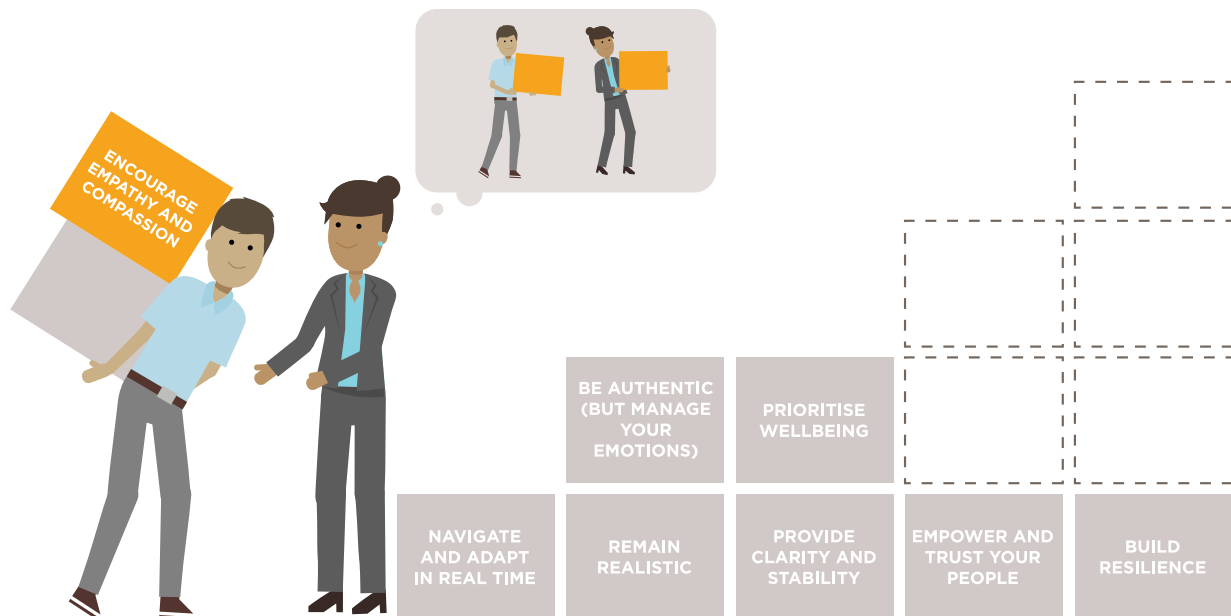
Reflect for a moment on how you can show more empathy and compassion.

- Ask people how they are doing and truly listen to their response.
- Show your interest — stop what you are busy with, turn your full body towards the person, look them in the eyes and respond to their question.
- Demonstrate empathy by reflecting any emotions that they reveal and assure them that their feelings are valid.

Try leading with compassion and ask these questions during your next one-on-one:

- How are you doing? How is the current situation affecting you?
- What is going well right now?
- What are your real challenges right now?
- How are you tackling these challenges? How is it going?
- What do you need from me right now?

Click [here](#) to watch Dr Brené Brown, a research professor and best-selling author, explain how we can create genuinely empathic connections with our team members.



## A NUDGE TO LISTEN AND LEARN THROUGH CHAOS

When we are intensely busy, it is easy to fall into the trap of running only in 'operational mode'; performing the next task almost without thinking. We do this because getting things done gives us the sense of control and achievement that we sorely need. It is, however, always important, and even more so during times of crisis, to take a moment to stop and listen.

During crisis times, new information is regularly introduced and the status quo changes rapidly. If we do not stop and listen every now and again, we will miss important information needed to lead and manage effectively during these times. The age-old adage 'two heads are better than one' remains true. We need to stop and listen to our team members: their ideas, thoughts, plans and concerns. When you take the time to listen to your team, your crisis management will become more efficient and effective.

Show your staff that you are truly listening by following these simple listening tips:

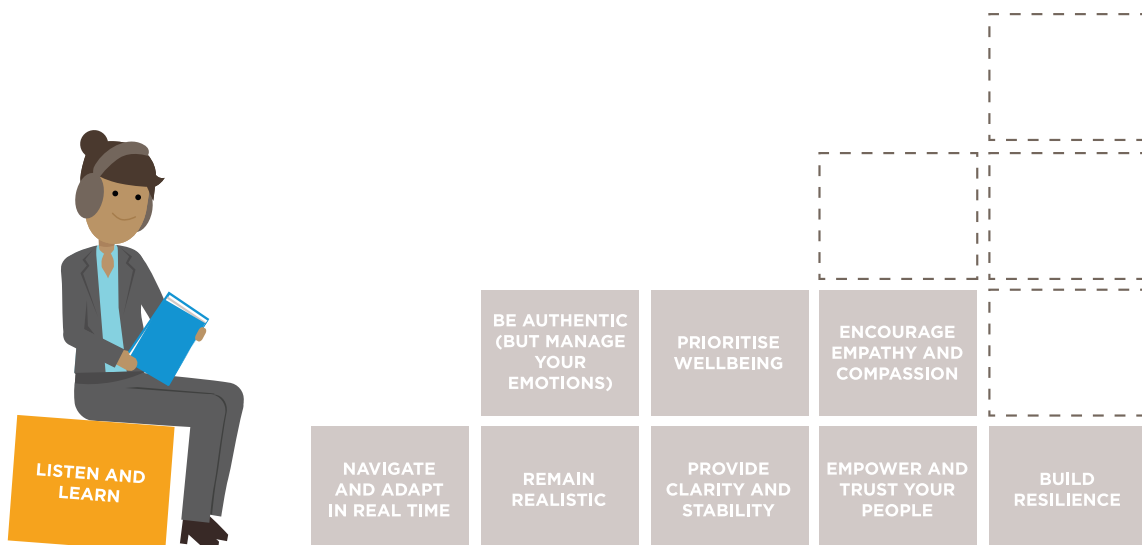
- **Focus fully on the person** by stopping what you are busy with, turning your body towards them and making eye contact; body language reveals where your attention truly is.
- **Clarify** what the person is saying by asking open-ended questions (for instance, who, why, what, where and when?) rather than those that elicit 'yes' or 'no' as responses; this shows interest.
- Give words of **encouragement** such as: 'go on' and 'what else?'; this shows attention and willingness.
- **Summarise** what the person said by reflecting back their words; this shows that you truly heard them.

- **Reflect back the emotions** that you picked up from their message; this shows empathy.
- **React** appropriately; make sure to show that you value their views even if you do not agree with what they said.

Through listening, we also learn. Though we may wish we had the time to properly reflect on what we are learning by breaking down the situation and our response to it to identify where we did things right and where and how we could have done better, realistically there is no time during a crisis for this level of learning. There will be time for reflective learning when the crisis has passed. The best way to learn right now is to listen to others, to pay attention to the outcomes of your own decisions and to find out how others are dealing with the uncertainty, the unplanned and unforeseen circumstances and the mistakes that were made.

Reflect for a moment on how well you currently listen and learn:

- Whose opinions do you ask for and consider when you make decisions?
- Do you truly listen to your staff? Does your body language support this?
- How are you gathering feedback, thoughts and suggestions from your staff? Do they know what you are doing with their input?
- What mistakes have you made that you can learn from right now?
- What mistakes have others made that you can learn from?
- How are you recording what is happening now so that you can achieve proper reflective learning later?



## A NUDGE ON HOW TO MANAGE PERFORMANCE DURING ABNORMAL TIMES

During times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not possible to manage performance in the same way as we would in normal circumstances. Crisis times force us to focus on new and different goals, juggle continuous change and manage our operations in a very different way.

Performance management creates alignment and a shared understanding of what has to be achieved and what individuals have to do, learn and develop. But, how can we adapt our traditional approach to fit our current operating context? It is tricky, but not an insurmountable challenge.

Here is some advice from a global advisory firm, Gartner, on how we can effectively and fairly manage performance during the pandemic:

### 1. Be achievement-oriented

Start by celebrating what employees have done well and how they achieved this. This will inspire pride and encourage self-reflection — how your team might replicate that success in future.

### 2. Focus on contribution

Balance performance outcomes and behaviours. In these times, give more weight to employees' contributions. For example, being a team player and demonstrating a willingness to help others without being asked, or showing empathy and support to colleagues.

### 3. Frequent, informal check-ins

Aim to have regular, informal performance check-ins with your employees. Don't add another meeting to your already packed agenda. Keep it simple and incorporate these performance check-ins into your existing one-on-one meetings.

### 4. Structure the conversation to acknowledge current realities

In uncertain times, it is important to demonstrate empathy. Begin the conversation by inquiring about their wellbeing. Don't jump straight in with questions about their productivity or performance.

### 5. Be flexible and focused

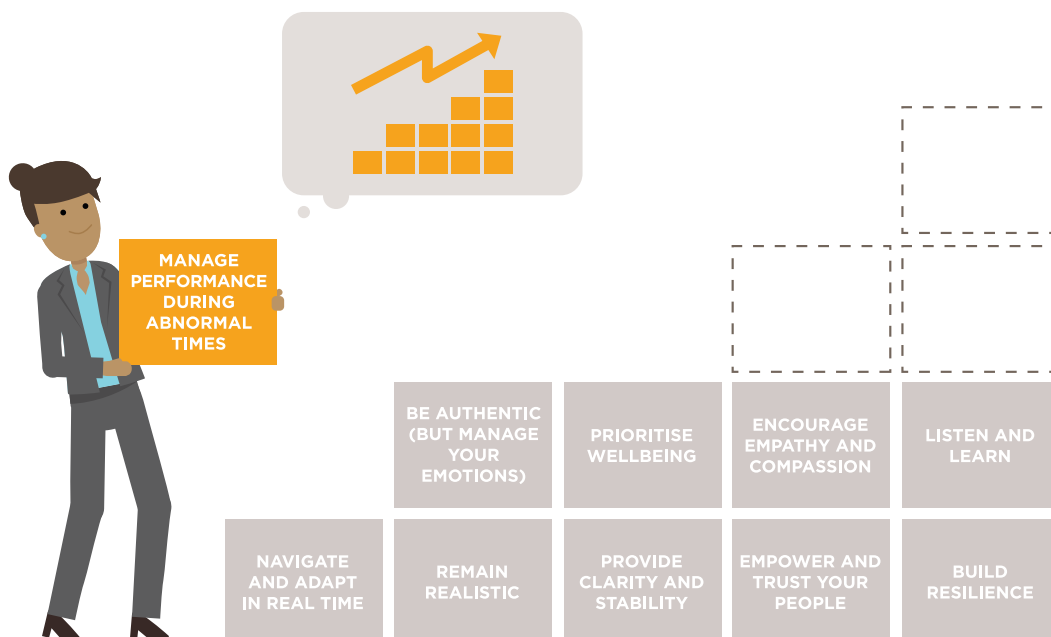
Our employees are being challenged to learn new skills, perform additional tasks and adapt to changing work requirements on the fly. We can support them by focusing on short-term workflow prioritisation. This means, shifting from asking about priorities for the month or quarter ahead, and instead, discussing work priorities for the next day or week. By viewing work as manageable chunks, we can prevent employees from feeling overwhelmed.

### 6. Have a developmental mindset

Maintain a future-focused perspective in your conversations. Rather than spending all your time reviewing past performance, use it to inform the support you provide to help your employees improve their future work and make progress towards their developmental goals.

Do not be tempted to discard performance discussions. Instead, find ways to identify what high performance during disruption looks like for your team, recognise great contributions and inspire your team to rise to the occasion.

For a practical guide on managing performance during the pandemic, click [here](#).



## A NUDGE TO MANAGE AND LEAD REMOTELY

Trust is the essential ingredient for any high-performing team. The sense of psychological safety that is created when there is trust between team members is what sits at the core of highly engaged and productive teams.

### But how do you build trust when you lead a remote team?

With remote work, the opportunity for casual workplace interactions and random encounters in the corridors is lost, along with the chance to build relationships through shared face-to-face experiences. These limitations make it harder to cultivate trust. This means that you need to work much harder and be more deliberate in how you engage with your remote team. It is challenging, but not impossible.

Here are three key principles to bear in mind:

#### Set the stage

- Discuss and agree on the team's purpose to engender a sense of a 'shared mission', something that is particularly important during a pandemic, when it is all hands on deck. Help your team understand what is at stake, why it matters and how their work contributes to the shared purpose.
- Confirm the rules of engagement. Agree on **how** you will work together as a team.
- Set up regular one-on-one interactions with each team member; this will provide them with an opportunity to share their challenges and concerns with you in a safe space.

#### Invite participation

- Model vulnerability — share your personal perspective on your work (and setbacks) with your team. This will create the psychological safety and trust that will

encourage your team to be honest and real too.

- Seek opinions and feedback from the team (and be open to hearing some constructive feedback).
- Build a sense of connection. Create an opportunity for team members to share a bit about their lives and interests outside of work.
- Model active listening to show your real interest in each voice; when team members feel truly heard and valued, they are more likely to continue to actively participate.

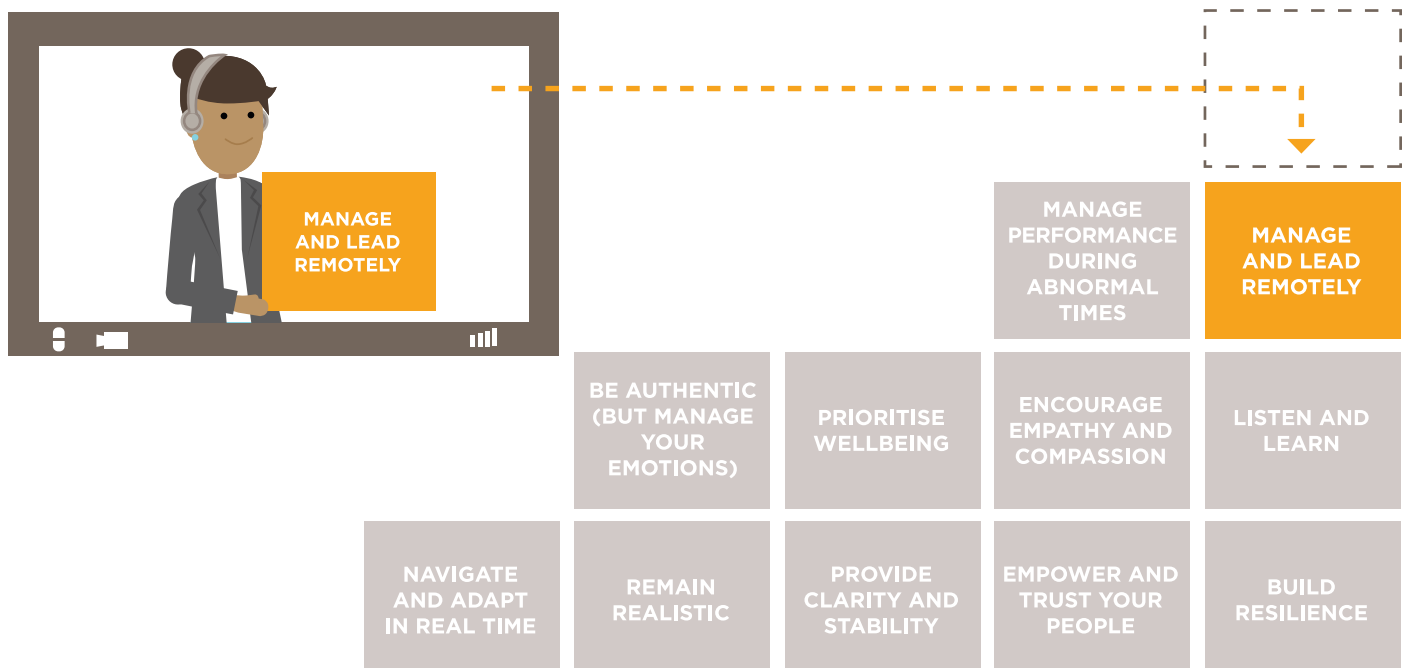
#### Respond productively

- Provide regular, realistic feedback on performance against new and changed expectations and objectives; this will reduce uncertainty.
- Encourage your team to think creatively and find new ways of doing things. Demonstrate this in your own work.
- Acknowledge effort and express appreciation to provide encouragement and spur on further efforts.
- Avoid micromanaging every task or minute of the day; try to become comfortable with asynchronous work practices in the team.

In a short video (4.20mins), Amy Edmondson, Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School and author of *The Fearless Organization*, describes how leaders in healthcare can create an environment of psychological safety for their teams. [Click here](#) to view the video.

#### Do your team members feel they are working in a safe space?

We have attached a short [questionnaire](#) that you can use to better understand the dynamics of personal safety in your team.



## A NUDGE TO GIVE HOPE — ANCHOR YOUR TRUE NORTH

When dealing with a crisis in the ‘here and now’ it is often easy to lose sight of the future; to feel stuck in the moment and not be able to see a positive outcome. In these moments, it is easy to fall into feelings of hopelessness and depression, which in turn can decrease engagement, motivation and performance. During challenging circumstances, it is important for us to maintain a spirit of hope. Hopeful employees are more resilient, agile and better able to navigate obstacles.

Inspiring hope within your team does not mean making empty promises that everything will be fine. It is about reminding them that even though we may not know exactly when and how, this **will** end, and at some point, things **will** get better. This hope, coupled with the assurance that they will receive help and support along the way, invites your team to participate in the creation of a better future. Crafting specific steps that the team can take will help them manage stress and anxiety and build hopefulness.

Focusing on hope and the knowledge that things will get better in the future will only get you halfway to emotional wellbeing; you will still need something to help you cope with current realities. For this, you will need your anchor, or true north — the main thing that keeps you and your team aligned with what is truly important, what your real purpose and mission are right now. For some, the Mediclinic purpose to enhance the quality of life may be sufficient. Others may require something more tangible that speaks to ‘right here’ and ‘right now’.

Many of our children have already learned the lesson from *Frozen’s* character Anna, when she chooses to ‘do

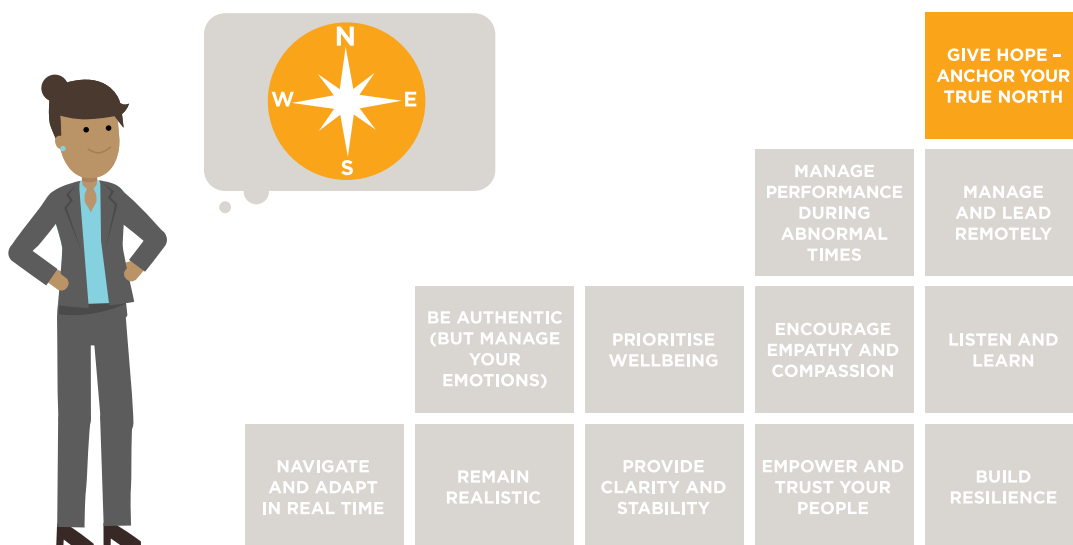
the next right thing’ to find her purpose when hope seems lost. Here are the lyrics we can all learn from:

I won’t look too far ahead  
It’s too much for me to take  
But break it down to this next breath  
This next step  
This next choice is one that I can make

So I’ll walk through this night  
Stumbling blindly toward the light  
And do the next right thing  
And with the dawn, what comes then?  
When it’s clear that everything will never be the same again  
Then I’ll make the choice  
To hear that voice  
And do the next right thing

Sometimes your anchor may also be to decide to bravely take the next step into the darkness, to do the next right thing; whether this is washing your hands, putting on a mask, treating a sick patient, connecting to a Zoom meeting, supporting a colleague or team member who is going through a difficult time, comforting your crying child or just responding to an email.

Reflect for a moment on how you can help your team envision a better future and identify their current true north. Then, help your team craft the steps to get there, starting with what is the next right step for today, then for tomorrow, the week, month and quarter. These small steps, anchored in our values, can help us find the hope needed to weather this storm, and build our resilience to withstand future storms.



Click [here](#) for more helpful tips to lead others and take care of yourself during this time. Contact your regional Organisational Effectiveness Specialist if you need further information or support.

