

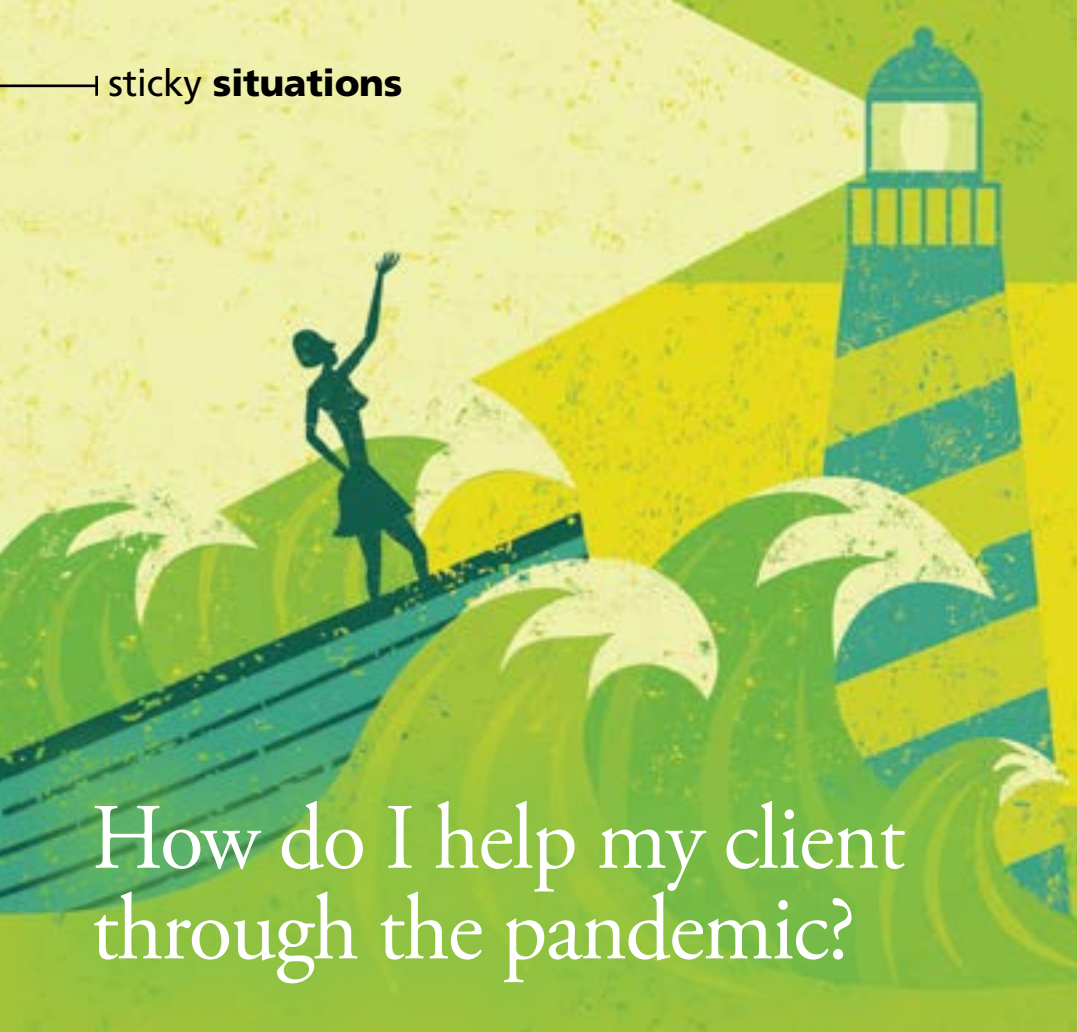
choice

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From TRIAGE to
RECOVERY

Coaching through COVID-19

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How do I help my client through the pandemic?

THE SITUATION

“My client is experiencing waves of intermittent fear and optimism as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. It’s impacting their ability to be an empathetic and understanding leader when the team is also experiencing volatile emotions. How can I best support my client in navigating an organization filled with emotional people, especially when we are all facing unpredictability and volatility on a global scale?”

THE EXPERTS WEIGH IN

By Craig Carr, BCC, PCC, CPCC

It sounds like your client is one of many executives finding out they’re expected to know how to lead a virtual team. This suddenly common situation can be stressful and fragmenting for everyone. Meanwhile, coaches are also having to pivot and learn about the unique characteristics of a distributed workforce.

Group and leadership dynamics are suddenly different, too. One of the first wobbles a leader confronts is accepting that things will not go back to the way they were. When leaders communicate it’s only a matter of time before things return to normal, they risk losing credibility and loyalty if the core business cannot support their claim.

Even if the office does re-open, significant changes are ahead, and leaders need to be ready. This represents the first layer of calm a leader must project. They

must communicate an “I’ve got your back” message and, more importantly, find in themselves where the purpose and mission of the organization are worth rallying for. I can say with a high degree of certainty that the leader who has ignored, denied, or overridden systemic dysfunctions will see unhealthy hidden dynamics and negative unconscious patterns played out when a crisis occurs, or when their team goes remote.

When a leader eschews empathy and honesty and then continues to do so in the presence of volatility, at least 60 percent of the group will have no trust in them when the emotional turbulence of a crisis gets real. If that is the person you’re coaching, you’ll have some remedial leadership work to do with the client and some trauma resolution to do with the team. It will be a tough, challenging slog, especially if the

leader is not up for being vulnerable, open, and humble with their cohort.

That said, I also want to approach this as if your client has done work on knowing who they are and sees that the organization is in crisis and people are freaking out. Here’s one way to look at what needs to happen: When the Titanic was going down, do we think the heroes were those who panicked and pushed to the front of the line to get on a lifeboat or those who “took a beat,” found courage, and helped others to safety?

My point is that now is a time when “calling forth” is the skill every coach must be ready and willing to brandish like a sword. If that leader/client of yours is not able to rally the team, you must find out if it’s personal fear that’s stopping them, or if they don’t care enough about the company mission to do what it takes.

By Suzi Pomerantz, MT, MCC

During a global pandemic and the ensuing economic and public health crisis we are all navigating, leadership faces unprecedented challenges. Here are five steps you can take with your leadership coaching clients to help them to right the ship.

1. Normalize It – Help your clients to realize that they are not alone, everything they are feeling is normal, valid, and appropriate. Be present with them as they express their emotions to you, to model for them how to be with their employees during volatile times. Clear space for them to become listening leaders who can then validate the experiences of their employees. Normalize the experience for your clients. Help them to identify their preferred method of metabolizing their emotions, to self-regulate and clear space for their employees' emotions so they can then hold that space and not be triggered.

2. Stages of Grief – The most widely accepted model of understanding grief is the Kubler-Ross cycle, which includes: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Your clients and their employees are likely experiencing these stages in rapid succession – perhaps daily or multiple times a day. Help them understand and name that their experience may fit the stages of grief, so they can process it and choose their responses.

3. Uncertainty & the Brain – David Rock, founder of the NeuroLeadership Institute, says, "Uncertainty registers in the brain as an error, gap, or tension: something that must be corrected before one can feel comfortable again. That is why people crave certainty. Not knowing what will happen next can be profoundly debilitating because it requires extra neural energy." Leaders can use conversational strategies to create certainty and calm the central nervous systems of individuals and

the collective. Originally a military term, we are now all experiencing VUCA: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. Leaders must pivot their leadership style and strategies to match.

4. Self-leadership – The best leaders engage in practices and strategies to manage their own energy. Leading themselves and managing their own emotions, self-regulating so they can be fully present for their people is often a differentiator between effective and ineffective leadership. The key is that this self-regulating is in service of others. Put your own oxygen mask on before helping others.

5. Flip the Switch – Your client's focus on their fear, optimism, state of being and feeling, is evidence they are shining the spotlight of awareness on themselves. You can coach them to flip the focus from self to others, and they can begin to practice shining the spotlight of their awareness and energy on being of service to others.

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®, CEC

COVID-19 will define a time in the world when no one had control; when no one was sure what to do next. We look to leaders in times of crisis, not remembering or knowing they are experiencing the same feelings and emotions that those who look for answers are feeling. In a coach's work with a leader, there is a significant opportunity to assist the leader in becoming aware of their emotions to such an extent that they can harness their awareness to lead others through COVID-19. In their awareness may not lie the answers for others, but a roadmap for helping others within their organization to find their way, apart yet together.

There has never been a time in business when communication is more critical. My grandson, Matt, who is a first responder, was talking to me about 'compassion fatigue.' The idea that first responders must be aware they can begin to feel indifferent about suffering due to the frequency

of, or the number of appeals, for help. Communicating remotely with so many unknowns ahead, is taking its toll on all. Help your client realize they are no different in their fatigue, or the fatigue of those around them, which is why their ability to be consistently empathetic and understanding may ebb and flow.

Leadership is not about being perfect. It's about finding the next flow after the last ebb. Leading well requires extreme self-care now more than ever. How well is your client taking care of themselves? You cannot give away what you do not have. Ensure that in your conversations with your client, they are getting clear on their own needs first, and their empathy will be available for others.

Ask your client to meet more frequently and purposefully with those they lead and

solve the future worries and issues together. Because no one has done this before, collaboration within companies will allow for some of the most lasting success going forward. Many great ideas from companies are coming from the 'rank and file'; those who are doing the work and finding new ways to pivot their skills and talents.

Finally, remind your client there is an overwhelming sense of loss for what we all thought the immediate and long-range future would bring. We have been through devastating times in the past. Each failure leads to success when we take the lesson from the loss.

Keep talking with your client; stay connected and know that, apart yet together, we will come through these most troubling of times. •

Are you grappling with a sticky situation?

You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you some different perspectives to consider. Email your situation to: submissions@choice-online.com and put "sticky situations" in the subject line.