

# Evolve the way you lead

## The rise of the caring, compassionate leader

The COVID-19 crisis has changed the world of work, disrupting the employee eXperience (eX) and significantly accelerating the focus on eX and talent transformation. Many organizations have met these unprecedented challenges with exceptional leadership responsiveness. At every level, leaders and managers have demonstrated unparalleled levels of empathy, authenticity, care and concern towards employees.

**But do we really understand the role leaders play in the employee eXperience?**

**Which “moments that matter” can they most influence?**

**What leadership capabilities do they need to successfully navigate through and beyond the pandemic?**

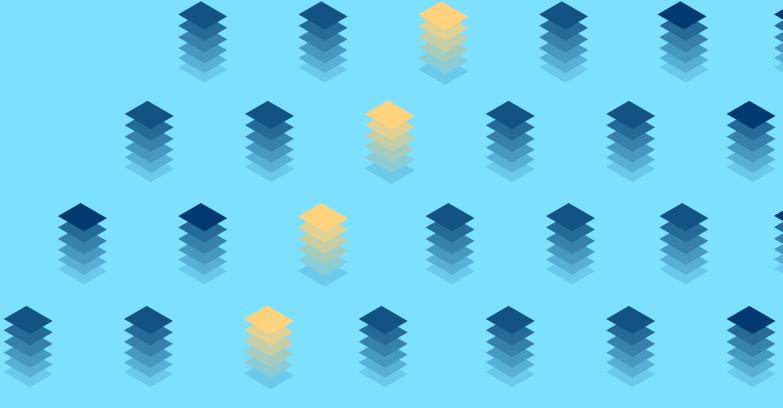
**And finally, what should organizations do to support this transition in leadership approach?**

Find out in this interview with Seymour Adler, Kincentric's Leadership Assessment and Development Global Practice Leader.

**We have been talking a lot about the impact of leadership on eX over the past few months. What are you observing in your work with leaders?**

The very best leaders of today are extremely conscious of their impact on the employee eXperience. They recognize that employees have been stressed and stretched as they adopt new ways of working and struggle to maintain a healthy work/life balance. They also recognize that the things they do as leaders have a definitive impact on the eX. Understanding that employees are looking to them for stability, they're demonstrating more care and compassion than ever before.

**Despite the ups and downs of the pandemic, there have always been defining moments that serve as the foundation of eX. How can leaders help shape these moments during difficult times?**



There are many “moments that matter” throughout the employee lifecycle, and leaders must appreciate the impact those moments can have on the eX. Great leaders will look to connect with employees in a positive way by being sensitive to the challenges employees face and searching for opportunities that help them connect with the organization, its mission and purpose, and also with leaders and colleagues.

**Can you give us any examples of any particular moments that matter during the pandemic?**

One moment that matters in particular during challenging times such as this is *onboarding*. There are many people who have joined an organization and taken a new position in the midst of the pandemic. Attempting to master a new job, establish new relationships and build new networks in this environment can be very challenging. Leaders need to provide new employees with extra support and a clear roadmap that will allow them to quickly gain knowledge, build a network and establish trust, even in a virtual environment.

*“Great leaders recognize that the things they do have a definitive impact on the employee eXperience.”*



On the other end of the spectrum, *exiting* is another key moment. Employees may be leaving due to furlough, downsizing, or family obligations. Important too, are those employees who remain, who may be dealing with survivor guilt or taking on even more work to make up for the smaller workforce. We're finding that leaders who have made the effort to successfully establish a bond with their employees will be better able to support them through difficult times and transitions.

### Let's talk about leadership capabilities and attributes. Has the pandemic had an impact? And will it last?

Our research has shown that the trust an employee has in their leader, and therefore that leader's power to influence, is a direct function of the strength of the one-to-one bond that has been formed between them. Trust is critical in times of change or transformation. Behaviors that help strengthen bonds between leaders and employees – that help to deepen the emotional connection and enable a better understanding of one another – will help to create a better employee eXperience. Currently, only 36% of organizations think that their leaders are ready to provide a great eX.

### What could this mean for existing competency models?

Our 2020 global eX research also revealed that "engaging, empowering and connected leadership" remains the most important leadership capability. This is true now, and will continue to be important beyond the pandemic, as employees will be reluctant to return to an era of a "command and control" leadership style. We have been advising our clients to take a hard look at their leadership models to make sure they include – and suitably emphasize – competencies around empathy, caring and compassion, in addition to the traditional attributes such as problem-solving, business acumen and decision-making. Once established, organizations must ensure that those "softer" competencies are applied in talent processes and programs, from performance management and talent reviews to selection and hiring decisions.

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### You've talked about "connected leadership." How can leaders make that happen?

In addition to care and compassion, leaders must remain *agile and nimble*. If a leader has six or eight employees reporting to them, for better or worse, they're all going to be different. They will have different personality profiles, different likes and dislikes, and at any given moment, different challenges and varying levels of change readiness. This means that a leader will not be able to utilize a "one size fits all" approach to forging that important one-to-one

bond. Rather, the leader must remain nimble and agile, and create deeply personal, connected, emotional relationships with each one of their direct reports. That is really at the heart of discussions around inclusion.

**There is no simple toolkit for inclusion. Inclusion involves having respect, courtesy and genuine concern for each one of the people reporting to you. It requires a leader to fine-tune how they listen, appreciate and recognize every member of their team on an individual basis.**

To deliver a great eX  
in post-COVID-19  
recovery, leaders need to:



Inspire & engage



Empower teams



Create emotional connections



Demonstrate agility

### So, what should organizations be doing to drive success now and in a post-pandemic world?

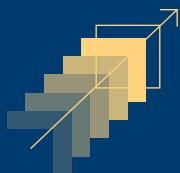
From our research, we've learned that the most successful organizations are already experimenting with changes in their talent practices, and in some cases, doubling down on leadership development. We have seen a genuine shift in the way that leaders have traditionally operated in many organizations. There is now an understanding at the senior levels of HR and even the C-suite that leaders must become more caring and connected as well as nimble and agile. There is no time to waste, and leadership development needs to be intensified to meet this need.

We've been working with our clients to deliver high-impact assessment and development services in a virtual environment. We're using technology to blend online learning with real-time facilitated sessions. We're also leveraging peer learning activities along with self-directed technologies in which people can access articles, playlists, videos and podcasts to help reinforce some of the learning. By using this blended approach, we're already seeing measurable improvements in leadership-driven eX scores.

**We've talked a lot about what leaders need to do to create a great employee eXperience. But what should organizations be doing to support their leaders in these difficult times?**

Organizations need to acknowledge the importance of the role leaders play in shaping the employee eXperience, driving engagement and delivering on the business goals. Organizations should be as focused on the moments that matter for leaders as much as for the employees – we could call that **LeX**. One way to create a meaningful experience for leaders is to show them that they are being invested in, developed and supported. Leaders need to feel that, while they find themselves in an unexpected and unprecedented situation, they have not been abandoned; that they have the support of HR and executive leadership; and that there is a vision and plan for the future—one in which they will be recognized and rewarded for their efforts and contributions during this difficult time.

*"Organizations should be as focused on the moments that matter for leaders as much as for the employees."*



It's also crucial that leaders are prompted and enabled to find meaning and purpose to their work roles. As human beings, if we believe that our work has long-term purpose and we are able to connect the work that we do every day to that ultimate purpose, we can put up with a lot of short-term discomfort. Organizations are responsible for making sure leaders understand that purpose, connect with it and find it personally meaningful to them. Only then can leaders effectively communicate that purpose and embed it in the people who report to them.

**The eX questions leaders need to ask themselves**

- What are my direct reports experiencing day-to-day in all elements of their lives right now?
- How can I make their experience working here more meaningful and positive?
- How can I enhance my one-to-one bond with each and every individual on my team?
- How can I actively work to develop stronger trust in my leadership?

We know that leadership is key to driving all those moments that matter for people. Being connected to your direct reports doesn't just make for a better working relationship, it has a transformative effect on that employee's eXperience and engagement. Combine that with a leader who lives and breathes the purpose, and you can transform an entire organization. But we all know that forming those crucial emotional bonds doesn't come naturally to every leader.

**So, what can companies do right now to improve leadership capabilities and create a great eX?**

**1. Refresh your leadership competency model**

Ask, "What competencies do our leaders need in order to have influence and impact, and produce business results?" It's obvious that what worked in the pre-pandemic world has changed. It's no longer just about technical or managerial competencies – it's caring and compassion, nimbleness and agility that will make the difference.

**2. Shift the content of your development program**

Look at each element of your leadership training and development to make sure the programs and materials reflect the shift in competencies.

**3. Look at your talent review and performance management processes**

Do these reviews and processes reward those who have the ability to create connections and drive employee engagement?

**4. Re-examine training and development methods**

Look at the methodology you're using to make sure the material is effective. This will require an agile approach, pivoting quickly from traditional methods and instead embracing the opportunities presented by an accelerated use of technology to accommodate remote learning and create virtual classrooms.

**CONTACT**

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We're here to help. To discuss your leadership challenges, [contact us](#).