10 Leadership Strategies For Thriving in 2021

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We are already at the end of a challenging year. So much of it has been a blur as we've scrambled to reinvent our work and daily habits to adapt to a persistent global pandemic. We are heading into 2021 knowing that our best-laid plans will be quickly undone without warning. How do we survive and thrive in such a risky and unpredictable environment?

> "Simply put, we are wondering how to go about restarting the economy; repairing what was broken; and preparing ourselves to cope with a host of urgent social, environmental, demographic, and economic troubles."
>
> *Blair Sheppard, Daria Zarubina, and Alexis Jenkins, Adapting to a New World, s+b*

Leadership expectations have changed during the pandemic. During isolation, people have been scrutinizing the ripple effects of good and bad leadership decisions.

The good news is that we've learned some things as we navigated our challenges this year. Today I'm sharing **10 Leadership Strategies for Thriving in 2021** thatspan many different leadership roles. Implementing all of them well can propel us forward in the current high-visibility, high-stakes environment.

10 Leadership Strategies For Thriving in 2021

Our implementation of each of these 10 Leadership Strategies will be closely watched by constituents in the coming year. Addressing each of them carefully and plugging any gaps will prepare us for our best chance of success as we head into 2021.

1. Clearly Define Ethics to Guide Company-Wide Decisions

Tell people how you'll be making ethical decisions. Don't leave the process to chance.

> "Great leaders are… defining the firm's values concisely, so people have the clarity and guidelines to make decisions."
>
> *Jane Stevenson in* <u>*THE COVID-19 LEADERSHIP GUIDE*</u>, *Korn-Ferry*

2. Prioritize What Employees Need Most

Focus on what your employees need. They are the ones keeping the organization afloat and they need your support.

> "It's time for leaders to reevaluate how they are addressing culture, providing support to employees during the pandemic, and refining their strategies to retain employees in the new year."
>
> *Marcel Schwantes,* <u>*New Survey: What Leaders Must Do to Adapt and Succeed in 2021*</u>, *Inc.*

3. Run More Unusual "What-If" Cases

Think beyond expected scenarios to what else could happen. We've learned this year that 'standard scenarios' don't help us navigate rapidly changing situations.

> "While most business plans include typical financially related 'what if' scenarios, leaders should consider expanding it to include unusual ones."
>
> *Tom Himmer,* <u>*How to Develop a Business Plan for 2021*</u>, *The Business Journals*

4. Put Health and Safety First

Make sure that health and safety take priority over money in organizational decision making.

> "The coronavirus has created a humanitarian crisis, becoming a serious threat to the most vulnerable populations in every community. Protecting the health and safety of employees, partners, and communities will be job one for leaders around the world during the coming months."
>
> *THE COVID-19 LEADERSHIP GUIDE, Korn-Ferry*

5. Keep Priorities Crystal Clear

Share the top priorities of the organization and ask everyone to help achieve them.

> "Disruptions inevitably lead to an overload of sometimes-contradictory information. In the worst cases, employees are being given unclear or incoherent priorities. That's why a crystal-clear set of priorities matters in times of upheaval, but is so hard to achieve."
>
> *Mary Mesaglio, Gartner, 4 Actions to Be a Strong Leader During COVID-19 Disruption, Gartner*

6. Create a Culture of Reciprocal Care

Build a people-friendly culture where people feel safe and protected.

> "Cultivate a culture of reciprocal care where every person matters and each person's welfare and dignity is respected and supported."
>
> *Psychology Professor Laura Knouse and Leadership Studies Professor Gill Hickman, How Leaders Can Adapt in a COVID-19 World, UR Now*

7. Get Employees Involved in Company Decisions

Open up decision making to the people who know the work challenges.

> "Your employees want to feel like they have a voice in major company decisions, including what their future work arrangements might look like."
>
> *Nicole Fallen, 6 Tips for Adapting Your Leadership Style in the Post-COVID World, US Chamber of Commerce*

8. Exceed Customer Expectations

Aim higher. Doing what people expect you to do won't be enough when other organizations are doing much more.

"How will my company adapt our resources to address customers' current and future needs? What are coverage plans for servicing customers? The strongest leaders are determining how they can add more value and consistently over deliver."

Sam Reese, Planning for 2021: 5 Key Questions Leaders Are Asking, Vistage

9. Be Willing To Reverse or Adapt Decisions

Show that new information and guidance leads to new decisions. Be willing to adapt decisions as things change.

"The emerging approach recognizes that in fast-changing environments, decisions often need to be reversed or adapted, and that changing course in response to new information is a strength, not a weakness."

Jennifer Jordan, Michael Wade, and Elizabeth Teracino, Every Leader Needs to Navigate These 7 Tensions, Harvard Business Review

10. Integrate Brand, Culture and Ethics

Align your message and your actions. Gaps are easy to see and they damage your brand.

"A disconnect between what your organization values on the inside and how it is perceived on the outside can damage customer relationships. Customers have the ability—and the proclivity—to see if you are actually operating the way you say you are." "Top leaders of the organization must take responsibility for driving alignment."

Denise Lee Yohn, Want a Great Brand? Build a Great Culture, SHRM

Thriving in 2021 will require applying these 10 Leadership Strategies and continuing to adapt to the changing landscape of what "good leadership" means during COVID-19. We will need to focus on clear communication and finding ways to add value while honoring ethics, transparency, and trust.