

What 2021 requires from leaders

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SmartBrief illustration

Leadership is critical in 2021 if we want our organizations to withstand the challenges of the pandemic that will continue well into the new year. We can't afford to hope things will get better – we have to make them better.

We do this by leading in three ways:

1. **Initiate:** Anticipate change and take advantage of the unique opportunities that exist in crises
2. **Invent:** Create new business models, products, solutions and even new approaches to operations and employee experience
3. **Inspire:** Motivate customers, employees and other stakeholders through purpose, vision and human connection

In this video, I explain how to make sure 2021 is indeed a happy new year.

To learn more from Denise Lee Yohn or to book her to speak to your organization, see her [website](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

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Transcript

Happy New Year! If you're like me, you're probably hoping that 2021 is going to be much better than last year. But we all know hope is not a strategy -- and as leaders, we must take action to make it a great year.

Taking action is actually the first way to lead our organizations this year. 2021 requires us to initiate. We can't wait around for things to get back to normal because most everything is going to be different. We have to get out of reactionary mode and be proactive about pursuing growth.

The [Harvard Business Review reports](#) that companies that made significant acquisitions during the Great Recession outperformed those that didn't. And consider how innovative companies such as Airbnb and successful new products like the iPod were launched in difficult times. Plus, as I've reported [previously](#), brands that shut down their advertising and marketing during a downturn take an average of five years to recover the market share they lost.

But organizations that forge ahead despite disruption -- or because of it -- leave behind those that retreat or stall. So, make sure you set aside some of your budget for bold business-building actions and double down on your innovation efforts.

That brings me to the second leadership requirement for 2021 -- invent. We need to make new products and services a priority because customers and their needs have changed dramatically. E-commerce is soaring, and [McKinsey research](#) shows around 80% of customers expect to continue the new shopping behaviors they adopted last year. So, consider new approaches to health and safety, privacy and convenience, regardless of the type of business you're in.

We also need to invent inside our organizations as well since flexibility will be critical for us and our employees. So, rethink your office location, design, amenities -- and even the need for an office in the first place. Deploy new technology and systems, develop different management and meeting practices, and design flexible work hours and processes to make our organizations safe, productive, and desirable to employees.

And we need to inspire. Once the novelty of the new year wears off, people will realize that life is still going to be very difficult for at least the next six months. As leaders, we need to motivate customers, employees, partners, investors -- everyone around us.

That means adopting and articulating a meaningful purpose for our organization and aligning our strategies and operations with it. Also, we need craft an optimistic vision of the future of our business and set realistic goals for everyone -- and then show how we plan to achieve them. We shouldn't get bogged down in operational changes and forget that we are people leading other people. And a human connection can be far more influential than any technology or program we implement.

This new year requires a different kind of leadership. Whether you are the head of your organization or a small team leader, you have the opportunity to initiate, invent and inspire - - and lead others to make 2021 the best year ever.