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Wouldn't it be nice if we all work up this morning and the Coronavirus pandemic was a big April Fool's joke? Unfortunately, it's not and won't go away soon. But it will go away.

In 1848 William Blackwood wrote in *Blackwood Edinburgh Magazine*,

"When an Eastern sage was desired by his sultan to inscribe on a ring the sentiment which, amidst the perpetual change of human affairs, was most descriptive of their real tendency, he engraved on it the words: -- "And this, too, shall pass away." It is impossible to imagine a thought more truly and universally applicable to human affairs than that expressed in these memorable words..."

We seem to need constant reminders of this timeless truth. As the long arc of history repeatedly shows, despair and helplessness make it harder -- if not impossible -- to overcome catastrophic events like this pandemic.

We need help to avoid what psychologist Steven Stosy has called, "headline stress disorder." This often stems from the Availability Heuristic; our tendency to estimate risk and probability by the most recent anecdotes, examples, and attention-grabbing news (especially when it's sensational and negative).

We are in a very serious emergency and **we all need to closely follow the advice of our healthcare experts to reduce the spread of this new virus.** And we need to find ways to guard against fear damaging our mental

and physical health. That feeds a vicious circle of pessimism and helplessness that reduces our action and makes the problem worse.

This issue reflects the balanced leadership approach we need in these tough times, providing an open environment for straight talk and planning for the worst infused with hope, optimism, and positive possibilities. As we're seeing many politicians do, leaders need to control their egos, let the data speak, and face reality. At the same time, we can't lose hope and let fear overwhelm us. As President Roosevelt said during his 1933 inauguration in the midst of The Great Depression, "So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is...fear itself -- nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

Harvard Business School's *Working Knowledge* published a thought provoking series of reflections from their professors and researchers on [How the Coronavirus Is Already Rewriting the Future of Business](#). This is a good time to reflect on what we can take forward from this big disruption. Here are a few leadership lessons that stand out:

- "...reminds us how our wellbeing is interconnected, and the flurry of heartwarming responses people have exhibited in the face of this crisis reveals our tremendous willingness and ability to help one another."
- "...hiding bad news is never a good idea. That will mean recommitting ourselves to mastering the leadership skills to tell the truth and to engage people in the hard work of creating solutions together."
- "...provides senior management a huge opportunity to develop a trust-based culture rapidly..."
- "...working remotely is very effective if you can also restructure the organizational processes for how communication happens, how socialization happens, and how coordination happens."
- "Companies with the strongest stakeholder and partner orientations are best able to survive and transcend crises, because they can plan together, gain local knowledge from each other, and draw on good will to get back to business quickly when the crisis abates."
- "Renewing and reinforcing good workplace practices can make a big difference to productivity as well as well-being. For example: abundant communication, cross-training, flexible work schedules, goal clarity, empowerment of people, and broad purpose."
- "We will realize we need far fewer face-to-face meetings than we thought."
- "By auditing your work responsibilities and project commitments, along with all the meetings, emails, and other tools you use to collaborate, you can become more focused and intentional about how you spend your time..."

Centuries of evolution have hard-wired us to notice what's wrong much more so than what's right. We all MUST follow the advice of our healthcare leaders and take this pandemic very seriously. But giving in to despair and helplessness is self-defeating and will only prolong the agony. Hope, optimism, and positive action is what's always led humanity through wars, depressions, countless disasters. We multiply our misery if we allow the pessimism plague to infect us as well.

Coronavirus Crisis: Reasons for Hope During These Dark Times



As Heather and I work from, and stay home, to be part of the solution, I found myself gorging on way too much negative news. As my sleep and mood deteriorated, I went looking for an antidote to the pessimism plague. I began a search for reasons to be optimistic. One of the first articles I came across was at Human Progress by Chelsea Follott. In [Technology and Cooperation Help Fight the Pandemic](#) Chelsea writes, "The threat from COVID-19 should be taken seriously, but there are reasons for rational optimism even during a pandemic."

Here's a brief summary of what's been helpful from that article and a variety of sources to zoom out and regain perspective:

- As of March 24, 81,171 of China's 1,500,000,000 (1.5 billion) people were infected by the virus (0.000054%). With their dramatic isolation actions, 3,277 died (0.00000218% of the population). Over 96% are now closed/recovered cases, with 66% of currently infected patients in mild condition.
- All 14 of the temporary hospitals in China have closed as parks, and tourist attractions are reopening.
- When Nobel Laureate, Michael Levitt, first analyzed Chinese infection rates, he tracked an increase of 30% per day in Hubei province. At that rate, the entire world would be infected in 90 days. On February 7, new infections dropped linearly and kept going. Based on this sharp change, he predicted all of China would improve in two weeks and stop in China by the end of March. Only 3% of Wuhan were infected. His analysis of the Diamond Princess showed with its optimal conditions for spreading the virus, only 20% were infected. He concludes most people are naturally immune.
- We have smartphones, internet connectedness, social media, diagnostic drive-through test stations, advanced computer forecasting, and online tracking maps to slow down the spread. Info about the virus is spreading faster than the virus.

- Research on a vaccine and treatment began within hours of the virus being identified. It took 48 years to create a poliovirus.
- The coronavirus genome was sequenced two days before the first death in Wuhan, China.
- We now have options like remote work, online courses, and virtual meetings that weren't as available during the SARS and H1N1 epidemics. This is facilitating very rapid and widespread [social distancing](#).
- Many companies have moved very quickly to work from home, closures, reduced hours, and other forms of reducing people-to-people transmission.
- Many jurisdictions around the world are declaring states of emergency, closing their borders, and restricting travel. This will ["flatten the curve"](#) and reduce the chances of overburdening our healthcare systems.
- Global banks are much stronger and less leveraged than in 2008. Stock markets should bounce back more quickly than the six years it took the Dow Jones Average from 2007 to 2013 to recover.
- Taiwanese research institute Academia Sinica, which has over 1,000 scientists, just announced it has isolated coronavirus antibodies. They've set up a Covid-19 platform to share information with and among research institutes to develop better testing kits, drugs, and a vaccine.
- A month after the outbreak started, 164 scientific papers were already available on PubMed with many more papers undergoing peer review. In 2003, it took over a year to achieve half this information with SARS.
- Antivirals and other drugs for malaria, AIDS, and MERS show early signs of hope in treating this new virus. More than 300 tests in China have shown success in these treatments with the coronavirus.
- New infection cases have dropped to zero in Hubei province (Wuhan is the capital) since March 19.
- As a result of their very high lockdown and social distancing measures, on March 24, South Korea had 97% closed cases, with 99% of the remaining cases considered mild.

Martin Seligman, director of Penn's Positive Psychology Center, offers a quick and straightforward way to refocus our mind during these turbulent times; [A simple exercise to help stay calm in the face of coronavirus uncertainty](#).

Don't be an "apocaholic" and give in to [fear](#). Face tough issues head-on. But do it with optimism and hope, not despair, disaster, and catastrophizing. As the old adage tells us, "tough times never last, but tough people do."

Sources and More Resources

[There are reasons to be optimistic regarding the coronavirus](#), Megan McArdle

The Washington Post

If you're tempted to panic right now, do remind yourself that Americans have a long history of being slow off the mark during a crisis -- and then pulling together to mount an overwhelming response.

[Coronavirus and a Case for Optimism](#), Brett Dalton and Bruce Yandle, *American Institute for Economic Research*

We are convinced that markets -- to the extent they are allowed to operate -- working together with high-speed communications technologies, will significantly reduce the harm that could befall us.

[Coronavirus: Five Reasons for Optimism](#), Adi Barak and Tamar Tunik, CTech by Calcalist

Compared to the 2008 crisis, the financial system is more stable; compared to SARS, medical technology is more advanced.

[Optimism grows that drugs from past outbreaks may treat coronavirus](#), Christine Dolan, *Just the News*
Drugs developed in the past to treat malaria, AIDS, and other respiratory syndromes are showing promise against coronavirus.

[Israeli Nobel Laureate: Coronavirus spread is slowing](#), *The Jerusalem Post*

Most people are naturally immune, and that since the infection rate in China is slowing down, "the end of the pandemic is near."

[Optimism in a Dark Time](#), John Horgan, *Scientific American*

The coronavirus pandemic might have positive consequences

[Part of the Coronavirus Conventional Wisdom Has Become Too Pessimistic](#), Josh Barro, *New Year Intelligencer*

The better we get at interventions to identify and isolate specific people with the virus, the less we should need to rely on interventions that isolate the entire population.

Constructive or Destructive: Is Feedback Stoking or Stifling Performance?



At our youngest daughter's sixth birthday party, a five-year-old boy hit Vanessa on the head. Asked to apologize, he politely refused: "Mr. Clemmer, I don't apologize unless I see teeth marks or blood."

Many managers don't realize the problems they're creating unless they see teeth marks or blood. The most insensitive managers are those who lack good feedback systems and refuse to seek input on how to improve their own performance.

Feedback is as critical to personal, team, and organization effectiveness as cake is to a six-year-old's birthday party. Without feedback, we're like kids playing a blindfolded game. It's so difficult -- and often hilarious -- because we stumble around wildly missing the target when we can't tell how we're doing.

In his new book, *Fit to Compete*, Harvard Business School professor, Michael Beer, declares that "honest conversations about your company's capabilities are the key to a winning strategy." He writes, "Many management failures -- including the many corporate scandals of the last twenty years and the concurrent growing mistrust of leaders and institutions -- are rooted in the inability of corporate leaders to learn the truth and respond effectively."

In a *New York Times* article, "[Give Compassionate Feedback While Still Being Constructive](#)," Arianna Huffington, writes, "Compassionate directness is about empowering employees to speak up, give feedback, disagree, and surface problems in real time." She points out, "**How** (her emphasis) feedback is delivered is one of the most vital -- and underappreciated -- indicators of a company's success. People are hungry for feedback that helps them grow and improve. According to a survey by Zenger/Folkman, a leadership development consultancy, 92 percent of people agreed that "negative feedback, if delivered appropriately, is effective at improving performance." Arianna is citing Jack and Joe's research paper, "[Your Employees Want the Negative Feedback You Hate to Give](#)," published by *Harvard Business Review*.

How are you doing?

Here's a quick self-assessment to give yourself feedback on your feedback:

- *Is silence sinking your team/organization?* Boeing's culture likely caused those tragic crashes. Complete our [short quiz](#) to see if you have a moose mess and follow a [few tips](#) to reduce your moose.
- *Are you fostering a team/organizational culture of courageous conversations?* You can take a [few key actions](#) to "reduce the moose" and surface barriers that need to be addressed.
- *Are you [me-deep in fooling yourself](#)?* Our work with 360 assessments consistently shows that the lowest rated leaders rate themselves much higher than everyone else does.
- *Would your manager, peers, and team members see you as a courageous leader regularly asking for feedback on your effectiveness?* Ignorance may be bliss, but it's [deadly to leadership effectiveness](#).
- *Are you paying a high cost for not dealing with a toxic employee?* Many leaders avoid giving corrective feedback because they don't know how. Following [a few key steps](#) can make a huge difference.
- *How constructive is your criticism?* It can quickly become destructive criticism when it's delivered by a leader with a low [negativity/positivity ratio](#).
- *Are you positively correcting negative behavior?* There are a few [vital coaching principals](#) that strengthen self-esteem and avoid what can feel like personal putdowns or attacks.
- *Do you listen to their views before giving feedback?* Managers rated as great listeners (often asking good, open-ended questions before giving feedback) were assessed as [four times more effective](#) than poor listeners.
- *Do you turn feedback into change?* Leaders who get the most benefit from their 360 feedback assessments pass through [three stages](#); Acceptance -> Prioritization -> Making Change Happen.

Don't wait to see blood or the aftermath of a moose mess. Make sure you're getting unfiltered feedback on how feedback is stimulating or stifling growth for you, your team, and your organization. How do you **KNOW?**

Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm on...Ego



In his recent *Globe & Mail* column, "The Benefit of Silencing Our Own Egos," Harvey Schachter writes,

"Columbia University psychologist Scott Barry Kaufman observes on the Scientific American blog that media debates he watches these days want to make his head explode: 'All our egos are just too damn loud.' And those out-of-control egos we witness in the media probably contribute to our own manner when leading."

"When a man is wrapped up in himself, he makes a pretty small package."

- **John Ruskin**

"This dumb ox will fill the whole world with his bellowing."

- **Albertus Magnus**

"None so empty, as those who are full of themselves."

- **Benjamin Whichcote**

"Fear seems to have many causes. Fear of loss, fear of failure, fear of being hurt, and so on, but ultimately all fear is the ego's fear of death, of annihilation. To the ego, death is always just around the corner. In this mind-identified state, fear of death affects every aspect of your life."

- **Eckhart Tolle**

"Egotism is the anesthetic that dulls the pain of stupidity."

- **Frank Leahy**

"Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all other countries because you were born in it."

- **George Bernard Shaw**

"Egotism: The art of seeing in yourself what others cannot see."

- **George Higgins**

"The ego is an important psychological structure that plays an important role in a human being's dealing with the world, but it is not ultimately who we are. In fact, the ego can create powerful blockades of pride, shame, and fear that prevent too many people from opening themselves up to love and healing."

- **Eben Alexander, *Living in a Mindful Universe: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Heart of Consciousness***

"Niles, I've got news for you. Copernicus called and you're not the center of the universe."

- **Frasier Crane, *Frasier***

"I have my faults, but being wrong isn't one of them."

- **Jimmy Hoffa**

"Level 5 Leaders look out the window to apportion credit to factors outside themselves when things go well (and if they cannot find a specific person or event to give credit to, they credit good luck). At the same time, they look in the mirror to apportion responsibility, never blaming bad luck when things go poorly.... The great irony is that the animus and personal ambition that often drive people to positions of power stand at odds with the humility required for Level 5 leadership."

- **Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't***

"But enough about me, let's talk about you. What do you think of me?"

- **Bette Midler**

Further Reading

- [Is There a Place for Ego in Effective Leadership?](#)
- [Charisma Confusion: It's Often a Weakness and Humility a Strength](#)
- [What's Your Me/We Ratio?](#)
- [Say What? Are the Best Leaders Listeners or Talkers?](#)
- [Hypocrisy and Egotism: Me-Deep in Fooling Myself](#)

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The items in each month's issue of *The Leader Letter* are first published in my weekly [blog](#) during the previous month.

If you read each blog post (or issue of *The Leader Letter*) as it's published over twelve months, you'll have read the equivalent of a leadership book. And you'll pick up a few practical leadership tips that help you use time more strategically and tame your E-Beast!

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Let's leverage our leadership strengths to work together and get through this challenging time.



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