

What good leaders do in a time of crisis

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As part of Saica's *Leadership in a time of crisis* webinar series, CA(SA) and CFO of Discovery Health, Brett Tromp, shared his thoughts on what good leaders can do in a time of crisis.



Brett Tromp

In good times, a leader's role is straightforward: keep your company afloat, your staff employed, and your customers satisfied. It's during a crisis that your role as a leader is really tested. With a successful track record as a CFO and over 15 years' experience in handling all aspects of financial management and managerial functions, Brett Tromp is perfectly positioned to share his thoughts on what good leaders can do in a time of crisis.

1. Find your why

"Many years ago, my coach gave me a book that would ultimately change my life," says Tromp. "That book was *Man's Search for Meaning*, by Holocaust and concentration camp survivor, Viktor Frankl."

Tromp goes on to explain that, according to Frankl, our primary motivation is our will to find meaning in life. "There's never, in our lifetime, been a more important time than now to figure out why we are here – to figure out what is your why."

For Tromp who loves to mentor people, it's very important for leaders to find and hang onto their why. "Your why is deeply intrinsic to you as a person," he explains. "Without a why, a purpose, difficult times become very confusing for people, and so your why becomes the guiding light as you move through these critical times. While the way we do things may change after this pandemic, our why is a constant, which is why it's so imperative we not only find our own why, but also help the people we lead to find theirs. This is probably the most important message I can give you," says Tromp.

2. Be sensitive

Now, more than ever, it is important to lead with tolerance, says Tromp. "People are scared and uncertain, and isolation leads them to behave in ways they wouldn't necessarily behave. Now is not the time to get angry or to criticise them."

Tromp advises putting yourself in other people's shoes and assessing what you would have done in the same situation. "Nobody is doing a perfect job, because perfect is impossible in the best of times and especially right now. I'm also not suggesting blind, naive leadership, but rather that you ask constructive questions, support your staff and be tolerant and patient."

Tromp advises growing a thicker skin, while simultaneously being more sensitive to what people are feeling and helping them through this uncertain time.

3. Communicate clear, reliable information

"The amount of fake news and data out there about coronavirus is terrifying, and from a healthcare perspective, it sometimes seems there is more fake news than real information," says Tromp. "It's your job, as a leader, to share only real

facts.”

For Tromp, part of being a leader is to wave through all the noise, and arm people with relevant information to help them make the right decisions and move forward. Tromp advises leaders to not just share something by passing it on. Leaders need to double check information before sharing it.

4. Help those in need

There is so much need at the moment, and wherever we look, people are struggling. “Whether it’s in the small business space, in informal settlements, or around the issue of food, there’s never been a better time for leaders to step up and rally their people to help others,” says Tromp.

This has been a unique time in our country where we’ve seen people across all races, ages and political parties, rally together to help South Africa’s people. “It feels very liberating,” says Tromp. “I really believe helping others brings out the best in a person.”

Tromp believes we have been given a unique opportunity to make South Africa a better place. “As leaders we have this opportunity and responsibility. It is time for those with more, to share and give away. A time to lead, to give, to take responsibility and to help others.”

For Tromp, while the pandemic is a terrifying and distressing situation, it is also exciting. “We have to come up with new, innovative ways to lead and help people. This is bigger than ourselves and we shouldn’t be fearful. Continue reminding yourself of your why and helping your team members find their why – then we will navigate this time together.”

He also suggests you ask yourself how you will be judged when this is over. “Look at our President. He will be remembered for his swift, clean, smart leadership, and for saving thousands, potentially hundreds of thousands of lives,” says Tromp. “What type of person, company, leader do you want to be seen as after this pandemic is over?”

Practical changes Discovery has made

Tromp shares three changes Discovery has made that show strong and compassionate leadership:

1. **Staff come first.** The most important issue for us, is to make sure our staff are taken care of. While 80% of our staff can work from home, we have ensured the other 20% are kept safe. We maintain safe distances at work, give free lunch to everyone who comes in, and arrange taxis so they don’t need to take public transport. Take care of your staff during this time and the rest will follow.
2. **Increased communication.** In the absence of physical presence, we are ensuring our communication is spot-on. Our local Executive Committee moved from weekly meetings to daily meetings. Most meaningful for me, is that every day at 2pm one of our staff does an internal webcast for the rest of the company. Adrian Gore did the first one, and we have alternated since then. The important thing for us is to be transparent, open and honest, and to keep everyone updated at all times.
3. **Staying relevant.** We are focusing on areas where we can be more relevant, where our business can really impact its members and the country.

To help address the challenges faced by many, Saica is hosting a complimentary virtual leadership series called Leadership in a time of crisis. This series focuses on various elements affecting individuals, businesses and the profession as a whole during the Covid-19 pandemic. Previous sessions in this series have been recorded and can be viewed on [Saica’s events page](#).

About Saica

The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (Saica), South Africa’s pre-eminent accountancy body, is widely

recognised as one of the world's leading accounting institutes. The Institute provides a wide range of support services to more than 50,000 members and associates who are chartered accountants [CAs(SA)], as well as associate general accountants (AGAs(SA)) and accounting technicians (ATs(SA)), who hold positions as CEOs, MDs, board directors, business owners, chief financial officers, auditors and leaders in every sphere of commerce and industry, and who play a significant role in the nation's highly dynamic business sector and economic development.

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