



Letters to Leaders

COVID-19: Acting Strategically in the Midst of a Crisis

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As a leader, one of the most important, but difficult things to do in the midst of crisis is to step back and create space to think and act strategically. This can change the efficacy of your immediate response and the trajectory of your organization in a post-crisis world.

Key considerations for acting strategically in the midst of crisis:

- **Conserving and restoring personal capacity as a leader is essential.** We are in the midst of a very long expedition and taking care of ourselves and one another now, will make it possible to reach our destination.
- **Caring for those who care for the patients and the community.** The most important strategic action we can take, particularly during crisis, is to maintain and build our team's capacity.
- **Thinking creatively while operating in a "box".** During times of crisis, we are by definition constrained. Organizations step away from Research & Development and our ability to innovate "in-place" is tested. We are compelled to make new things out of things that already exist to address urgent needs.

Conserving and restoring personal capacity as a leader is essential.

Our effectiveness as leaders and strategic thinkers is constrained by our personal limitations, which dramatically increase with both physical and emotional fatigue.

So, what behaviors do we need to enact to engage the strategic and innovative parts of our brain, as we address the monumental task ahead? Continuing with, or returning to, the behaviors and activities that allowed us to "re-charge" before COVID-19 is the first step. Self-care that positions us to be decisive in a crisis and thoughtful about the future requires us to be intentional about the behaviors we practice and the activities we prioritize. Engaging in self-care, even for just a few minutes a day, can make a tremendous difference in our degree of readiness to serve. Last week's [Letters to Leaders](#) offered some strategies. This week's edition is a call to execute our self-care plans.

Caring for those who care for patients and the community.

As leaders, we are responsible for protecting and expanding staff capacity, both as individuals, and within the context of their jobs as front line caregivers. This is especially true during the current public health crisis. It is our role as leaders to anticipate the needs of our staff and solve problems preemptively. It is also our responsibility to engage our staff, listen, address their concerns, and remove barriers. We are responsible for soliciting feedback and managing course corrections.

To be effective and properly care for our staff we must engage in continuous assessment and communications activities, both within our organization and across the U.S. health system. By way of example, a West Coast health system with 51 hospitals, [Providence](#), developed a tool to continuously assess their situation and anticipate future hot-spots, allowing them to direct resources, including PPE, to the sites with greatest need.



Front Line Focus

Today we salute front line leaders across the country, by recognizing our friends and colleagues at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Particularly fitting for this edition of Letters to Leaders, is the team's amazing work, putting innovation and patient care literally side-by-side. Check out one of the ways that [Brigham is changing COVID-19 testing](#) to promote detection and protect staff.

Thinking creatively while operating in a "box".

Well managed organizations have high performing [incident command centers](#) focused on communicating, coordinating resources and staffing, and quickly addressing urgent priorities. Despite the proficiency of these centers, we all end up operating in a "box" during active response. By definition, a crisis strips away the luxury of time, and requires us to solve seemingly intractable problems with the resources we have immediately available.

To solve these problems, great leaders seek to make the "box" larger and increase the possibilities. They often forge new partnerships, including engaging in both cross-industry and cross-sector collaborations to immediately secure the expertise and resources that they need to support their staff and patients. While crisis magnifies day-to-day challenges, draining staff and resources, great leaders counter despair by acting strategically, essentially innovating with the resources that they have on hand, extending their resources through collaboration, considering asset reconfigurations, and engaging in active experimentation.

- Consider the case of **Northwell Health**, an organization that acted strategically during crisis to [convert BiPAP machines into ventilators for hospitalized COVID-19 patients](#).
- Several medical schools, including the **Columbia College of Physicians & Surgeons**, are [graduating students early to address staffing shortages](#).
- To provide accurate information about COVID-19, **Yale New Haven** established a [call center](#) staffed by previously employed professionals, now "re-enlisted" to help.
- **Marin Health**, and other progressive systems have leveraged [telemedicine and virtual care models to protect staff from COVID-19](#).

What is your organization doing to act strategically during crisis? What innovations are you deploying that may carry positive changes into the post-COVID-19 future?

Share your solutions with us on social media (@lucaniapartners) and we'll help spread the word to other organizations that may benefit from your expertise during these challenging times.

Thank you and best wishes,

Lindsey Greene-Upshaw

About Letters to Leaders

In the weeks ahead, Letters to Leaders, written by our leaders at Fund Love and Lucania Partners, will highlight the frontline leaders who are showing us the way during this challenging period and also provide some perspective on a variety of topics. We do this from a place of good fortune, gratitude, and humility, recognizing that these are unprecedented times, and with the hope that you will share the topics that you feel are most relevant or are of most concern; we'd be pleased to offer our views.