

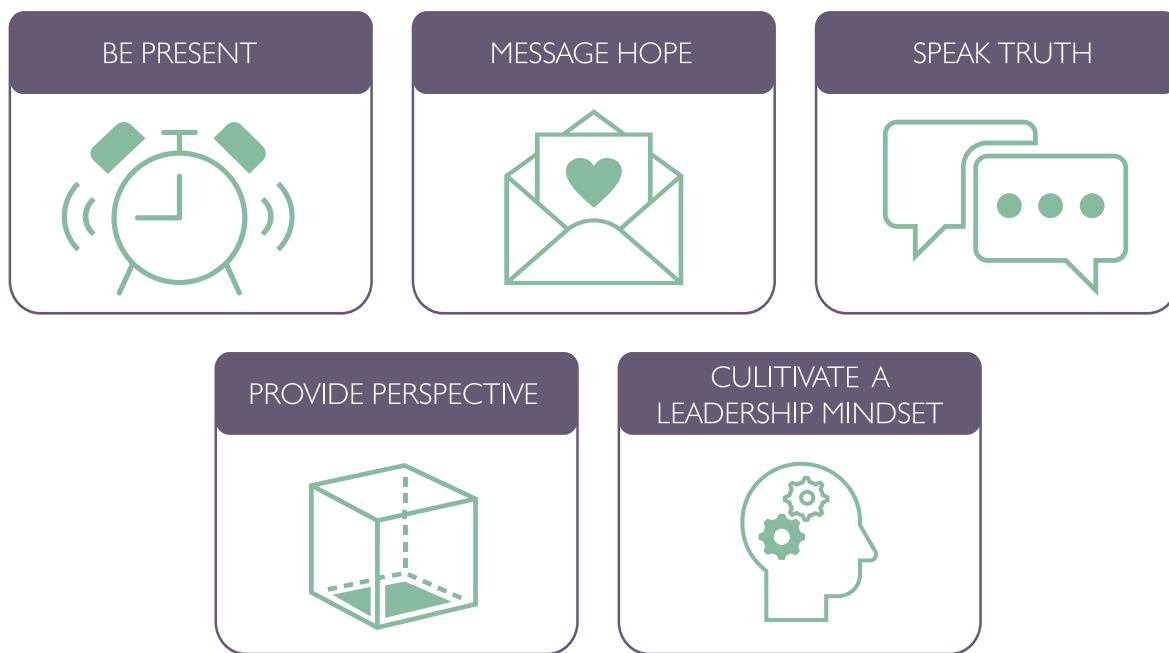


## RESOURCE GUIDE

# The Five Core Practices of Trusted Leaders

The events of 2020 have forever changed the world of work and life. What has not changed is the need for great leadership.

Clients, employees, service providers, and suppliers are all facing unprecedented changes and challenges. For those who want to be true trusted advisors, the opportunity to demonstrate leadership, deepen trust, and cultivate followership requires not just mastering excellence in the technical skills to do great work as a leader. It also requires demonstrating excellence in five key elements to be a great leader. Those wishing to be impactful and steward influence to help their organizations, clients, and key stakeholders navigate through the turbulence will manage their intention and attention in order to:



# BE PRESENT

In times of uncertainty, it can feel challenging to keep clients and other key connections warm. If you are like many of our coaching clients, you may find yourself waiting to hear that assistance is necessary or welcome before making contact in order to avoid being a burden to already stressed connections. And, as in-person events continue to be put on hold, it can seem like the possibilities to stay organically connected to others are minimized until life and business as usual resumes.

However, business “as usual” may be on pause for much longer than we want, and this is exactly the time for trusted advisors to lean in, step up, and lead. The key is finding new, authentic ways to stay connected, with an intention to listen for and solve another person’s most important problems, even when there is no immediate business need.

What does this mean practically? First, recognize that the richest, most fruitful communication requires dialogue, so email should not be the only way you are connecting. You might need to email first to set the stage for a call, but do not rely solely on email as your primary channel to communicate. If your default is to hit send as your main method of contact, consider doing the following:

- Every time you think of pushing send, consider picking up the phone and calling instead.
- Use the time from meetings that get canceled or rescheduled as an opportunity to call one person to ask how they are doing.

- Pick a regular day and time to connect with one additional person. Perhaps first thing Monday morning; the five minutes at the end of your work day; or over lunch on Fridays.
- Recognize that it's okay to leave a voicemail or even talk briefly just to express a desire to schedule a longer catch up at a mutually convenient time. Either way – hearing your voice helps you rise above the clutter of emails that are currently clogging almost every client's inbox.

Prior to talking, identify a few potential ways you can be helpful given what you anticipate might matter. In the case of COVID-19, are there firm resources that could be relevant to the type of business your contact is in? Is there an upcoming virtual event that might be of interest to your contact? Do you have another person in your network that you might suggest an introduction to given your contact's business or personal interests?

However, the most important thing you can do is ask good questions and listen deeply. When you discover something that is a priority or concern, recognize that you have a multitude of ways in which you can help. If you offer that assistance, people will value your outreach even more.



# MESSAGE HOPE



A second element of being a great leader is the ability to instill hope in ways that help others feel calmer, more optimistic, and resilient. At present, there is no shortage of things to remind us that we are living in an exponentially volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. And, this is precisely why our connections need us to step up, lean in, and stand out as courageous leaders. But, how can we offer hope to others when we ourselves may not be feeling particularly hopeful? Here are three things research shows can help:

- Look to heroes – Take a quick moment to identify and think about people you consider heroic in times of great need, such as the first responders during 9/11 or the medical professionals that continue to show up to treat patients today despite the great risk to their own health and safety. Researchers have a name for the high we get from witnessing human goodness: moral elevation. And moral elevation has been shown to have many positive benefits, including inspiring optimism, making people want to be better, and encouraging people to act more altruistically. The good news for leaders is it tends to spread to others—when we witness one person acting in ways that inspire moral elevation, others want to follow suit.
- Stay calm and maintain your focus – As leaders, we need to recognize our own need to regulate emotion so we can respond in constructive and helpful ways to external circumstances. Research has shown that the ability to adjust emotions by using rational thinking can be learned and practiced, in particular with mindfulness practices, including meditation, breathing, and exercise.

- Look outside yourself – Research suggests that when we recognize our common humanity and show compassion, we are more likely to pull together and solve even the most complex issues. Start by practicing compassion on yourself and recognizing that we all have moments of fear and doubt and we all make mistakes. You will not be perfect or impenetrable to the swirl of chaos surrounding you, but you can recognize and remember that how we support and bolster ourselves by supporting and bolstering each other is critical and can give you the peace of mind to comfort others.

Finally, seek inspiration from other leaders who can strengthen your own sense of perspective, calm, and confidence. Here are a few examples that may lift you up when you need your own shot of inspiration:

*“You may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing that we call ‘failure’ is not the falling down, but the staying down.” – Mary Pickford*

*“Hope is the pillar that holds up the world.” – Pliny the Elder*

*“Bran thought about it. ‘Can a man still be brave if he’s afraid?’ ‘That is the only time a man can be brave,’ his father told him.” – George R.R. Martin, A Game of Thrones*

*“Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim.” – Nora Ephron*

*“Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one’s courage.” – Anais Nin*



# SPEAK TRUTH



While giving others a reason to remain positive is essential, great leaders must also keep themselves and others firmly planted in reality, enabling teams to make informed, sober, and wise decisions. In a time of crisis, a leader's challenge is to strike a balance between not sugarcoating their message while simultaneously role modeling optimism and resilience. See [this](#) and [this](#) for additional suggestions on how to strike this balance.

There are three elements to keep in mind as you seek to speak the truth with team members, clients, and other stakeholders. Also see this great [Harvard Business Review](#) article for some additional best practices.

1. **Create honesty without alarm** by keeping to the facts and avoiding emotionally charged or vague language. Specifically, words to avoid include: always, never, nothing, impossible, collapsing, everything, devastated, huge, immeasurable, and deadly.

Instead of saying, "The firm is being extra cautious and planning for the possibility of a huge decline in revenue in the next twelve months," consider replacing that forecast with factual data. "In the first 90 days of impact, we have experienced a 15% decline in hours across our firm. We do not know the exact length or depth to which clients will continue to pause work, but we are being prudent in how we are stewarding our resources and are focused on five specific actions we are taking now."

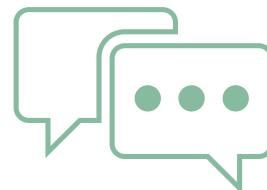
The factual data grounds people in accurate information about the degree of impact thus far and what specifically they can expect from leadership.

2. **Use the "yes, and" technique** to neutralize the negative. With its roots in improv comedy, the "yes, and" technique suggests that we accept what has already been stated and then build on that line of thinking. In the current circumstances, the "yes, and" technique acknowledges the challenges of the current circumstances and helps communicate additional information so that others can focus on what matters most or what needs to happen next.

Put in practice, the "yes, and" technique might sound like, "We know that the next several months will require both prudence and quick action, and there are three things we are asking employees to help us do to be good stewards for our firm and clients."

3. Finally, **recognize that in the absence of information, people will "MSU" (make stuff up)**, so share what you know and be honest about what you don't know. "Right now, we don't have a clear sense of how long this will last. The estimates we are forecasting last anywhere from two weeks to five months. Therefore, we will be updating our clients and employees every week on how we are working and what new resources we are employing, and we'll have a hotline open 24/7 for questions and immediate needs."

As a leader in a time of crisis, frequent, short, and supportive outreach is key to helping others stay calm and confident. Be sure to stay present and hopeful as you seek to speak the truth to those you are leading.



# PROVIDE PERSPECTIVE



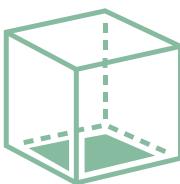
A fourth element of leadership and communication is providing perspective. Perspective gives people a sense that they are not alone, these circumstances aren't personal, and this situation isn't permanent – three tenets that help people embrace [resiliency](#).

Here are two ways in which you can help provide perspective for others.

1. Ground people in what past experience shows us. As an example, one law firm partner realized that this is the 10-year anniversary of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, a devastating environmental disaster through which she had counseled many of her environmental and energy clients. She realized that there were several lessons learned from that experience to draw upon in the present COVID-19 circumstances, not the least of which is that companies, circumstances, and marketplaces eventually recover and rebound if they take the right steps to embrace what comes next.
2. A second way to provide perspective is to keep clients informed about what we see across other professional segments, whether by practice, geography, industry, or types of business. Feedback from buyers of legal services since COVID hit has revealed three ways in which clients want perspective from legal counsel in the midst of today's challenges:

- Process improvement measures – what can be automated, what can be outsourced, and what can be streamlined
- Budgeting approaches – what new staffing mixes and new fee structures are others using to better align costs with revenue and cash flow forecasts
- Capacity re-alignment ideas – how are others shifting responsibility and focus of their teams, how are they retooling or retraining, and how can they most efficiently create the right mix of internal and external experts to respond to the next wave of needs

Finally, as you providing perspective, it may first require that you reflect on your own perspective and leadership mindset to determine which game you want to play, which brings us to the final practice of being a great leader.



# CULTIVATE A LEADERSHIP MINDSET

As leaders, we can operate from two different mindsets: playing not to lose, or playing to win.

PLAYING TO WIN	PLAYING NOT TO LOSE
Playing full out	Playing it safe
Taking risks	CYA
Creating and building	Protecting
Openness	Defensiveness
Abundance	Scarcity
Living into the future	Living from the past
Joy of the game	Fear of the game
Going as far as you can	Holding onto what you have

The instinct when we are risk averse – as lawyers are often required to be - is to move into a place of scarcity, which means we play it safe. Rather than call, we email; rather than go above and beyond to demonstrate care, we forward firm alerts with a cursory general message. But what our clients and colleagues need right now more than ever is human connection, a message of hope that we will get them through this difficult time, practical knowledge, perspective, and opportunities to create plans of action to move forward. This requires a growth mindset focused on creating the conditions for new opportunities to emerge while cultivating confidence that there are enough resources, team members and ideas to create new possibilities.

There is no doubt that choosing an abundance or growth mindset can be hard – particularly for those who have spent years in a profession designed to spot potential flaws, risks, and pitfalls. And that, in turn, can also make us feel less than confident

to step into the unknown. If you find yourself in a moment of doubt or self-consciousness, remember that confidence is not the absence of fear, but it is the willingness to embrace three elements that allow us to move forward anyway:

- **Competence:** the recognition that you possess or have access to the skills, knowledge, and resources to serve others well.
- **Courage:** the recognition that you can take action even when you experience the emotion of fear.
- **Conviction:** the recognition that the world is missing out on something if you chose not to act.

So, consider what or who ends up better off, more resourced, or simply encouraged because you choose to act proactively in the face of your fear and with the capabilities available to you. Recognizing this often gives us confidence to move forward with a mindset of abundance and a willingness to play to win.

Ultimately, this is an opportunity to out-behave the competition. Remember that how we show up for others now – how we seek to serve others well – not only creates better interactions today, but it will lay the foundation for who is positioned to capture work, opportunity, and loyalty as the new normal emerges. For you personally, this is also an opportunity to not only demonstrate the skills of a leader, but just as importantly, the character of someone that others will willingly follow.

Written by Alycia Sutor, Managing Director,  
[asutor@growthplay.com](mailto:asutor@growthplay.com)

