



"YOUR FIRST AND
FOREMOST JOB AS A
LEADER IS TO TAKE CHARGE
OF YOUR OWN ENERGY AND
THEN HELP ORCHESTRATE
THE ENERGY OF THOSE
AROUND YOU".

Peter Drucker

First Aid for Leaders: Lessons in Leadership

written by Karen van Geelen

This is the third in a series of articles that explores the challenges and successes experienced by public sector leaders as they lead through crisis and pivot their teams to new ways of working.

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I love a good superhero movie! But whether they are born of myth or imagination, superheroes as we know them are a work of fiction. They are blessed with supernatural or superhuman strength, and a healthy dose of invincibility. Sadly, we are not, and yet so many of in leadership roles feel it's their job to be the superhero that it's incumbent upon them to have all the answers, and to carry the emotional burden of the team.

I recently interviewed several senior leaders from different areas across the public sector about their experiences in leading their teams through the COVID-19 pandemic. People I spoke with all expressed desire to be a leader who sets the strategic direction and cultural tone of their organisations, and then develops, guides and mentors to enable their teams to work to their best potential.

But...there is no rule book for leading in a team through a pandemic.

Prioritising Self Care

As the crisis escalated, these leaders instinctively recognised the importance of prioritising wellbeing and their response was to supercharge their leadership styles to ensure staff were fully supported and knew they were valued. To a large extent, they felt they had exceeded, but the journey had not been without its challenges.

This advice aligns closely with the approach taken by another senior leader who was responsible leading an operational team through the crisis and needed to onboard five new staff at the same time the lockdown commenced. This presented significant leadership challenges in a workplace characterised by highly technical operational work that required a lot of new knowledge on systems and procedures. Not the least of those challenges was having to stand up the new team in a virtual environment and ensure systems were in place to enable relationships and connections to form so the team developed an inclusive culture.

Talk to yourself like you would someone you love.

Brene Brown

For this leader, the lessons taken from this experience were about how to lead staff in a disconnected environment. From the perspective of self, they recognised they needed to find ways to restructure feelings and change their mindset to find enjoyment in their work, despite the challenging circumstances. Their approach was to create a vision for how they were going to present as a leader through this period and then develop a concrete set of strategies to follow. They found having pictures of their children nearby gave positive reinforcement. Just the short mental break provided by glancing at the photographs helped to refocus and enabled them to find enjoyment in workplace. They found that once they had shifted from the old way of thinking they were able to relax into the mobility of the remote working arrangements and to begin taking advantage of it.

Practising Self Care

Superheros may excel at single-handedly fighting crime and saving the world, but have you ever noticed the trail of destruction they leave behind them? As a leader, your team looks to you to role model behaviours and set the emotional tone of the team. Emotional contagion^[1] can be simply described as a process where we can catch another person's emotion. Leaders who don't exercise good self-care are more likely to role model less desirable behaviours and transmit a negative emotional state. However, with a few strategies leaders can maintain their own emotional state and role model positive behaviours to those they lead. **Below are five simple tips for prioritising self-care.**

While deceptively simple, these strategies will assist you to develop habits that will build resilience so you can be the leader you aspire to be. Good superheros make great icons, good leaders make great role models.

Contact us if you want more information

If you would like to learn more about resilience and wellbeing the team at Interaction have extensive expertise in leadership development, wellbeing, facilitation, coaching and consulting. Contact us on us on 02 6282 9111 or email icg@interactionconsulting.com.au or visit www.interactionconsulting.com.au



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[1] Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J., & Rapson, R. (1994). Emotional Contagion. Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction. CAMBRIDGE UNIV PR.

5 TIPS FOR PRIORITISING SELF-CARE

You will thank yourself after

PRACTICE SELF-AWARENESS

- Pay attention to how you are feeling and try to identify what has contributed to you feeling this way
- Manage your emotional reactions
- Seek feedback from others
- Consider others' points of view

SET BOUNDARIES

- Protect your emotional space
- Communicate clearly and with intent
- Don't be afraid to say 'no'
- Don't chase perfection

MAINTAIN A SCHEDULE

- Identify what times of the day you have the most energy and schedule your high energy and low energy work accordingly
- Let people know when you are, and are not available
- Schedule time for responding to emails and messages
- Work regular hours and when working remotely resist the temptation to work longer hours

TAKE TIME OUT TO RECOVER

- Take a microbreak or minibreak
- Maintain a healthy sleep, diet and exercise regimen
- Practice mindfulness exercises
- Practice gratitude

DON'T BE A SUPERHERO

- Ask for help
- Involve your team in decision making
- Delegate
- Share your vulnerability