Effectively leading through COVID-19: Leader Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help leaders develop the mindset and behaviours to navigate uncertainty, and manage themselves and their teams to deliver business outcomes. It contains a series of top tips and resources on how to effectively lead through COVID-19.

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As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, the role of a leader has never been more important. This toolkit provides top tips and resources to help leaders develop the mindset and behaviours to navigate uncertainty, choose the most effective response to lead a team and to look ahead to the future, so we can all come out stronger on the other side.

How to use this toolkit

Every leader experiences unprecedented challenges to personal and working conditions in their own way. This toolkit contains some resources that will help you connect with what you might need.

Think about what might help you most from the topics included and revisit the toolkit for more guidance and inspiration as and when you need it.

How to navigate around the toolkit

- Click the green link icon to jump to the relevant page or resource
- Click on the underlined text to jump to the appropriate page
- Click on the home icon to return to the summary page
Plan for how you and your team can build capabilities now that will enable you to thrive in the future.

Prepare
Get the basics right first

Take the time to set yourself up to be as effective as possible. That includes your mindset, environment and wellbeing. Help your team to do the same. Time spent getting things right now will ensure that the new habits being formed are as positive as possible.

Connect
Support and be supported

Adopt a people-first response. In times of uncertainty and concern, it’s not only about what leaders do but equally how they do it that matters. How you respond to the needs of your team during these challenging times will be moments that matter and how you rally your team will be key.

Lead
Re-focus, re-evaluate, re-engage

To navigate the speed and scale of change in such uncertain times requires an agile leader. Continually evaluate the effectiveness of plans and pivot when faced with change. Prioritise what adds value and experiment to find ways to constantly improve.

Thrive
Build capability for a bright future

Lead with positivity combined with realism. Be prepared, rational and confident. There is disruption now but there will also be recovery. How we lead in a time of crisis can inform our long-term impact on what becomes the ‘new normal’.

Click on the four-step process below to help you manage the critical stages of leading in times of crisis…

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Key topics

As and when you need to access key topics, you can use the quick links below for top tips and key resources

**Mindset**
- Put your own oxygen mask on first
- Resilience & positivity
- Looking after your physical wellbeing
- Looking after your mental wellbeing
- Building empathy
- Agile mindset: test and learn

**Knowledge**
- Get all the information you need
- Technology
- Working from home
- Communicating through COVID-19
- Prepare for the unexpected

**Skills**
- Build your capability to lead through the crisis
- Leading through change
- Building trust and productive relationships
- Virtual coaching
- Virtual collaboration
- Developing others

**Ongoing development**
- Looking up and out
- Knowledge & resources
- Expert insights
- Peer to peer learning

COVID-19 Leader Toolkit 2020
1. Make a commitment to maintaining your physical and mental wellbeing

2. Reflect on times when you have been resilient, what helped you to bounce back?

3. When working from home create a space to work that is as free from distractions as possible

4. Get up to date with the technologies that support remote working

5. Set boundaries for yourself (Eg. establish a daily routine with consistent start times to your day, dress for work, take structured breaks away from the computer)

6. Set boundaries with others (Eg. resist distractions from colleagues and at home)

7. Make use of your ‘usual commuting time’ for development (Eg. read, exercise or listen to a podcast)

8. Set realistic goals each day and make them visible - write them down and tick them off

9. Connect with your team, set up a similar plan to ensure they start off with positive habits

Key Resources

- 5 ways to lead through crisis
- Rapid response checklist
- 7 time management mistakes
- Coronavirus: How to “be the calm in the chaos”
- Tips for working from home

Further Resources

- How to be your best self in times of crisis
- Making time to reflect

Self-evaluation

- How productive are you?
Connect: Support and be supported

Top Tips

1 Increase connection through multiple touchpoints. Don’t over-rely on email - pick up the phone and have regular meetings.

2 Go on video during meetings.

3 Agree with your team how and when you will stay in touch and which technology platforms you will use, including ‘watercooler’ time to catch up socially.

4 Be flexible, allow team members to get work done at different times than they normally would when working from home.

5 Practice compassion and kindness, lead with empathy and show you care.

6 Create psychological safety for the team.

7 Discuss your expectations with your team.

8 Schedule virtual coffee breaks with colleagues.

9 Share and celebrate personal and team successes.

10 Empower your team, showing trust and allowing diversity of thought is critical when leading in times of change.

Key Resources

- Practical workforce strategies that put your people first
- How to run effective virtual meetings
- How leaders can provide assurance during COVID-19 podcast
- Using digital tools effectively
- How to fuel a positive culture for remote workers
- Inclusive leadership fluidbook

Further Resources

- Connected, but alone?
- How co-workers are staying connected while working from home
- How to create psychological safety
- Managing virtual teams fluidbook
### Top Tips

1. **Put your people first** - focus on workforce protection & demonstrate empathy
2. **Reinforce your purpose** - empower your teams to make decisions aligned to your purpose
3. **Communicate regularly** - be open with your team, customers and other stakeholders
4. **Scenario plan** - plan for the evolving situation by reviewing plans and thinking beyond the immediate crisis
5. **Set the pace** - take time to pause and assess to avoid burn-out for you and your team. Build in time for physical and mental wellbeing
6. **Don’t stop delegating** - now is the time to empower your team
7. **Be bold and make decisions** - don’t wait to have all the information but remember to pause, assess and act on the information
8. **Leverage the opportunities** - adjustments to working practices, such as the adoption of new tools to aid collaboration can be beneficial to maintain even after the crisis has passed
9. **Identify what you have learned** - developing yourself and others will be useful in future crises

### Key Resources

- A blueprint for working remotely: lessons from China
- Leadership in a crisis: Responding to the coronavirus outbreak and future challenges
- When leadership matters most
- Resources to lead effectively amid COVID-19

### Further Resources

- Duke Corporate Education Leadership series  
  A series of talks exploring challenges and solutions to navigate a world of exponential change and complexity.

### Self-evaluation

- How good is your decision making?
Determine the scale and pace of action required after the initial crisis stage. Review your team strategy in line with organisational priorities.

Resilience in the face of challenges. A broader resilience plan is vital for you and your team. Part of this will be to build a vision of a positive future of how your team can contribute.

Reassess your business systems and plan for contingent actions in order to return to productivity at pace and at scale.

Reimagine the future. A crisis of this scale will create a shift in the preferences and expectations of individuals and businesses. These will impact how we live, how we work, and how we use technology. Leaders and businesses that reinvent themselves to cater to evolving preferences will succeed.

Reform through learning. The crisis will provide an opportunity to learn from a wide range of social innovations and experiments, such as working from home, virtual collaboration and distance learning. Understand the successes and failures of such experiments, look for the changes that if permanently adopted could improve ways of working long term.

Reflect and share your experience and learnings widely across your networks. Plan how to maximise and utilise the new skills that you and your team have developed.

**Key Resources**
- Anticipate new strategy requirements beyond the immediate crisis
- Beyond Coronavirus: The path to the next normal
- Strategic decision making fluidbook
- Building business agility fluidbook

**Further Resources**
- How to lead like the great conductors

**Self-evaluation**
- Are you a positive or negative thinker?
Put your own oxygen mask on first

- Resilience & positivity
- Looking after your physical wellbeing
- Looking after your mental wellbeing
- Building empathy
- Agile mindset: test and learn
## Top Tips

1. Look after your physical wellbeing as this helps manage stress
2. Practice thought awareness. Don’t let negative thoughts derail your efforts
3. Learn from your challenges and setbacks, practice an agile approach
4. Choose your response: we all experience bad days in times of crisis. We have a choice in how we respond
5. Maintain a balanced perspective, focus on the positives as well as the challenges
6. Set SMART, effective personal goals
7. Build your self-confidence: Be confident that you will succeed despite setbacks
8. Develop strong relationships with your colleagues. Treating people with compassion and empathy is very important in times of crisis
9. Focus on being flexible. Things change, carefully-made plans may need to be amended or scrapped

## Key Resources

- Managing conflicting priorities
- Positive thinking, thought awareness and rational thinking
- Building resilience fluidbook
- Reorganising priorities in changing times
- Empowerment and delegation

## Further Resources

- 20 tips on how to prioritise work and meet deadlines
- Be a flexible leader
- 21st century resilience
- 8 Ways to manage team overload

## Self-evaluation

- How resilient are you?
Looking after your physical wellbeing

Top Tips

Physical wellbeing and mental wellbeing are linked. Doing a little in each area is key.

Nutrition:
1. Cook healthy meals – cooking can also become a hobby or area of interest.
2. Ramp up your immune system – take vitamins, eat vitamin dense foods, get outside for vitamin D (in line with local guidance).
3. Drink water – aim for 8 glasses or 2 litres a day.

Movement:
1. Get some exercise - Eg. workouts, gardening, dancing, walking, just move your body!
2. Stand up - at least once per hour
3. Make sure your work space is appropriate – follow ergonomic experts’ advice

Recovery:
1. Sleep - aim to get 7-9 hours of sleep each night
2. Take regular breaks - schedule time for lunch and breaks each day
3. Take time-off – disconnect completely to recharge

Apps to look after your physical wellbeing
Join Virgin Pulse Challenge
How we take care of ourselves
Improving your physical wellbeing at work
Physical relaxation techniques
Check yourself for signs of burnout

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Looking after your mental wellbeing

Top Tips

Mindset:
1. Find what inspires you – music, reading, gardening, crafting, whatever gives you joy!
2. Practice gratitude – recognise one good thing that happened today
3. Practice mindfulness/meditation – and limit the amount of news you consume

Social Contact:
1. Keep in touch and connect – with friends, family, colleagues each day
2. Ask for help – reach out and ask for support, ignoring stress doesn’t make it go away
3. Help others – doing good for others makes you feel good too!

Key Resources

- Apps that look after your mental wellbeing
- The Science of Wellbeing (free class through Yale University)
- Managing your relationship with stress
- What is resilience and why is it important?

Further Resources

- Mental health fluidbook
- Ways to stay social while in isolation
- Supporting colleagues to stay mentally healthy
Building empathy

Top Tips

1. Remember that empathy is not agreeing or disagreeing with someone - it is understanding their thoughts and feelings through connecting.

2. Get in the habit of asking more questions than you usually would - coaching skills will help with this.

3. Use active listening skills to really focus on what people are telling you.

4. Use the technique: repeat, paraphrase, reflect.

5. Always validate other peoples’ emotions – if they weren’t valid, they wouldn’t be experiencing them.

6. Practice empathetic acknowledgement: showing someone that you are aware of and understand their emotions, without judging, pitying or advising.

7. Avoid making assumptions or drawing your own conclusions about how people feel.

8. Share how you are feeling as well, without making it all about you.

Key Resources

- Why empathy is a critical skill
- Developing the skills to understand people
- Emotional intelligence fluidbook
- Working in an emotionally demanding role
- Go beyond active listening

Further Resources

- Compassion and the true meaning of empathy
- Habits that will increase your empathy

Self-evaluation

- How good are your listening skills?
**Top Tips**

1. Focus on improving how you do what you do every day
2. With support, actively seek out new experiences and challenges, with the aim or making sense of them and learning from them
3. Apply critical thinking – look for patterns and make connections and help develop your team to have an inquisitive mindset
4. Look for different ways of approaching familiar problems
5. Be curious
6. Try out new approaches and experiment with new ideas, make sure you are inclusively listening to all of the ideas in your team
7. Look for “stretch assignments”, where the probability of success isn’t a given
8. Build resilience to acknowledge failures and capture the lessons learned from them
9. Seek out feedback and focus on how you can do things better

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**Key Resources**

- Flexibility & agility animation
- Building business agility fluidbook
- Key elements of an agile mindset?
- Flexibility in the workplace
- Becoming an agile organisation

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**Further Resources**

- Understanding the agile mindset
- What is the agile mindset?
- Why growth mindset matters for organisational agility
Knowledge

Get all the information you need

- Technology
- Working from home
- Communicating through COVID-19
- Prepare for the unexpected
Top Tips

1. Reduce additional load on your home broadband (Eg. Netflix streaming) to maximise your connection to work

2. Ensure you are still working securely when out of the office, always lock your device and keep apps and software up to date

3. Performing a ‘regular restart’ of your computer is something we all need to be doing to ensure we benefit from updates of improved performance and features, security and protection for our computers from vulnerabilities

4. Connect using VPN whenever accessing via a public WIFI network

5. Report suspicious emails / SMS / phone calls using your company’s IT security process

6. Use tools like Microsoft Teams to connect and collaborate with your team and colleagues

7. Remember to check your workflow apps (HR, Finance etc) for approvals

8. Check for company updates and stay connected through your usual IT communication channels

Key Resources

- Getting started with Microsoft Teams
- Microsoft Teams platform walkthrough
- Working remotely FAQ
- Getting started with Zoom
- Using digital tools effectively

Further Resources

- Microsoft Teams Community
- Zoom Support
Top Tips

1. Maintain your usual morning routine to put yourself in the right frame of mind.
2. If possible, find a dedicated space for working. A spot with minimal distractions and comfortable seating is best. Make sure you utilise technology to work efficiently.
3. If possible, structure your day the same way you would in the office. If you devote your mornings to project work and use the afternoons for meetings, do that at home.
4. Build breaks into your work - they are key for mental wellbeing.
5. Don’t forget two of the most important factors in your productivity when transitioning to remote work - your physical wellbeing and mental wellbeing.
6. Create a virtual collaboration contract. What were your norms and how might they change now that you’re working from home?
7. Increase virtual touchpoints but decrease the length of these meetings. Communicating is key.
8. Maintain the social connections you’ve built with your teammates. Use video calls for impromptu discussions whenever possible.
9. Know your goals. Along with short-term, task-related goals, make sure that you’re also clear about the wider career goals and purpose you’re striving to achieve. Keeping these in mind will motivate you to do your best work.

Key Resources

- Running effective virtual meetings
- Balancing working from home with family responsibilities
- The future of remote working
- COVID-19 remote work toolkit
- Using digital tools effectively

Further Resources

- Virtual team building ideas
- Working from home with kids
- New to remote working?
Communicating through COVID-19

Top Tips

With many governments recommending or even enforcing self-insolation, many employees will now be working from home. As a leader, the way in which you deliver communications and engage with your team may therefore have changed. Here are some top tips to help you effectively communicate with your team through this uncertain time:

1. Be in the know on COVID-19. To effectively support and answer questions from your team, keep up to date with the global and local guidance for wherever you have team members. Familiarise yourself with the latest guidance on the World Health Organization website, local government guidance for wherever you have team members and your company’s own guidance.

2. Get to grips with video conferencing tools like Microsoft (MS) Teams or Zoom* and use social collaboration tools you have available, like Workplace for on-going engagement with colleagues – now is the time to increase your digital presence.

3. Stay connected and show you care. To stay connected and visible with your team while working remotely, follow these simple steps:
   - At least once a week connect with your team, as a group and on a 1:1 basis, to provide an opportunity for questions and discussions.
   - In all virtual meetings, go on video and encourage team members to do the same.
   - Have social interactions with team members too and check in on their well-being and mental health.

*use your in-house video conferencing and social collaboration tools

Further Resources

- Communications fluidbook

Key Resources

- Support your people, sustain your organisation
- Actions for strong leadership during a pandemic podcast
- The leader’s guide to managing COVID-19 panic
Prepare for the unexpected

Top Tips

1. **Expect the unexpected:** be alert to changes in your team. Increasing connection will help you recognise issues early and address things before they become overwhelming.

2. **Don’t panic:** your ability to stay calm is instrumental to your success in managing the unexpected. Take a deep breath and spend a moment evaluating the situation and thinking about what you need to do next. To be in the best position to remain calm, make sure to actively work on your mental wellbeing.

3. **Prepare solutions in advance:** it is not possible to plan for every worst-case scenario, but try to have a strategy for dealing with things that are most likely to happen.

4. **Use your critical thinking skills:** take a systematic approach to solving both small complications and significant crises.

5. **Keep a list of resources at your fingertips:** when situations arise, and you need outside help to resolve them, know where you can go for help.

Key Resources

- Guidance from the World Health Organization
- Responding to team members in distress
- Giving bad news

Further Resources

- Getting the best from solitary team members
- Don’t let frustration get the better of you
Skills

Build your capability to lead through the crisis

- Leading through change
- Building trust and productive relationships
- Virtual coaching
- Virtual collaboration
- Developing others
Leading through change

Top Tips

1. Change is complex and can at times be very disruptive for people.
2. Build trust to help manage change effectively.
3. You are able to encourage and influence teams to change how they perform their roles, in order for change to land successfully and embed and sustain over time.
4. You have a critical role in how people experience change. Great coaching from you can help your team embrace the change. Use the reflection workshop guide.
5. Take time to understand the changes being introduced and what this means for the people in your team.
6. Involve your team in helping you to understand what the changes mean for them – no doubt they’ll come up with some things you won’t have considered. Using a facilitation guide can be helpful when discussing change.
7. Familiarise yourself with the Agile approach. This will feel very different as solutions will develop over time – making it more challenging to fully understand change impacts for your team.
8. Take time to surface resistance and use multiple approaches – team meetings, 1:1 discussions, smaller groups. You can use the virtual coaching to do this.
9. Keep reviewing how the changes are impacting your team and how they are responding. Try using this learn & reflect exercise.
10. During any change it’s critical that the people most impacted feel engaged and informed, effective communication is critical.

Key Resources

- Leading change toolkit: help people land and embed change in your team
- Change curve animation

Further Resources

- Leading Change: Dialogue and reflection workshop guide
- Learn & reflect exercise: Understand my change journey and build resilience
- Making sense of the complex world together: Facilitation guide
- Leading through change fluidbook

Self-evaluation

- How good are your change management skills?
### Building trust and productive relationships

#### Top Tips

1. Remember that trust can be destroyed very quickly, and once broken is difficult to rebuild.
2. Trust builds trust; so if you want people to trust you, first show that you trust them.
3. Keep your word about the little things as well as the big things. Communication can be key in this.
4. Be consistent in what you say, what you do, and how you present yourself online.
5. Set and follow through on performance expectations and accountabilities.
6. Clearly state any implied accountabilities to avoid misunderstanding.
7. Discuss and air differences before they start to fester and impact on productivity.
8. Show support for people, even when they make mistakes. Demonstrate empathy and understanding.
9. Be honest and fair when giving feedback.
10. Coaching can help people work through problems and can lead to improvements in the working relationship.

#### Key Resources

- Building trust
- Building great work relationships - making work enjoyable and productive
- Psychological safety first: building trust among teams

#### Further Resources

- How to build (and rebuild) trust
- What we don't understand about trust
- The 13 behaviours of high-trust leaders

#### Self-evaluation

- How approachable are you?
Virtual coaching

Top Tips

1. Establish trust and a personal connection
2. Keep your questions focused and concise
3. Allow time for thinking and reflection, don’t be tempted to fill every silence
4. Develop peer coaching skills within your team to build capacity in others by developing your team
5. Use a range of media and technology for formal and informal coaching; it is possible to coach in two minutes over instant messenger
6. Don’t dictate the medium; be empathetic and let people choose the method they prefer
7. Minimise distractions and do not multi-task during a coaching session
8. Have a clear structure and manage the time closely
9. Use ‘nudges’ to reinforce desired behaviours; for example sharing recommended articles, videos and podcasts

Key Resources

- Coaching infographic
- Push/pull continuum animation
- Coaching fluidbook
- I need to become better at coaching - Thrive in Five

Further Resources

- Want to get great at something? Get a coach
- The virtues of virtual coaching
- Six skills for virtual group coaching

Self-evaluation

- How good are your coaching skills?
Virtual collaboration

Top Tips

With the need to work as virtual teams, we need to take extra care to treat one another as human beings with emotions and feelings, and to respect and celebrate diversity of thoughts/preference.

1 Slow Down to Speed Up - take the time to set expectations, to focus, to create processes on how the team will interact, and to put the appropriate tools in place. Review by asking: Do we need some new agreements or to adjust some existing ones? Use the collaboration contract

2 Respect time zone differences: Rotate the role of early riser on a weekly or monthly basis

3 Put extra time and extra planning effort to host virtual meetings, ensure everyone has a voice, promote mental/emotional connection with one another. Create psychological safety by building trust and encourage team members to speak up. Use the facilitation guide

4 Maximise opportunity to express non-verbal cues: turn on video, explicitly check-in on the sentiment of the participants. Communication is key

5 Make people feel like they are physically together: invite people to share where they are, what do they see outside the window. Talking about physical spaces creates “togetherness”

6 Choose from a range of collaboration technologies to keep the virtual team connected. Consider both live and asynchronous collaboration tools. Eg. keep a chat room open for team members to hang out anytime

7 Make feedback more frequent and less formal. Set expectation with the team that it is something you all deliberately practice. Consider meetings with a celebration section on both work and personal milestones

Key Resources

- 7 Habits to virtual collaboration – Workplace post
- Collaboration contract
- Making sense of the complex world together: Facilitation guide
- Stakeholder mapping
- Meeting design

Further Resources

- How to run a great virtual meeting
- How to be a virtual meeting hero
- An alternative way to approach and design how people work together

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Top Tips

1. Include regular development discussions during your 1:1s
2. Take time to understand what motivates each individual and what their aspirations are
3. It is important to build trust so they can share their recent learnings
4. Share and celebrate successes
5. Provide regular feedback
6. Consider using a coaching style to help them find their own solutions
7. Actively seek learning opportunities for your team in everyday situations. Consider an agile, test and learn approach
8. Encourage team members to define an action plan for development and discuss progresses regularly
9. Consider using the 70/20/10 model as a guiding principle while discussing development opportunities

Key Resources

- Motivate employees to reskill for the digital age
- How to mentor someone who doesn’t know what their career goals should be
- 3 ways to improve performance management conversations
- Mentoring Matters: three essential elements of success
- What good feedback looks like

Further Resources

- The 70/20/10 model

Self-evaluation

- How well do you develop your people?
Ongoing Development

Looking up and out

- Knowledge & resources
- Expert Insights
- Peer to peer learning
## Ongoing development

### Knowledge & resources
Many learning consultancies offer open source learning resources providing access to information on leadership development.

### Expert insights
Many corporate education providers record live webinars and offer access for individuals to watch recordings free.

### Peer to peer learning
Social media can provide a great way to connect with leaders, share experiences and discuss learnings.

### Reflection
**Take time to reflect on your leadership experience during this unprecedented period:**
- Capture personal and pivotal leadership moments to review in the future.
- Ask yourself what have been key learning insights from this experience?
- What three leadership steps are you going to take as you step into the future?

This document was originally produced for AstraZeneca employees and has been repurposed so that all leaders can use and benefit from it during these challenging times. Thank you to our learning partners hemsley fraser and MindTools for generously offering their resources contained within the toolkit free to access for everyone.

COVID-19 Leader Toolkit 2020