

Charting a Bold Path Through Uncertainty: A Leader's Guide to Success



“Wait and watch” may allow your business to survive in uncertain times. But these bold leadership strategies will help your business lean into volatility and disruption – and truly thrive.



In this eBook, you'll learn:

- Why leaders need to play both defense and offense in uncertain times,
- How to boost corporate resilience through economic and social upheaval,
- Which strategies successful leaders use to lead in uncertainty and how to deploy them,
- Who can help you build a thriving business even in tough times.

Coaching Both Lines: Defense and Offense in Leadership

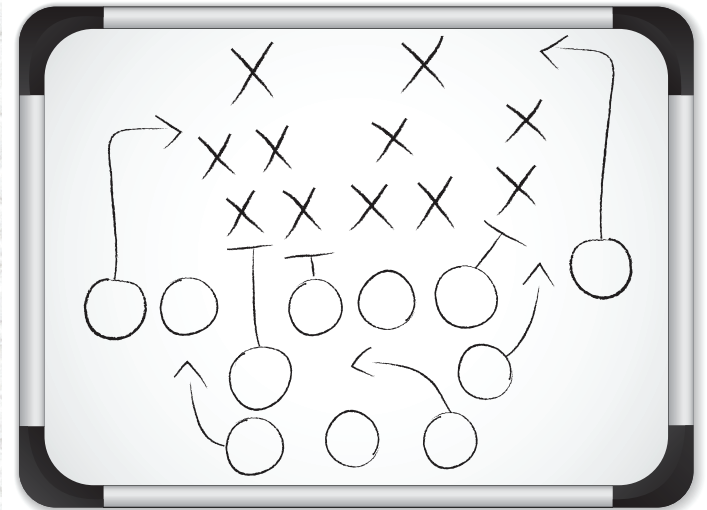
Knowledge is an unending adventure at the edge of uncertainty.

- Jacob Bronowski

In times of uncertainty, two types of leaders emerge. One type plays defense, concentrating on current threats and shoring up business reserves of both money and talent. The other type also conserves resources but also embraces uncertainty as opening new doors to new risks.

The first type of leader often brings a business through a recession or other crisis intact but diminished. The second type is equally likely to survive a crisis - but far more likely to thrive on the other side of the downturn.

Defense-only postures create companies that perform perpetually in the middle of the pack. Leaders that combine defense and offense build companies that rise above the crowd both during and after hard times.



How a 360-Degree View Boosts Corporate Resilience

Business is all about risk taking and managing uncertainties and turbulence. - Gautam Adani

Leaders that play both offense and defense during times of uncertainty:

- Pull their companies ahead of the competition by seizing opportunities.
- Position their companies for strong growth, taking advantage of early improvements in the situation.
- Plan ahead more effectively, because they listen to reports and rumors about the specific shape uncertainty may take next.
- Prepare for the long term by building more resilient teams, more effective budgeting and management procedures, and more flexible processes.

These leaders balance living in the moment of crisis with building toward a future of growth and achievement. They, and their teams, demonstrate more resilience as a result.



Thriving Through Uncertainty: Key Strategies

The only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty; not knowing what comes next.

- Ursula K. Le Guin

Leaders who successfully forged a path through uncertain, volatile times share several common habits. These leaders:

- Embrace uncertainty
- Resist the urge to perfect things
- Peer intently into the foggy futures
- Manage expectations with communication and clarity
- Practice radical transparency with their teams, and
- Know when to seek support.

Here's how today's leaders can exercise these same traits for better leadership in tough times.



Embrace Uncertainty



The power of the lawyer is in the uncertainty of the law.

- Jeremy Bentham

Many professionals become used to being a source of answers. The teams you lead look to you for answers. Your experience often positions you to provide answers quickly. You begin to see your success as tied to your ability to provide the right answer.

When being the answer source becomes part of your professional identity, uncertainty can feel like a threat. Yet uncertainty is a normal part of life - and those who can embrace it give themselves more chances to learn and grow.

As figure skating legend Dick Button once noted, a skater who has stopped falling has stopped improving - because that skater has stopped embracing uncertainty. Be willing to fling yourself into uncertainty, so you and your team can continue to grow.

Resist Perfectionism

I spent a lot of years trying to outrun or outsmart vulnerability by making things certain and definite, black and white, good and bad. My inability to lean into the discomfort of vulnerability limited the fullness of those important experiences that are wrought with uncertainty: Love, belonging, trust, joy, and creativity to name a few. - Brene Brown

Perfection is an excellent aspiration but a poor requirement. While the vision should always be of the ideal, “good enough” is all you need for most day-to-day tasks.

Many leaders are high achievers, which often comes with a drive to perfectionism. To build a healthier relationship with your drive to achieve:

Examine the role of mistakes in your own career. What did you learn? Can you appreciate mistakes, even if you would have preferred something else?

Be honest about failure. Talk to leaders you respect about their experiences with failure. Be willing to share your own stories with those you lead.

Look for the opportunity in every crisis. When in doubt, turn to nature, which is always turning defeat and death into life and hope. Every rotting tree stump is home to thousands of new forms of life.

As you gain perspective on perfectionism, you'll find it easier to accept that mistakes and failure are not only normal, but necessary.

Sharpen Your Vision



If you aren't in the moment, you are either looking forward to uncertainty, or back to pain and regret. - Jim Carrey

Many people use words like “complicated” and “complex,” or “simple” and “easy,” interchangeably. Doing so, however, elides important differences between these concepts - which can in turn prevent leaders and their teams from peering into the fog of uncertainty and spotting potential opportunities.

For example:

- Complicated problems are highly technical in nature and tough to understand. Setting competitive compensation based on market factors can be complicated.
- Complex problems have many interdependent elements. Year-to-year staff needs depend on the interrelationship among business performance, team performance, and the global economic climate.
- Easy solutions are frictionless to implement. It's easy to ignore signs of upheaval and continue business as

usual, pretending as if nothing will disrupt your progress.

- Simple solutions address maximum problems with minimum steps. Working with a staffing partner can simplify efforts to find and keep the right talent within budget.

Not all complex problems are complicated, and vice versa. Similarly, simple solutions are not always easy. By clarifying these viewpoints, leaders can help their teams better understand both the challenges ahead and the available solutions.

Regulate Expectations

If there's one thing that's certain in business, it's uncertainty.

- Stephen Covey

Fear thrives in the fertile soil of uncertainty. Part of managing fear is to provide an honest view of both opportunities and challenges.

Successful leaders align their teams' expectations with reality. They do not allow unchecked optimism to lead to mistakes or disappointment. Nor do they become harbingers of doomsday.



Rather, the best leaders focus on the middle ground. What challenges do we face as an organization? What strengths and resources do we have? Where do we need to improve? A frank discussion of strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats can inspire your team to develop innovative approaches to uncertainty.

Practice Radical Transparency

Human spirit is the ability to face the uncertainty of the future with curiosity and optimism. It is the belief that problems can be solved, differences resolved. It is a type of confidence. And it is fragile. It can be blackened by fear and superstition. - Bernard Beckett



Radical transparency is the practice of making as much business information as possible available to everyone in the organization.

In practice, most of your team members won't read most of what is available to them under a radical transparency policy. When teams have new ideas or face new challenges, however, they will have access to the information they need to help the organization. Radical transparency empowers your teams to do their best work - even in a crisis.

Support from the Greats:

Real-Life Lessons from Leaders

Perhaps the most difficult type of uncertainty to lead through is that of war. Here are lessons from leaders who successfully navigated their countries and their people through humanity's darkest hours.

Courage is not the absence of fear. It is going forward with the face of fear. - Abraham Lincoln

Continuous effort, not strength or intelligence, is the key to unlocking our potential.

- Winston Churchill

Take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly, and try another. But by all means, try something.

- Franklin D. Roosevelt

Perseverance and spirit have done wonders in all ages.

- George Washington

Build Your Team: How a Staffing Partner Can Help

The best way to predict your future is to create it. - Abraham Lincoln

Facing the need to maintain skilled teams while controlling costs during an economic downturn? A staffing partner can be your best ally during tough times.

Your staffing partner can help you:

- Access the skilled talent you need when you need it,
- Control staffing costs and manage your budget,
- Capitalize on new opportunities that arise,
- Build a resilient internal culture that can weather uncertainty.

