

Waldron Leadership Series

9 Elements to Assure Your Leadership Brand Resonates in Crisis

written by

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Our leadership brand is most tested in times of uncertainty and crisis.

How we react, what we say, and the actions we take to motivate and mobilize others are critical in the legacy we are creating.

As leaders, we project leadership and, thus, are perceived as leading in a certain way—commonly referred to as our “Leadership Brand.” Leadership brand is deliberate and an extension of and complement to the values to which we ascribe. When combined with our organizations’ values, which hopefully are closely aligned, the aggregate effect is to reflect an organization’s leadership culture.



aspire to project, and we bring that style to bear in our work every day. If we are effective, our colleagues and stakeholders perceive our leadership brand positively and, aligned with our brand aspirations. However, when we're under stress is when being our best selves is most challenged. And it's at these times when our "strengths" can help us or become a detriment to our leadership brand.

Whatever the brand we've developed, it has been informed by and operates in an organizational and leadership context, the leadership culture in which we have evolved, and that we are responsible for upholding to be effective. We must remain deliberate in applying our Leadership Brand, while also being acutely aware of the changing context and being agile in its application.

Leadership Brand in Service

An effective leadership brand is crucial to our own, our team's, our peers', and our organizations' success. It inspires confidence and brings out the best in our colleagues in good and challenging times. Our job is to apply our unique leadership brand and inspire high-performing, motivated followership.

To date, most of us have developed our leadership brand for a face-to-face world. We meet directly, person-to-person, bringing our leadership brand to bear and that of our organizations to drive agendas forward. Whether through travel or office interactions, many of us have believed that being physically present with our teams, peers, and colleagues in general, is essential to projecting our and the organization's leadership. If we meet with clients, customers, vendors, and partners, we typically exhibit our leadership presence—the essence of our leadership brand.



How you evolve in leading a remote workforce today will likely become best practice for your organization later on.

Applying New Channels During Crises

So, what happens now in a world that has suddenly gone to a remote work posture?

How do we continue to develop and show our leadership and our desired leadership brand?

How do we maintain the appropriate degree of presence when we can't use the tried and true face-to-face means we've relied upon for so long?

How do we effectively help our people and stakeholders retain the confidence in us, the organization, and the stability of employment?

How do we continue to bring out the best in people so that they work with aligned purpose, confidence, and productivity?

We begin by leaning on our humility and humanity. By exhibiting vulnerability, empathy, and compassion. By connecting our head with our heart as we navigate the uncertainty in front of us. We draw upon the many elements that make up our leadership brand to guide us along the way. The nine outlined below provide a baseline as to where to begin.

1

Retain Presence.

Your leadership presence is needed, probably now more than ever. Find ways to effectively connect at a deep and personal level with the various tools available. Be as deliberate about how you choose to project presence as you would in the face-to-face environment, though adjust it for remote participation. Recognize that under these challenging conditions, there will be unavoidable interruptions. Animals, kids, and technology glitches will happen. Try to anticipate what might go wrong and then be forgiving of others (and yourself) when they do. It's much easier to be present and productive when we know we don't have to be perfect.

2

Engage Proactively.

Help alleviate the emerging sense of isolation and disconnection by reaching out and checking in at an individual level—above and beyond the regular business video meetings and conference calls. Let your managers, their direct reports, other stakeholders, peers, and your higher-ups know you are engaged and thinking of them. Such contact not only creates connection but solidifies the leadership brand you are trying to uphold.

3

Be Transparent.

You will not have all the answers, nor are you expected to. However, communicating early and often are reasonable expectations others will have of you. Amid the pandemic crisis, people are off-balance, adjusting to a new environment, feeling uncertain as to their and the organization's future. Tell them what's going on; be as open and honest as possible. By doing so, you will engender trust, project stability, and convey a sense of confidence, thereby upholding your leadership brand and that of the organization.

4

Continue Investing.

Don't stop your commitment to individual growth, organizational development, and team effectiveness. During times of uncertainty, it's incredibly important to take consistent actions to mentor and develop your leaders and teams. By doing so, you provide reassurance not only to them personally, but also regarding the organization's future, and convey that you and the organization, remain committed to them and their careers.

5

Stay United.

Increase your commitment to your people. Put together a specific plan on how you intend to keep your teams close and effectively working together, then execute on it. Their mutual support and connection are critical not only to the organization's success but also to their sense of belonging and purpose.

6

Foster Creativity.

Innovation inevitably emerges out of crises, and it often comes from whom we least expect. Encourage your people to use this uncertain time to innovate and seize the opportunities that emerge. Set specific time aside to engage teams in thinking creatively together, challenging them to take innovative approaches to challenges and strategy. Such encouragement and action will foster a sense of connection, contribution, and teamwork in preparing your organization for the future.

In a recent conversation with a CEO-client currently faced with revolutionary and complex organizational challenges related to COVID-19's impacts, we discussed making use of this disruption to accelerate needed change. Leading with strength, their team is intentionally applying some of their attention to strategic and structural decisions that will make the organization even better, more resilient, and competitive in the post-COVID environment.

7

Understand Power.

Remember, you're the boss, and people will feel the need to act; the weight of your actions directly reflects on your leadership brand. Your position of power may leave people feeling they must be "on" and available at all hours. It's your job to encourage them to assert healthy boundaries around working hours, self-care, and having personal lives. Let them know that you don't expect them to be attentive to, much less respond to, that 10:00 PM email you just sent.

8

Demonstrate Empathy.

Everyone's situation is unique. Some of your team may be dealing with illness within their family or struggling with other personal matters, like a spouse or family member losing their job. Recognize a business-as-usual approach may not be well-suited to the current reality. Practice the use of active listening skills, be empathetic, and show support.

9

Model Accountability.

The best way to hold your teams accountable is to model it yourself. Stay vigilant over relevant KPIs. Avoid sacrificing the tools and measures you rely on to keep the organization healthy and able to continue to employ your people.

Above all else, take care of yourself. You can only be an effective leader to others if you have invested in keeping yourself healthy and grounded each day. There is a lot expected of leaders now, more than ever before. Just remember, you are human too. How you show up, and the actions you take are a direct reflection of your leadership brand and that of your organization.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:



Mike Humphries is President & CEO of Waldron, a Seattle-headquartered, multi-market Leadership Development, Board Governance Consulting and Career Management Firm. **Waldron is the partner strategic leaders choose when their brands are on the line.** The Firm helps attract, engage, inspire, support and develop effective leaders and Boards. Mike actively coaches select senior executives, counsels and facilitates boards on governance effectiveness, succession, board and CEO performance. Pursuant to Waldron's Social Good mission and B-Corp impact, Mike actively supports many organizations with missions aligned with social justice, housing, health, poverty alleviation, development, conservation, the environment, and education.



Kim Bohr is COO and Head of the Effective Organizations practice at Waldron. In her role, Kim focuses on working with Waldron's exceptional leadership, consulting, coaching, and project management teams, as well as its staff members across all offices. Kim's professional mission is to make organizations better from the inside out by helping leaders create alignment between people, processes, and an organization's guiding principles. Kim is a published author, speaker, and entrepreneur. In support of her passion for transformational learning, Kim is an adjunct faculty member at Seattle University, where she teaches MBA and undergraduate courses on business strategy, operations, and leadership. Also active in the community, Kim leverages her extensive professional experience in humanitarian work and volunteering, including serving as a national Board member of Susan G. Komen.



ABOUT WALDRON

Waldron believes in empowering organizations and individuals to realize their full potential.

For over 35 years, Waldron has helped high performing executives and organizations lead the process of change, individual and organization transformation, giving Waldron specialized insight into the complexity involved in adapting to rapidly changing business environments. Viewed as a trusted advisor, we partner deeply with our clients. We are committed to providing truthful insights delivered discreetly, in a clear and concise manner. Our highly tailored engagements move individuals and organizations to achieve desired results and outcomes.

Waldron is an equity owner of Career Partners International (CPI). It is through the Waldron CPI group and its 360 offices worldwide that we are able to serve our multi-region and multi-national clients with-consistently-delivered, differentiated and highly personalized support services for client organizations' career transition/outplacement, executive coaching and leadership development needs.

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