



# Leadership Insights

during the COVID-19 Outbreak



## Leadership Landscape

In April, we surveyed our community of leaders, representing the public, private and social sectors. 50 leaders were eager to share with us their own challenges and digital opportunities during this uncertain time. 58% of respondents were employed full-time, 24% were self-employed, 6% employed part-time, 6% retired, 4% were volunteers, and 2% were students.

### Top 3 Challenges

**1**

**FUTURE PLANNING**

Maintaining work goals

**2**

**FINANCIAL**

Funding

**3**

**CONNECTION**

Personal interactions



**D. Lena Hickman-Miott**  
COO, Miottech

*"Clarity is better than certainty."*



**Laurie Sudbrink**  
Founder, Unlimited Coaching Solutions

*"When the going gets tough, the tough get their GRIT (Generosity, Respect, Integrity, and Truth) together!"*



**Greg Johnson**  
CEO, Global Parenting Network

*"During these stressful times, a nurturing mindset is key."*

## Nearly 40% of leaders cited difficulty working in an uncertain environment, as it relates to their work goals and future planning.

Business owners are finding it difficult to confidently plan steps to reopen their shuttered organizations; linear thinkers are anxious dealing with the ambiguity of the situation; employees are challenged to maintain previously agreed upon goals; and events have been cancelled, without viable dates for rescheduling in sight.

Funding and financial challenges accounted for 18% of responses. *“The financial crisis caused by the pandemic adds another layer of strategic planning, fiscal management and tough decision making to protect and advance those you lead,”* one respondent noted. The decline in active clients; uncertainty about how consumer purchasing will be changed; annual fundraising events indefinitely postponed; and vendors who acknowledge that their customers are financially strapped, all account for financial worries.

The third top challenge cited (16%) in this survey was the lack of personal connection resulting from the pandemic. Leaders are finding it hard to keep up with diverse issues without informal contact throughout the day; maintain the number of non-productive meetings in balance with the need to stay connected personally; and reach people through the crowded social media landscape.

These challenges were followed by the challenge of staff stability, safety and security (11%).

## Evolving Professional Roles

**Overwhelmingly, leaders shared that their professional roles have taken on a new, deeply supportive dimension.**

Being a support system for team members, communicating more clearly, showing appreciation and listening were routinely cited when respondents were asked how their professional roles have changed.

**“I have moved from Chief Executive Officer to Chief Encouragement Officer.”**

*“I have found it important to express clear thoughts, appreciation and support to all,”* one respondent noted. *“My role now is more of a supportive listener and sympathizer,”* stated another.

One respondent shared that anxiety is the highest they’ve seen in 40 years in business. *“I devote more time than ever to managing our team's psychological wellbeing.”*

Leaders have also had to rethink where they add value. And for some, that’s meant becoming more concise in their communication and staying on top of industry developments. Collaboration was cited frequently in this evolving landscape. Leaders are seeking partnerships and expert insight to help fill leadership gaps.

## Opportunities

20% of respondents cited renewed energy, and a focus and motivation to think, read, study and learn new things.

15% noted the professionalism, dedication, and resilience of their staff and colleagues during this time and 10% noted that they were pleased with the work output of their teams.

*"I'm amazed at how much work can get done,"* and *"very productive outputs,"* were frequently cited comments in the survey.

Several respondents noted the environmental benefits related to the shelter in place orders.

*"We are starting to think about after we return to the office, what will the new normal be?"*

Many leaders surveyed are considering re-thinking workplace policies, with an emphasis on decentralization, capitalizing on technology and supporting a remote workforce in the future.

## Moving Forward

Leaders are hungry for shared knowledge, keeping connected with others, and building community.

Survey respondents expressed the desire for diverse viewpoints and insights from leaders who have innovative ideas. *"A fresh look is essential,"* one respondent wrote.

Nearly 70% of respondents contributed their own leadership insight to share with fellow leaders. Since May, the Hesselbein Forum has highlighted these pieces of wisdom in our daily Leadership Tip of the Day e-newsletter.

*"Never has there been a better time to pay attention to the whole person,"* wrote one respondent, a sentiment echoed by many others.



**Christie Andrus-Nakano**

Founder, Human Factor Leadership

*"EmPATHetic leaders clear the road, making space on the path for others to unleash their talents."*



**Tom Deierlein**

CEO, Thundercat Technology

*"Revisit your personal and organizational values to use as a guide for your decision making."*



**Tania Ceron**

Student, University of Antioquia, Colombia

*"We must not just go back to normal. Let us be more environmentally aware, build with others better ways to live, and strive toward equitable societies."*