

# How to Be Leaderly in Utter Uncertainty

(and what behaviors to focus on in  
this current coronavirus situation)

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# How to Be Leaderly in Utter Uncertainty

(and what behaviors to focus on in this current coronavirus situation)

by Sue Bethanis, CEO, Mariposa Leadership, Inc., [sueb@mariposaleadership.com](mailto:sueb@mariposaleadership.com)  
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Like you, I have been flooded the last three days with news and emails about coronavirus precautions. To allay my own anxiety, I spent much of this last weekend reading, and today, I am writing because I want to help reduce anxiety and be practical about how we can act as leaders of our organizations. As a leadership coach, it follows that I am focusing on leadership behaviors.

We have an obligation to protect and care for those we work with. It's on us, and we can't rely on politicians. There are potentially two pandemics here – wide-spread COVID-19 and wide-spread panic. Whether either becomes a pandemic in the U.S. depends a lot on the actions we take.

What are our primary goals as leaders in this situation?

1. **Plan for uncertainty**
2. **Overcommunicate with empathy and clarity**
3. **Model diligent healthy behaviors to limit spread**

## Planning for uncertainty

First, **planning for uncertainty** means planning for the worst-case scenario. If you have not developed a **revised** travel policy, remote working policy, and sick/leave policy, it's time to do so now. I also suggest sharing your plans and learnings with colleagues in other organizations. Coinbase, for example, has open-sourced their plans. Check out how HR leaders and Coinbase are on top of this [here](#) and how a seven-point plan from McKinsey covers business practices [here](#).

Frankly, I think developing these policies is the easy part; it is tedious, but you can borrow from and benchmark with others on this. The harder part is putting these policies into action and having to make decisions in the moment when you don't have all the information you need. How do you plan for that? This is the time to uplevel your flexibility skills and mindfulness. Planning for uncertainty also means expecting the unexpected and priming yourself for surprises. Go into your day thinking that there **will** be something that happens that you have never dealt with before. This will help you be calmer in a crisis because the surprise doesn't cause as much of a stress (fight-or-flight) response in you. **Your calmness will help others be calm** and will lead to less anxiety and overall panic.

This is also the time to **re-engage in a meditation/breathing practice** if you have let it slip lately. Doing even 5-10 minutes of meditation to start your day will help you through the rest of your day.

## Overcommunicating with empathy and clarity

Second, practice **overcommunicating with empathy and clarity**. Here are some examples:

- **Set up regular communication practices** via all channels to get the word out about revised policies and ongoing revisions. It's important that employees get into the habit of checking @all for the latest info.



- If someone wants to stay home because they are sick, potentially sick, or has been in contact with someone sick, grant it without hesitation. But don't stop there: have a conversation with them and **go out of your way to ask about your team members' concerns** and what support they need. These simple words can go a long way to quell fear and anxiety. That's your job always, but it's especially your job now: support, support, support.
- On the other side of that situation is this: a sick employee or co-worker who insists on coming into work because they have an important meeting with clients/customers or internal colleagues. Gently insist they don't come in, and work through who else can cover for them. Further, if there has ever been a time to **have back up to the backups**, now is the time. Look at your team, chat with your team, and think about the importance of supporting each other. Who can back up whom? What does each member of your team need to get up to speed on to be able to cover for each other?
- No doubt we are going to be doing more video conferencing because many employees will be working from home. Be sure to **communicate regularly about how working from home can be potentially isolating for you/your team**. Give peeps a chance to voice their concerns about this and ways to overcome this.

*(Please see a handy printable infographic below for a list of "overcommunicating" practices.)*

## Model diligent healthy behaviors to limit spread

Third, it's vital as leaders that we **model healthy behaviors** with diligence! This will limit the spread of the virus. Based on what I have read in the last three days, this is a good list for leaders to model:

- Wash your hands for at least 15-20 seconds, including the top of hands and in between fingers. Good idea to use (and provide) hand lotion as well because our hands are dry from all this washing.
- Use hand sanitizer every time you enter a new place and every time you leave; have a personal size bottle with you at all times. Organizations should also have them in every room; and employees should use it at the beginning and end of every meeting. Also ensure to wipe down all touched surfaces with disinfectant anti-bacterial routinely.
- Don't touch your face! The best article I have read is on hand-to-face transmission; read [here](#).
- Do not hug, shake hands, or fist bump. Elbow bumping is now in vogue.
- If you have not had a flu shot, get one now! It won't stop the coronavirus, but it will aid in stopping other flus. From a public health perspective, this will have less impact on hospitals and clinics. In the U.S., 32 million people got the flu last year; 310,000 people were hospitalized; 18,000 people died. In Japan, the "regular" flu rate has gone down in the last 2 months because people are hand washing more often. Fascinating article on this [here](#).
- If you are sick, do not go into work and expose people (this should be the case for any type of sickness). It will also make it less awkward for everyone. When you have to cough or sneeze, do it into tissues or your sleeve at all times.
- Stop buying face masks because they are ineffective for those without symptoms of the coronavirus. These purchases deplete the supplies needed for medical professionals.
- Get better at video conferencing! If you don't already do it on a regular basis, start practicing. Here are a few things to know:
  - We at Mariposa have been using [Zoom](#), a video conference software for 3 years and it does take practice. Plan a time with your team to work remotely and start teaching them the protocols. Zoom also offers free webinars and live training guides on how to use their services.
  - Get the right technology tools in place NOW and help keep your team connected when they aren't in the same physical location. Think about what specific tools and devices will be needed, i.e., online file sharing tools, laptops, webcams, smartphones, etc.

*(Please see a handy printable infographic below for a list of "healthy behaviors.")*



If you would like to chat more about how to lead in this time of uncertainty, ping me. Happy to help anytime. 4152653142, sueb@mariposaleadership.com

Finally, here are some more excellent resources in addition to ones hyperlinked above.

- Center for Disease Control: [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- ELAD: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) PSA for Startups](#)
- *TechCrunch*: [How to work during a pandemic](#)
- *Wall Street Journal*: [Coronavirus Hits U.S. Business Activity](#)
- *Wall Street Journal*: [Coronavirus Is Different. It's Rapidly Hitting Supply and Demand.](#)
- *Harvard Business Review*: [8 Questions Employers Should Ask About Coronavirus](#)

## About the Author

Susan J. Bethanis, Ed.D., is the Founder/CEO of Mariposa Leadership, Inc., a 12-person San Francisco-based firm that has been providing executive coaching to tech leaders for 24 years. Mariposa's recent clients include AppFolio, AWS, Gilead, OpenX, PayPal, Twitch, Theravance, Zuora, and Zynga. Sue's book, *Leadership Chronicles of a Corporate Sage*, is a fly-on-the-wall account of real conversations between a coach and an executive. Sue received her Doctorate in Education at the University of San Francisco, specializing in Organizational Leadership, and her Master's Degree in Education from Stanford, specializing in Instructional Design. Follow her at @suebethanis.



# “OVERCOMMUNICATING” PRACTICES

1

## **SET UP REGULAR COMMUNICATION PRACTICES**

Get the word out about revised policies and ongoing revisions.

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2

## **GO OUT OF YOUR WAY TO ASK ABOUT YOUR TEAM MEMBERS' CONCERNS**

These simple words can go a long way to quell fear and anxiety. That's your job always, but it's especially your job now: support, support, support.

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3

## **HAVE BACKUP TO THE BACKUPS**

Start looking at your team and think about the importance of supporting each other.

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4

## **COMMUNICATE REGULARLY ABOUT HOW WORKING FROM HOME CAN BE POTENTIALLY ISOLATING FOR YOU/YOUR TEAM**

Give peeps a chance to voice their concerns about this and ways to overcome this.

# HEALTHY BEHAVIORS TO PREVENT COVID-19



## WASH YOUR HANDS

Wash your hands for at least 15-20 seconds, including the top of hands and in between fingers.

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## SANITIZE & DISINFECT

Carry hand sanitizer at all times and use it every time you enter and leave; disinfect all touched surfaces.

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## DON'T TOUCH YOUR FACE

Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose with unwashed or unsanitized hands.

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## LIMIT PHYSICAL CONTACT

Do not hug, shake hands, or fist bump. Elbow bumping is now in vogue.

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## GET THE FLU SHOT

It won't stop the coronavirus, but it will aid in stopping other flus and impacting hospitals.

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## STAY HOME IF SICK

If you are sick, do not go into work and expose people.

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## STOP BUYING MASKS

Masks are ineffective for those without symptoms of coronavirus and deplete the supplies available for medical professionals.

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## MORE VIDEO CONFERENCES

Get better at video conferencing! If you don't already do it on a regular basis, start practicing.