SIX LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM COVID-19

Embrace action and have the courage to do the right thing.

Prof Günter K. Stahl, a leadership expert at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, shared with Forbes Life some of the most important leadership lessons to be learned from real-life cases observed at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Empower those on the front line and don't punish mistakes. In times of crisis, the biggest mistake for leaders is to try to control everything and over-centralise decision-making.

2. Act fast and decisively. During the coronavirus crisis, we saw that the countries that generally did best had government leaders who took early, decisive action to curb the spread.

3. Embrace action but don't overreact and plan ahead. In a crisis, leaders need to embrace action, prioritise speed over perfection, and focus on the immediate steps necessary to stabilise the situation and mitigate the damage (ensure the safety of the people, maintain liquidity, reach out to customers, etc.).

4. Encourage – and listen to – dissenting voices. The leaders who are most effective in times of crisis are those who seek out individuals who have a different perspective on an issue.

5. Have the courage to do the right thing (even if it's unpopular). From the above, it might seem that what is needed most in an acute crisis situation is sound management and decision-making, not leadership. The opposite is true.

6. Connect with people and show empathy, compassion and concern. Leaders need to connect with employees and other stakeholders, acknowledge the personal and professional challenges they are going through, and act as "Explainer in Chief". Leaders need to send positive messages but resist the temptation to hide bad news and take an overconfident, upbeat tone.

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