

How has the pandemic redefined the mindset of leaders around the world?

What makes a great leader? It's one of those questions that can bring out a multitude of answers. Before the pandemic, a CEO's role was primarily dedicated to making the big company decisions, from corporate strategy to investor handling that accounted for 45% of a company's performance.

However, the pandemic led to a shift in focus for many leaders – be it CEOs or other C-suite executives – as businesses were forced to respond to an unprecedented situation with hundreds of unknowns. From deciding when it was the right time to close the office to figuring out how to keep a production line running in a remote world, leaders were suddenly being pulled in even more directions than ever before. In order to respond to the challenge, they had to drastically shift the way in which they led their team.

Eighteen months later and leaders have learnt some valuable lessons that, regardless of how much we return to “normal”, they will continue to embrace. A key lesson, according to *CNN's recent report*, was flexibility, with the 15 CEOs they spoke to all agreeing on this one point.

But how else have leaders' mindsets changed over the course of the pandemic?

Pace and magnitude

While the pandemic initially caused chaos, many leaders were able to quickly change their views on what the right pace of growth was for their company and achieve feats that, before, they would have said were impossible or years away.

As the pandemic forced us to quickly migrate online within the space of a few days, CEOs recognised that the barriers towards making quick and bold company decisions were less about technical limitations and more about mindset and removing policies that were slowing things down.

You had global brands, such as Unilever, changing up their offering overnight – they were able to convert factory lines that were making deodorants into ones for hand sanitiser to help support the increasing demand within four days by removing bureaucratic policies.

This newfound boldness and willingness to change something that is not working is key to company growth and outstanding performance.

As we come out of the pandemic, we are seeing leaders take charge of the decisions about returning to the office, for example. There have been a lot of stories in the press about companies sitting on the fence when it comes to office returns, concerned with upsetting people because of the “great resignation”.

However, the companies that are seeing the best response are those who are being upfront with their teams about their expectations after realising that not making a decision can actually lead to more staff turnover because of the lack of clarity at a time of uncertainty, employees respect clear direction.

Empathy

The pandemic was also a big reminder that at the end of the day, we’re all human. The unforeseen experience put everyone in the same boat, regardless of what level of seniority they were, and as a result, many leaders have

become more empathetic towards their teams. Before the pandemic, leaders often worked in isolation, which could lead to a sense of detachment from the wider team. Now, they are listening, relating and connecting more with their employees.

The return back to the office has been a great example of how leaders are taking the time to listen to their teams before making any decisions.

Everyone experienced remote working differently and have varying levels of reluctance about returning to the office. It is important that leaders take all of this into account when making office space decisions.

In the last six months, we've seen a massive shift away from cookie cutter offices as CEOs come to us looking for a space that is unique to their team and ensures everyone feels comfortable. As a result, collaborative break out zones are on the rise to encourage people to come together and reinstate a sense of belonging.

One way we have tried to do this is by having a regular team lunch where we host Kitt Stories: we go around the table and tell different stories about our lives to break the ice and get to know someone. I always try to go first to help make newer members of staff feel at ease and so they can get to know me: it can be really easy for leaders not to prioritise one-on-one time with their team, so making time for these lunches is really important.

These are only a few of the changes that CEOs and leaders have embraced as a result of the pandemic, but at the heart of all of them lies the desire to put teams first.

The pandemic led all of us to reassess what we held to be important, and was a reminder that at the end of the day, you're only as strong as your team. The changes to products overnight might have been the CEOs decision, but they only succeeded because of the dedicated team they had executing it.

Looking ahead, many leaders are reassessing their wider company values and are ultimately shifting their mindset to put the team first, something which I believe will continue long after we recover from the pandemic.

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