

BLURRED LINES • KEY DISTINCTIONS • VUCA LEADERSHIP • TEAMS & GROUPS

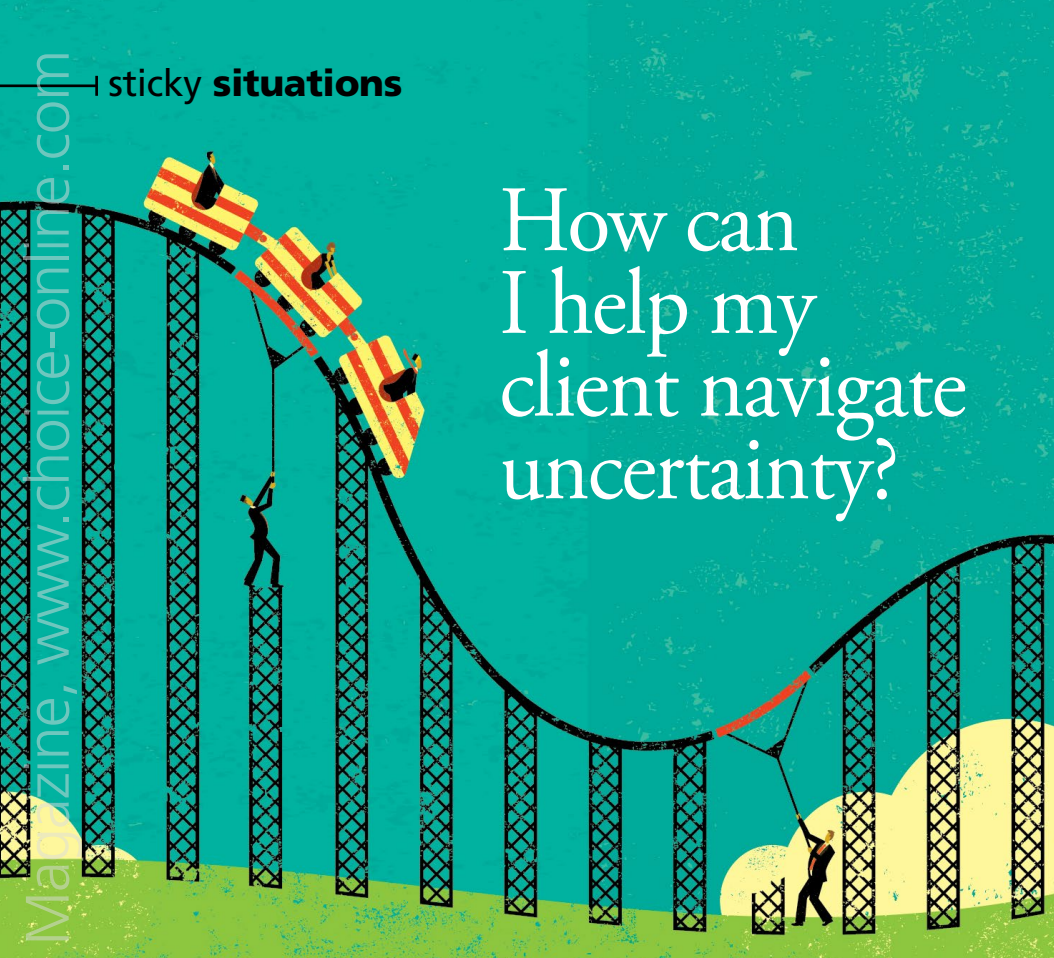
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DISRUPTION!

Navigating change at
an accelerated pace

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THE SITUATION

“I’m coaching a leader whose people are asking for answers because everything is uncertain. Normally my client provides the strategies and support that the team needs, but the pace of change is happening so fast that the leader is no longer able to help his people navigate the uncertainty, and that is making him question his value and leadership ability. What can I do as a coach to help my client regain confidence in his role and his leadership?”

THE EXPERTS WEIGH IN

By Suzi Pomerantz, MT, MCC

Disruption brings gifts and opportunities. Some leaders intentionally cause disruption to grow or innovate or reinvent. Others struggle to manage the stress and overwhelm that comes with the disruption of their industry, business, or career. Disruption brings uncertainty, yet our brains crave certainty. You can support your client to create certainty, even when circumstances remain uncertain. If the new normal is disruption, uncertainty and VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) for the foreseeable future, leaders will need to navigate that regularly. Help him reframe; moving from the operating stance of crisis and survival and uncertainty (victim) to a more empowered (creator) stance. Leaders can provide certainty, practice gratitude, and increase resilience.

Create certainty – In uncertainty, fear throws people into survival mode, which floods their brains and nervous system

with stress chemicals, hijacking their ability to logically problem-solve. When leaders create certainty, it allows people to bring their best frontal cortex contributions to the fore. Leaders can create certainty by letting people know *when* they’ll make a decision, or *when* they’ll have more information.

Communicate anything that gives people a sense of certainty and control. Amiel Handelsman says there “are three conversations you can initiate to calm others’ nervous systems: “How we will decide,” “What happens next,” and “What we can offer.” There is always some type of certainty to be created. Empower your client to seek it.

Transform attitudes – Leaders model for others how to transform attitudes and beliefs that must shift to meet the needs of the new reality. Thinking must shift; old frameworks or mental models that worked before may not work going forward. Embrace not knowing and leverage intellectual humility to develop the attitudes that will allow growth. Consciously practice gratitude.

Experiment to innovate – When leaders come from a creative place of service, they can let go of what worked, of what they think they know from experience, and they can look forward into the future to design experiments that will allow space to innovate into the new reality that disruption will open up. Experiment without attachment to specific results, and allow innovation to emerge.

Resilience is the ground floor of innovation – Leadership is challenging under the best of circumstances, yet even more so during times of disruption...whether that disruption is intentional or not. It means your client gets to choose and create a new way of leading. Help him master the ability to cause intentional neutrality as he navigates chaotic waters. He can provide value to employees who are constantly bombarded with various forms of disruption by recognizing resilience. Help him design and craft who he wants to be in the face of uncertainty. Rich ground for coaching!

By Craig Carr, BCC, PCC, CPCC

It's no secret that executives and business leaders face an emerging 'new normal' that can feel puzzling and contradictory. As economies get back to business and many hope that life will go back to how it was 'in the before times,' the reality is that change has already occurred. Coaches and consultants will be busy sorting through the nuance and variations of these dynamics for quite some time.

Unfortunately, there's little comfort for your client in knowing he's not alone when it comes to facing uncertainty presented by the post-Covid era. The description that he "normally provides strategies and support" suggests his mental construct for leadership may be too narrow. He's correct that leaders must be the first to project certainty, but new circumstances call for self-aware leadership that's savvy than what got them through in the past.

I appreciate that you brought this sticky situation up because it highlights the cultural inflection point that has arrived. Coaches have always played a leading role in transforming paradigms, but now more than ever, the stakes are high, and the hour may be late for many organizations and institutions. Companies will want to hire coaches and consultants who stand for organizational health and solve systemic problems and culture issues in more complete and novel ways.

ROI and performance will always be necessary, but healthy organizations will do more to create meaning, equality, and community. They'll find that the new world of work – especially at the executive level – demands it. Coaches in the post-Covid world, in my opinion, must double down on the stand they take for their work and the kind of coach they want to be.

Soapbox aside, begin by discerning where uncertainty is located in the system.

Is it within your client, alone? Or is it with his teams and direct reports? Is it in the business environment, or is it where the company is in its evolution and destiny? Knowing this will lead you to where attention needs to go. If you get this wrong, you'll lose valuable time, so don't prejudge the situation or allow your client to hide behind fake male invulnerability. Many a career is likely to fall this decade as a result of the lack of trust that engenders. Don't let it happen to your clients.

Second, because of the uncertainty, work with your client to elicit the genius of the group. That means serious truth-telling about what works and what doesn't and deep discussion about the kind of workplace, culture, and systems that will provide a secure sense of belonging while getting the job done. There's no guarantee any of it will work, and some people may find the exit. That's how this decade will roll, so ... coaches, prepare yourselves for a new era!

By Victoria Trabosh, CDC®, CEC

Pre-pandemic, many leaders had settled into their role of how to handle leadership issues and were comfortable with their personal style. The pandemic changed the questions and the certainty of the answers.

Many leaders recently realized so-called soft skills, or people-centered skills, were suddenly primary in their ability to lead well: authenticity, emotional empathy, the democratization of leadership, inclusion, the need for integration of the whole person into the work, and genuinely caring for employees. Many leaders had not focused on those people-centered skills and felt inadequate to handle the uncertainty, questions, expectations, and feedback they received.

With the changes experienced by all, it is time for coaches to step up to a new level of coaching the executive. In some cases, that may mean that as a coach, you lead the conversation to bring up the issues of

people-centered skills that your client utilizes, under-utilizes, or ignores.

We are here to coach the gap, from where leaders are to where they want to go. Before you let your client believe they have failed and are lost, acknowledge where they are and help them fail forward. Guide them to learn the explicit and personal lessons of what no longer works, look at leaders who have made it and thrived with their team through the pandemic, and chose one or two new behaviors to embrace to improve their leadership and become confident once again.

This answer is not a prescriptive response to tell you exactly what to do. Consider it a call as a coach to review with your client how they have led previously and what is

no longer effective. Suppose you've used a tool like a 360 review. What information is available that may show awareness of a skills gap but not competence in dealing with employees from a people-centered skills perspective?

As coaches, we can play an integral role in the transformation of leaders as they shift their leadership competencies that previously may have been ignored or minimized and keep the best skills that work regardless of the situation. Remind your client that as the challenges change, so must their leadership skills. Within that mindset, transformation within leaders is probable and will be some of the most explicit and profound lessons they have ever learned. I challenge you to join them in this transformation. •

Are you grappling with a sticky situation?

You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you some different perspectives to consider. Email your situation to: submissions@choice-online.com and put "sticky situations" in the subject line.