



LEADING with COMPASSION

living above the line

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WHERE DO YOU OPERATE? ABOVE OR BELOW THE LINE

Everything seems different right now. Because, in many ways, in the span of a few days and weeks, everything changed. And this change calls for a different kind of leadership. Right now, more than ever, we need to be leaders who lead with compassion.

To help understand what this looks like, I've developed a framework to clearly show the six defined behaviors of compassionate, courageous leaders. We call living into those behaviors living 'above the line.' Those six behaviors include: *dignity, authenticity, presence, accountability, empathy and integrity.*

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The behaviors below the line – humiliation, insincerity, distractedness, avoidance, detachment and dishonesty represent dysfunctional behaviors – behaviors that are ultimately destructive

to your culture and company. It, of course, takes courage to live above the line and lead with compassion, especially when everything feels different. In times of stress and chaos, it might feel easy to operate below the line and be distracted and detached, for example, especially when we are faced with obstacles we've never experienced before. But, living here – below the line – can create more problems that build over time and have a cost in the long term.

The surprising truth about this model is that it applies to our situation today more than ever. And it doesn't cost any money to lead with the behaviors that are above the line. It is 100% free to be authentic. Authenticity right now might sound like, "I don't know what may happen in the next couple of weeks, but here's what I do know. Today we're in this together.

We're in unprecedented times, but it is the unprecedented times that bring out the most innovation and creativity. This current situation can help us thrive."

These behaviors will not work if you don't put them into action. You can't just have dignity and authenticity; you have to display it to others. You have to give it away. That may mean having a very difficult conversation with someone right now and focusing on coming from a place of dignity and empathy — allowing that person to maintain their sense of worth and trying to see each situation from their point of view, without judgment.

This is game changing. And like most things worth pursuing, this takes time, energy and capacity. Running over capacity over long periods of time as a leader takes a toll in the way we interact with other people. Generally, living and leading from a place of overcapacity leads to frustration. Frustration is a cognitive bias we use to make a decision in the moment when we don't have the mental capacity to think about something. What we see is frustration but what is happening can feel overwhelming emotionally. And frustration — the currency of too much going on around us — can trigger a loss of control.

So how can we lead with compassion and ensure we stay above the line?

1 Establish new routines and rituals.
The way to add capacity back into your day is to build in routines that in turn increase mental and emotional capacity. Routines allow us to pay attention to the bigger picture, not the small things that can become routine. Rather than give in to the distraction and noise around you, focus on casting the larger vision and inspiring through people.

2 Display predictable behaviors.
Predictability helps to build capacity back into your day because you don't

our research shows that:

78% of participants who had leaders that managed above the line **were more engaged**

80% said they were **happier at work**

63% of participants had **better health outcomes**

have to worry about other things that are now part of your established routine. You now can direct that energy to more important issues. An example of the importance of predictability is how you communicate. Right now, your team is looking for steady, calm, intentional communication. In the midst of this crisis,

communication and collaboration are the heartbeat of your culture. If your team knows what to expect, they will feel more empowered to establish a stronger trust with you and with each other.

3 Inspire to the priorities.
Clearly articulate the priorities to the team so they feel confident in the direction. What are the three things we need to do today? What big rocks do we need to move and how do I as a leader inspire that direction? Define milestones and project check-ins.

4 Connect the work to your mission.
Use storytelling as a way to show how work continues to be incredibly meaningful. Tie projects and tasks back to the mission so your team understands and is excited by the work they are creating. Even in a remote setting, they will feel connected.

There is no template for how to lead during an unprecedented time. Compassion provides a guiding framework to use as a map. And compassionate leadership gives us a guide for what great leadership can look like and how we can be extraordinarily effective. As leaders, we get to define how work will be done in the future — the challenge is to make sure we set the opportunity now by leading above the line.