



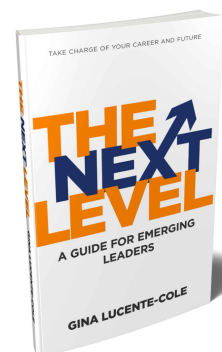
**BONUS BOOK CHAPTER:  
BUSINESS UNUSUAL**



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**AS PART OF**



# Business Unusual – The Path Beyond Covid for Emerging Leaders

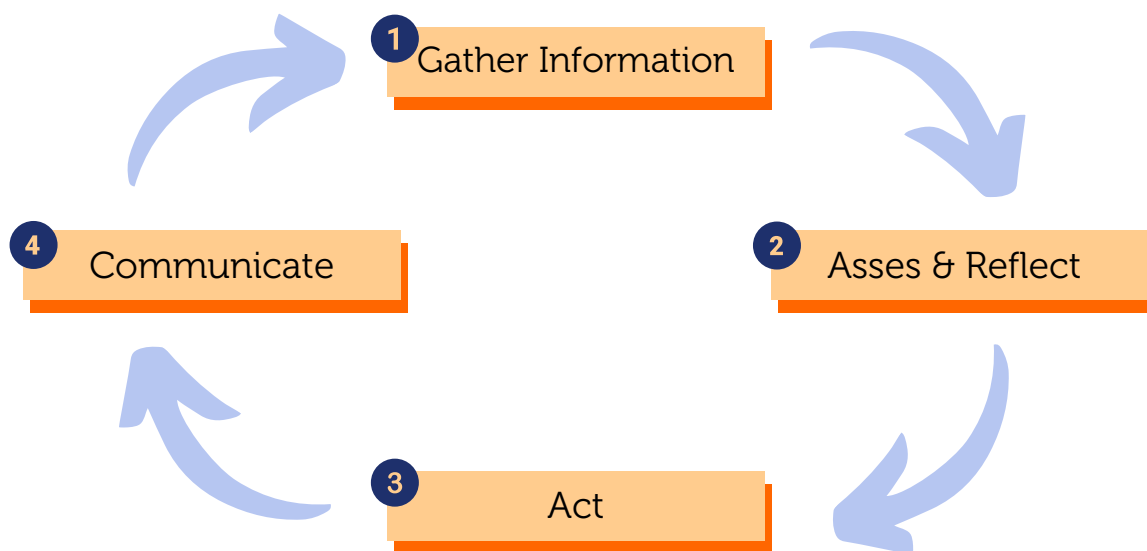
In March 2020, millions of workers in technology, finance, professional services, and other knowledge fields shifted physically from office buildings to their homes, some even to a make-shift set up on a dining room table.

This decrease in centralization impacted not only entire industries, but changed the way we complete tasks as mundane as a project update to the team.

We are still adapting to the shift to the “next normal” with the work itself and our team and organizational dynamics. You have already experienced the upheaval, and best practice is to continuously gather information, assess your team and your work, and act to adapt. As we move forward we acknowledge that this is a giant experiment in the way we work.

There is opportunity for emerging leaders to improve their department or project and the model they use for getting work done, and for how to lead and communicate with their team.

It is a chance to reach the next level while the team is looking at you for direction and support. Don't hold back, since this is the time when leaders will be tested and show how they can adapt and thrive. Here are some key things to think about. Here is a process for you to follow, adapting and adjusting your leadership with each cycle.



# Gather Information

## **Internal to the organization**

- Board of Directors, Executive Leadership Team, Human Resources

### Questions to Explore:

- What have they declared as essential to the business?
- What corporate values and purposes are continuing, which are adjusting, and which are fading?
- What are the critical triggers and actions needed in the short and mid-term? Are there data to make projections about the long-term?
- What are the adjusted goals and metrics?

- Your Team

### Questions to Explore:

- How are people being put first, considered the most valuable asset in the organization?
- How are people feeling about work?
- What are they stressed or concerned about?
- What is most challenging?
- What do they miss most about the lack of in-person work, travel, and meetings? What do they not miss?
- How do we want to structure in-person and remote work, meetings, and schedules?
- How connected does the team feel to each other?
- What is an unexpected upside of work now?
- What ideas for improvement does the team have? About the work itself or how to work together?

- Your Personal Mindset

### Questions to Explore:

- What are you thinking and feeling about work and your personal life?
- How is your energy level?
- How have you responded to COVID-19 and the impact on your work and the team? Have you been monitoring and tracking your remote team with distrust (and are micromanaging) or are you overwhelmed and just trying to get through the day (and may have abdicated some of your leadership)?

## **External to the organization**

- Clients
- Competitors
- Partners and affiliates
- Regulatory agencies
- Industry associations
- Industry research & forecasts
- Markets and Investors

### Questions to Explore:

- What are their areas of concern?
- Where is there opportunity?
- What is the most certain pathway and what is unlikely?

# Assess & Reflect

- Define the priorities and communicate them, giving context to the reasons they were considered. That context helps the team make decisions about their own work. Knowing the key purpose of the work will help the team define and decide the best ways to reach their goals.
- Assess the data about the work, as well as your own thoughts about it. Common emotions since 2020 include: doubt, uncertainty, fear, energy, focus, connection or disconnection, apathy.
- Take 30 minutes and define the value that you, your team, and your projects offer.

## Questions to Explore:

- How is that value defined and measured?
- What is the link between the value you offer and the evolving priorities? Where are your redundancies and inefficiencies?
- What rules or processes are getting in the way of the most important work?
- Assess your level of talent and survey what skills and capacities you have on the team, and how can you help others grow and develop?
- How will you retrain your top performers? (While there is uncertainty in many industries, the shift to remote work has removed many geographical hurdles to job hunting).

Asking these questions will help you make decisions about what work or efforts you and your team should focus on. It also is the first step to communicating to your manager and other stakeholders.

## *How can the current way of working be improved?*

- What does the team need in terms of working hours and when they are expected to be available?
- How do you want them to collaborate?
- Should “core hours” of working be defined (such as 10:00am – 1:00pm, adjusted for your time zone in the US or internationally) so people have time to center around each other?

- Is there time creep of the workday into personal hours and what is the impact on morale and productivity?
  - If there are “office days” implemented, how will those work?
  - What can you do to make sure there isn't an imbalance and a feeling like there are two different organizations (the one in the office and the one made up of disparate individual locations)?
- Reflect on what you need to do differently to be a better manager in a virtual and uncertain environment. The team is looking for guidance from their manager more than ever, so consider asking them what to stop, start, and continue doing to be most effective.



# Act

- **When you have to make a decision or take an action, respond quickly, but not reactively.** The difference between responding and reacting are the thoughts that you have before you act. Take the extra minutes (yes, mere minutes) to consider how you want to act and what difference it will make to your desire that future state or goals. Does the action support the goals logically or are you making a short-term emotional decision?
- **Be supportive and empathetic.** There will likely be continued challenges, and therefore inconsistencies in work produced and team behavior as people adjust the way they work and communicate. Expect mistakes to happen and give time and support for your team to get their footing.
- **Work with the processes and tools to support your team.**
  - What are the constraints they are dealing with and how can you remedy them?
  - What do they want to recreate from the way things were, working face-to-face, and what needs to be improved?
  - How can you overcome obstacles and implement improvements to show that you are responding to your team's ideas and feedback?
- **Consistently assess the work.** Are you focusing on the most essential tasks and projects in order to reach your goals? Then act, gather information, assess and take the next action. The cadence of this process is increasing with the current level of uncertainty in the world, so don't hang back waiting for more information or structure that may not arrive.
- **Consistently check in with the team.** How are they feeling? Overwhelmed or productive? Isolated or focused? Fearful about health?

# Communicate

- Communicate the value you and your team bring to the organization. Do you make an impact with your people-centered approach and ability to problem-solve? How does the work support the overall goals and Key Performance Indicators?
- Define what communication channels will be used for what information.
  1. What will you use for what information? There is ZOOM, Slack, Teams, etc.
    - Updates about the work
    - Updates about how the team is feeling (both as a group and individually)
    - Collaboration on project work and joint problem solving (even sharing your camera while working independently on tasks can help team members feel connected)
    - Team meetings
    - Team building
  2. What is synchronous, so that everyone is communicating at the same time? This is often in a “all hands” meeting or virtual team coffee hours. What is asynchronous, like updates or chats that people can read when they feel like it?
- Communicate information so you are credible, trusted, and reliable:
  - Simple
  - Short
  - Focused
  - Candid
  - Consistent
  - With empathy, acknowledge feelings that people may be having, and sharing your own.
  - Express recognition and appreciation
  - Repetitive of messages about priorities, how to align their own work

With so much unknown as we look forward, no one is expected to have all the answers. Take initiative where you can, be willing to adapt, and ensure your team feels heard. Yes, we are dealing with a lot of uncertainty, but leaders can set the path for a focused and positive workplace, I firmly believe this.