

How Do We Recover from a Worldwide Shutdown? Together.

The world is in a state of disruption. Nations are shutting their borders. Businesses and schools are closing. The stock market has taken a tumble. Grocery store shelves are emptying. Vacations have been put on hold. Sporting events and concerts are postponed. People are largely confined to their homes.

We can ask that everyone try to maintain a sense of normalcy, but let's face it: That isn't going to happen. Life is different *for everyone*. That is an important fact to remember – that *everyone* is being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, whether you are infected by the virus or practicing social isolation to **flatten the curve**.

These disruptions create a lot of stress in our lives, but the key to coping is humanity. By humanity, I am referring to both the entire human race and the characteristics that are uniquely human, such as kindness, mercy, sympathy and, perhaps most importantly, empathy. Empathy allows us to be mindful that everyone is currently experiencing significant changes in their lives and that some have been affected far worse than others. Empathy allows us to be selfless by asking, "What can I do to make this situation better for someone else?"

I like to use the phrase "Humanity isn't a trend." What I'm saying is that, while we might preach the virtues of humanity because it's topical to do so, it's more important to practice it. After all, it's easy to espouse the virtues of humanity, but it takes a great deal of effort and mindfulness to cultivate and live it. We need to bring awareness to how we treat others, particularly during this time of additional stress. We need to use empathy and kindness if we are going to get through the worst of the COVID-19 outbreak. If we do this, we'll have an entirely different epidemic on our hands – an epidemic of love for others and a realization that kindness is infectious.

Bringing Humanity into the Business World

The principle of humanity affects businesses, too. In business, we talk a lot about our corporate and personal brands and company cultures. Brand is an expression of a set of values, such as integrity, caring and teamwork. Culture is the behaviors that are shaped by these values. This worldwide disruption is testing whether our corporate and personal brands are lip service or the real deal. It is putting a spotlight on our organizational cultures to reflect who we really are. Your community, your clients and prospects, and your competition are all watching. Will you act with integrity, or will your core values ring hollow?

To that end, this is a test. Who are we during difficult times, and how do we treat others? The answers may differ among generations.



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For the Baby Boomer generation, this is an opportunity to test your ability to empathize with a diversifying workforce and new ways of conducting business. Dismount from your high horse and embrace change, such as using technology to work remotely. It is also a time for Baby Boomers, having faced these kinds of disruptions before – perhaps not a pandemic – but a problematic event nonetheless, to impart their knowledge to younger generations. Sharing learned experiences helps those who are facing the greatest disruption so they may weather these trying times.

Millennials and Generation Z, now is the time for these generations to step into the role of leader. You know how to thrive in a technologically advanced world. Be empathetic, and take time to educate those who might not be as savvy, including your bosses, coworkers, parents and grandparents. Position them for success, and you will be their hero. On a broader scale, you can tap into social media to take part in humanitarian efforts aimed at helping those affected by the disease, whether physically or economically.

To everyone, regardless of what generation you are part of, practice kindness. Have empathy for the employee who is a little late with an assignment. Have compassion for the colleague who has a crying child in the background on your conference call. If lines at the store are longer than expected, stay calm and know that everyone is there for the same reason you are. We are all in this together, and we don't need to add to the stress many of us are already feeling.

If kindness and empathy are the tide, and we all practice it daily, then we will rise to overcome this hardship and prove that humanity isn't just a trend.