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## LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: BE HUMAN

Leadership is always important. In times of crisis, the need for high quality leadership is magnified exponentially. Currently, and ongoing for a while, people are experiencing real, palpable anxiety. We are emerging from a pandemic (please)—we enjoyed barely three days to breathe without a mask (in some places), and now we are faced with a war in Europe.

What your people need from you now is a different kind of leadership—one that focuses on humanity. One that shows that, no matter what happens, you are calm and in control. You maintain your composure; you do not lose your temper or act out of fear. People in your organization need to know that you are going to make thoughtful decisions in their best interests, and in the best interests of the organization.

Aviation accident investigators say that the last words often spoken by the pilot before impact are, “Oh, sh[ucks]!” To be clear, that is a euphemism and it means they know they are going to crash. Had Sully Sullenberger said that to either the Air Traffic Controllers, or worse, the passengers, (a) it would not have helped him achieve his mission, and (b) he would have fomented panic. Instead, he told the truth. He was clear and concise. He told ATC, “We’re gonna be in the Hudson.” Direct and to the point. To the passengers, he said, “Brace for impact.” No sugar coating, and he was necessarily clear. Sully stayed with the ship. He was the last one off the plane after ensuring that everyone else had safely disembarked. He stayed (outwardly) calm, communicated clearly, told the truth, worked seamlessly with his co-pilot, and stayed mission- focused.

President Zelenskyy, too, is “staying with his ship.” He is in Kyiv, which is arguably, the most dangerous place for anyone to be right now, let alone for the President of Ukraine. He is not hiding. He is telling the truth. In the most chaotic situation imaginable, his approval ratings have soared to over 90%. How many leaders in politics or business can say that? He has not wavered from his mission.

Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, has been lauded for her swift action when Covid hit. She took bold action, essentially closing down the country—even though this act was not widely popular. In her brief tenure as PM (since 2017), Covid was her second major crisis. The Christchurch mosque massacre was the first. At that time, she also took bold and decisive action. She banned assault-style weapons within a month of the attacks. In both instances, the changes she initiated could have had negative political consequences. They did not. Instead, her party has done very well, gaining seats in Parliament. How does she do it? With empathy, honesty, authenticity, and clarity. She is an open communicator.

When Mary Barra took over General Motors as CEO, its government bailout was coming to an end. Sixteen days into the job, she found out about the ignition-switch defect responsible for multiple deaths. The ignition-switch issues had been going on for decades. Once Barra took over, the recalls finally began. She had the grace and strength to lead with humanity. Barra apologized to the families first, before diving into problem-solving mode.

In all these cases, leaders were willing to put the mission first. Your people need to know that you will hold the course and do the right thing in spite of fear. They need to know that your determination, empathy, and integrity are unimpeachable.

Six lessons in crisis leadership:

1. Stay mission-focused.
2. Remain calm.

## LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: BE HUMAN (CONT.)

3. Act boldly.
4. Don't abandon ship.
5. Show humanity, authenticity, and empathy.
6. Be honest, straightforward, clear, and direct.

*What lessons in leadership during crises have you learned and need to act upon? Upon which leaders do you want to model your crisis response?*

### Further reading

- [4 Things CEOs Can Learn from Captain Chesley Burnett "Sully" Sullenberger | Chiefexecutive.net](#)
- [Volodymyr Zelensky is Teaching a Masterclass in Leadership Right Now | Leaders.com](#)
- [The Case for a New Generation of Leaders: Jacinda Ardern | Harvardpolitics.com](#)
- [The Barra Era: A Look Back and What's Ahead for GM | IndustryWeek.com](#)
- [Becoming a More Humane Leader | hbr.org](#)
- [Leading with Humanity: Six Traits for Successful Leadership | forbes.com](#)