

Embracing the Spirit of Resilience on The Road to Recovery - Michael Lewis

A rising tide lifts all boats. – John F. Kennedy

The late John F. Kennedy loved to sail off his small sailboat in Nantucket Sound off of Hyannis Port, Massachusetts whenever he could escape the rigors of the presidency for some summer vacation in Cape Cod with his family. He once observed how when the tide came in it rose and lifted all the boats, perhaps his metaphor for when better times comes and there is prosperity, all people are uplifted. The hope of resilience and recovery is that as we resume our normal lives again that I believe it will restore us emotionally, mentally, and physically, serve to reinvigorate our suffering business community and reinstill in us a sense of appreciation for the world we've taken for granted.

As I write this article, Canadians are entering the twentieth month and the fourth wave of COVID-19. We are collectively facing the single greatest challenge to the health and prosperity of our nation in our lifetime. The reality of its impact is both hard and very real with 1.47 million Canadians having tested positive with the virus and almost 28,000 Canadians passing tragically away. Furthermore, according to the Canadian Federation of Business, well over 200,000 small businesses – many that had been open for decades – have closed. Dreams and livelihoods crushed. In short, the full impact that COVID-19 has had on Canadians and communities and municipalities cannot be overstated and will take years for a full recovery to happen.

Sadly, it also seems likely that COVID will continue to be with us for a long time and even as the majority of Canadians roll up their sleeves for vaccines and continue to live as safely and considerately as possible. Despite the bleak reality of the pandemic and all its costs, I think we can gratefully and safely say that worst of this pandemic and all the hardship and uncertainty is behind us.

The Challenge of a “Moving” Finish Line

A standard marathon is 26 miles and 385 yards or just over 42 kms. I often watch with admiration runners who have the strength and stamina to finish such a test of human endurance. But nevertheless, it is a fixed and universally accepted distance in which to run. Perhaps the biggest challenge of this pandemic was its unpredictable and constantly changing direction and duration. Just when we thought we might be making progress, moving forward, we saw more “lockdowns” and setbacks - the virus kept moving “the finish line” farther down the road.

They say that one of the hardest and most stressful experiences we can endure – is not knowing how and when an ordeal will end and thus, we continue to languish under a cloud of uncertainty on an unpredictable road forward. It seems that it is during challenging times like these that we question ourselves and our ability to endure the constant pressure and strain of what we are going through, perhaps to question our faith in those tasked to lead us forward and the solutions presented and suggested. This pandemic, just like a virus, seemed to change and evolve and thus public health leaders had to be equally agile by implementing strict but necessary public health restrictions in stages, only to have to re-implement when the COVID case numbers increased.

There will be countless articles and books written and no doubt, a complete and comprehensive examination of what we did right, what got wrong and what we've learned so that for future pandemics, our lessons learned at a municipal, provincial, and national level will hopefully better prepare and serve us.

Resilience is in Our Collective “DNA”

Being an eternal optimist and one who has made a living and life looking up, looking forward, and having faith, I want to focus on the road forward and past all we've been through and look at resilience and recovery. As I see it, resilience is the spirit and fight in us to recover from a loss and rebound from disappointment on a personal level, professionally and within a family or community setting. Resilience is the journey back as we restore ourselves and lives to where we were once before...if not to improve and be better. To bounce back and to resolve to come back better.

As a relatively young nation on the world stage, we know something about challenging times and have firsthand experience with resilience and recovery from a history replete with challenges. Collectively as a people we have exhibited strength, determination, and a will to overcome whatever came our way. Canada as a nation was born during the Great War, the first World War on the bloody fields and trenches of Europe. We rose then to challenge and through courage and valor, it revealed the character and heart of our nation and its people.

Generations of Canadians have lived through (and recovered) various financial and economic depressions and recessions. But in time we bounced back, often to a better and stronger place than before. As an example, our farming community has always faced a myriad of challenges as daily they put food on our tables. Farmers and their families all know about tough times and about comebacks and resilience drives their spirit. In short, as a nation, we've faced tough times in the past and will again and every time it has revealed our strength of character, our resilience, and our values of supporting each other ...and others in our communities.

We all learned that tough times come and go. But tough and resilient people remain! The road to resilience and recovery is and will be a Canadian story and is our ongoing legacy.

A Leader's Guide to Resilience and Recovery

As I see it, hopefully, the pandemic is ending and normalcy as we define it slowly returning that every leader has now been presented with ***a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity*** in collaboration with their team, to look at all aspects – positives and negatives ... of how COVID-19 impacted and influenced their effectiveness, learn, and record its lessons and celebrate and move on!

Here are just four suggestions that a leader (director, manager, or supervisor) can make the most of their team's COVID-19 experience and turn a "lemon of a time" ...into lemonade.

Engage In Conversations and Discussions with Your Team

The primary goal and objective of having a post-pandemic team meeting is to gain insights and good information about how they personally and collectively have managed (or struggled) during the pandemic. Timing is important as you want to gather information when it is still fresh. You may discover that they have a desire to share what they learned, how and what they have sacrificed, of what they view as been successful and where things fell short and that communicating this might be somewhat cathartic.

Embrace the good and bad, the successes and failures and as a leader, you will gain a deeper appreciation of what everyone has had to face during such trying times. Conversely, your team will appreciate you taking an active interest in their experiences. Besides, great leaders know that no one motivates and inspires others more than someone who listens and demonstrates that they care.

Lead An Analysis and Examination of The Lessons Learned

Begin an examination around all aspects of how the pandemic changed the way you and your team did work and be willing to drill down into how well (or not) you continued to provide services. This could be facilitated first by distributing a questionnaire that staff could complete in advance. You should view this as an opportunity to really discuss and record the lessons learned. During these meetings, you'll likely discover and appreciate just how when your team was placed in unique and unpredictable circumstances how they had to adapt and embrace imagination, creativity, and innovation to make things work under difficult and changing circumstances.

Create An Operational “Play” Book

Having conducted a very thorough review, examination, and analysis of how your team adapted and worked through the changing workplace landscape and having examined the lessons learned, you owe it to future leaders to have a record of your findings, observations, and recommendations. Maybe a “play” book or a how-to reference guide to reference for future pandemics? Just think of how useful it would have been had you been handed a thoughtful, detailed, and insightful set of procedures outlining important first steps to take and a detailed guidelines on how to go forward would have made things easier to implement and execute?

Recognize, Appreciate and Celebrate!

The pandemic presented us with a unique time in our lives. Because of this, you might want to consider some form of team or department celebration – an event that recognizes and acknowledges the commitment, dedication, and hard work, and the coming together and the stepping up that everyone was required to do. From closing your municipal offices and working from home, from having to mask-up and work continuously with the public in public settings and to keeping the wheels of municipal obligations and responsibilities turning, ...and everything else, don't you and all your team deserve it?

The Good News and Moving Forward ...

Finally, the good news. There is a light at the end of the COVID tunnel...and it's not a train! Every day with more and more Canadians getting vaccinated and with COVID case counts dropping, it is time to think hopefully and optimistically about our world returning to normal and envisioning our communities rebounding on the road to recovery...and so can you and your team or department and community.

Malcolm S. Forbes once remarked that *“any failure is a success if we LEARN from it”*. So, moving forward as a leader think about taking some time to really engage and talk to your team about the lessons of COVID, create a lasting legacy in which you and your team created a pandemic “play” book and recognize, celebrate, and appreciate everyone who faced the time of COVID and made what might have looked impossible...possible! You'll be glad that you did.

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