

# Leading With Transparency During Times of Crisis

April 13, 2020

## OVERVIEW

During a crisis people are fearful about what has happened, what will happen, and how it will impact them. Emotions will be heightened because human needs are typically threatened during a crisis, and some basic needs are not being met. Effective leadership can help an organization and its staff maintain a sense of security and confidence during these times. When faced with a crisis, most leaders immediately think and behave in ways that feel unfamiliar, but to be effective, leaders should stay true to who they are.

For state and territorial health officials, functioning as a crisis leader includes the ability to shift behaviors and directions quickly. Demonstrating care for individuals and clear communication are both vital as well. Underlying all of these skills is a foundation of trust and transparency. Transparency as a value is about being open, honest, visible, and accessible as a leader. Without a leader’s conscious commitment to transparency, a crisis can have negative long-term impacts on an organization’s morale, productivity, and retention.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEADERS

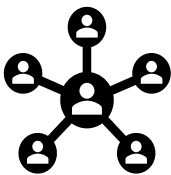
Creating a culture of transparency takes attention and conscientiousness from leaders. Here are a few recommendations for you to consider during this time:



**Be timely:** Share what you know, when you know it, without waiting until you have every question answered. Treat staff with genuine care and concern. Respond to what people are telling you, and consider what is *not* being said and why that may be.



**Be open:** Leaders often face criticism in a crisis, but transparency means opening yourself up and being vulnerable with staff. Commit to two-way communication and seek regular updates from staff to inform your situational awareness during the crisis. Let staff know how they can best reach you with updates and questions.



**Be visible and available:** Ensure staff hear from you frequently, and take time to review, repeat, and reinforce messages in multiple formats. Share public messages with staff first and be mindful that they are experiencing what is going on around them as both employees and individuals. Remind staff that diverse viewpoints and approaches are of value and contribute to creative problem solving and resiliency. Draw on existing relationships and positive organizational infrastructures. Be aware of your own emotions, their effect on your behavior, and their influence on your leadership style. A

leader's attitude is contagious—especially in times of crisis. Remain positive! Your support will have a major impact on staff morale and their confidence that things will get better.

## **RESOURCES**

Blog: [How to Lead Through a Crisis](#). Center for Creative Leadership.

Podcast: [Leadership, Uncertainty, and Learning to Thrive in Times of Change](#). Center for Creative Leadership.