

# **Leading through turbulent change:** a compilation of Praesta Prompts

Praesta is an international partnership of business coaches. We support senior leaders, including CEOs, main board directors, leadership team members, other key senior executives and emerging leaders through Executive Coaching, Team Coaching and Board Performance Reviews. We are leaders in working with executive women and job-sharers.

All Praesta coaches have had senior level careers in business or government and combine this deep experience with rigorous professional coaching practice and professional development.

Three core values are fundamental to everything we do:

### **Insightful**

Broadening perspective, fostering creativity and finding clarity

### **Excelling**

Igniting client confidence to excel now and into the future

### **Uplifting**

Enabling those we work with to be confident, authentic and encouraged in their leadership

Praesta Insights draw together ideas and experience on topical leadership issues in an accessible and digestible way.

Praesta coaches Hilary Douglas and Peter Shaw are the joint authors of 'Leading through turbulent change: a compilation of Praesta Prompts'.

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## Introduction

Turbulent change affects every leader. How best do we handle the resulting uncertainty and bring a sense of forward direction?

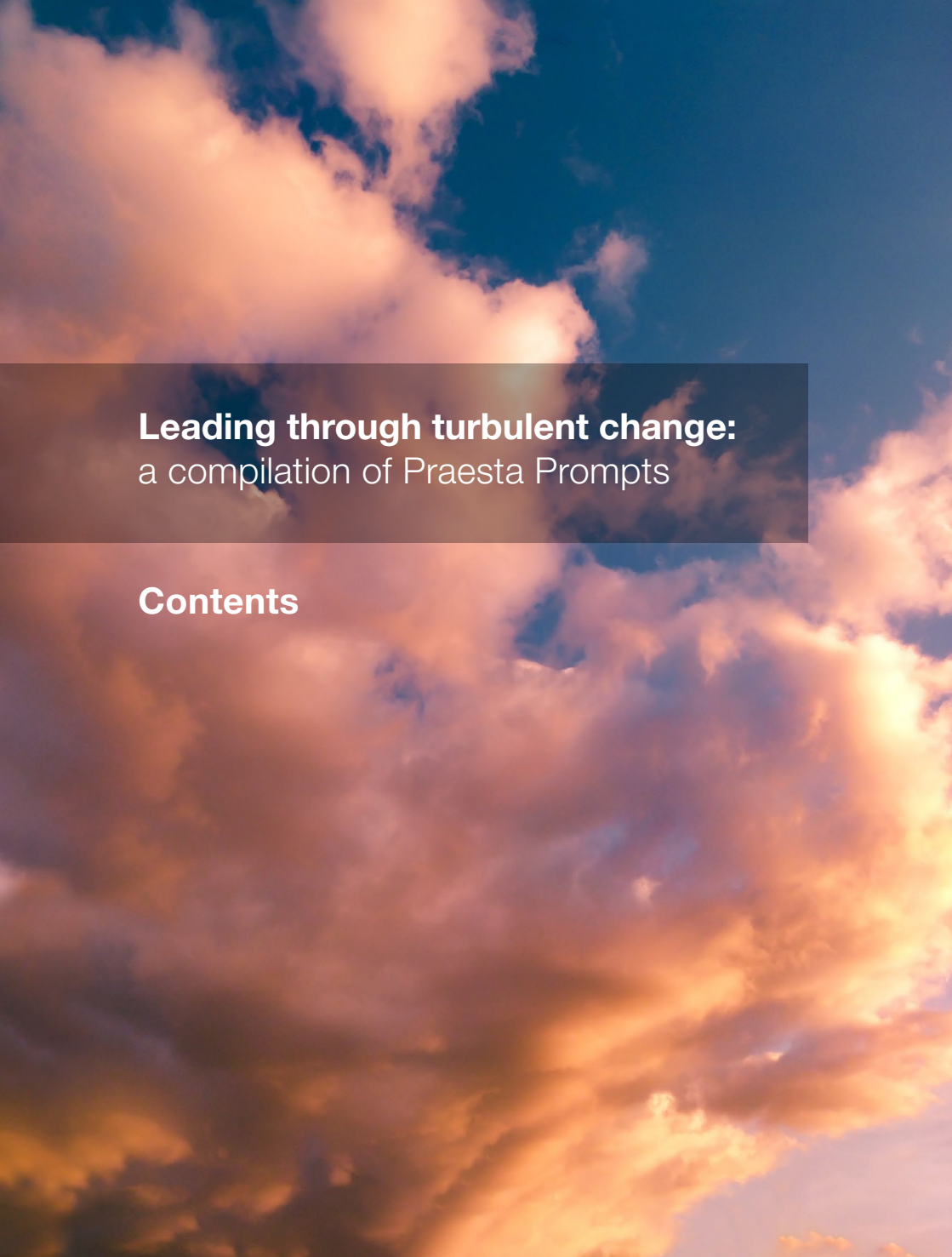
This booklet is a compendium of Praesta Prompts we wrote and sent to clients and contacts at a time of both national and international turbulence. The themes of the Prompts flowed from coaching conversations with individuals and teams in a range of sectors and countries.

Many recipients of the Prompts suggested we create a compendium of the Prompts as their relevance goes far beyond the immediate context in which they were written. We have adapted the original wording so they are applicable for individuals and teams going through a variety of turbulent times.

**We have grouped the Prompts for ease of reference into six sections, namely**

- **Flexing your leadership style**
- **Using your authority well**
- **Handling uncertainty**
- **Managing the chatter in your heads**
- **Creating a sustainable future**
- **Looking after your resilience**

At the end of the booklet we conclude with some questions drawn from themes in the booklet. We hope they will provide a valuable basis for reflection and discussion.



## Leading through turbulent change: a compilation of Praesta Prompts

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## A. Flexing your leadership style

### 1. Bringing curiosity into your leadership approach

#### **When can curiosity be a valuable part of your leadership repertoire?**

Whatever your leadership style, bringing a sense of curiosity can enable apparently fixed positions to be explored more openly, and allow new possibilities to emerge. Curiosity can be about the facts underlying an issue, or the sequence of events that led to a situation. Equally, it can be about understanding where others are coming from and looking for common ground.

#### **Bringing curiosity might mean drawing on questions like:**

- I wonder what might be the result if...?
- Could you tell me more about that?
- Help me understand why a particular view is being taken?
- Might we share what is going on in our heads on this issue?
- What would our customers think is most important?
- How might an entrepreneur see the potential opportunities here?

It can be helpful to summarise what you hear, and play it back to the other person. They will often be prompted to add something which could prove to be a breakthrough.

#### **If pausing to be curious does not come easily to you, you might think about:**

- In which other areas of your life are you energised by being curious?
- Who could be a good partner to prompt thinking in new ways?
- When has your curiosity opened up fresh insights in the past?

Your default management style can influence the way you express your curiosity. Others may experience your questioning in unintended ways. Be aware that:

- A rapid series of questions to a junior team member may feel like an interrogation that stops them thinking straight
- A challenging question to a colleague in front of others may be received as an attack
- Some people may wonder whether you use questions to avoid making a decision.

Body language and tone of voice are as important as the words you use. A key element of curiosity is a desire to learn from what you hear – and for others to see you are open to changing your view. Sometimes you just need to be silent and give others time to think.

## 2. Knowing Your Default

**Successful leaders know when to flex their style to suit different situations**, and how to respond to the different personalities they are dealing with. First, they need to be aware of the default style that others most often see in them, and where that comes from.

**Do you recognise any of these descriptors as part of your default leadership approach?**

- High expectations of yourself and others, driven to get results
- Excited by new ideas and innovative thinking, bored by process and structure
- Keen to make a decision and move on to the next challenge
- Methodical and evidence-based in your approach
- Naturally inclined to consensus-building and harmony
- Believe you best protect your people by being on top of everything

If some of these descriptors apply to you, they may feel like strengths but they may not always land well with others. In some circumstances it may be that your team members:

- Are so anxious about meeting your standards that they don't give of their best

- Can be overwhelmed by all your ideas and not know what to prioritise
- Notice you miss important input by closing an issue down too early
- Feel worn down by the rigour applied to process and data, or think they will never produce enough data to get a decision made
- Wish you would sometimes be more directive
- Feel that your protectiveness is stifling their development and would rather be confident that you have their back when they make mistakes.

**Every style has its strengths, and its admirers. Yours will already have brought you success in your work.** The trick is to know when your strengths and preferences don't match the situation or may be overplayed. The impact you intend to make may not always be the impact that is felt – and different people will experience you differently according to their own personalities and drivers. Hence the value of seeking honest feedback from a range of different people and then being deliberate in flexing your approach.

## 3. Balancing task and people

**How do you strike the balance between getting the job done and showing empathy to your people?**

This is a challenge for leaders at any time but becomes acute when one crisis follows another. When team members are feeling fearful about the future, how can you respond in a way that still delivers the results that others expect of you?

**If your natural style leans towards getting the task done, and moving immediately to the next task, there is a risk that people experience you as some sort of machine. Might you:**

- Ensure your communications acknowledge people's feelings
- Share something of your own feelings or experiences
- Signpost sources of emotional support, and ways of protecting resilience
- Encourage confidence and grounded optimism about the future
- Keep thanking people for what they are doing and remind them why it is worthwhile
- Invite a colleague to spot when you risk forgetting people's needs.

**If your natural style gives priority to harmony and to people's feelings, might you:**

- Remind yourself that empathetic leaders still need to provide direction and structure
- Accept that others need you to make decisions and you can't always please everyone
- Use your empathy to mobilise people round a shared sense of purpose
- Recognise that people benefit in uncertain times from having a goal to focus on
- Signpost sources of pastoral support rather than take it all on yourself
- Invite a colleague to spot when you risk losing sight of your role.

It's worth remembering that your team members will have a mix of default styles between them. Some will find security in concise, logical communications. Others need evidence of compassionate leadership, and recognition of shared vulnerability. Leaders are always adapting their approach to the situation and to their audience, but we all have our default. It can help to run your ideas past someone with the opposite style to yours.

## 4. Overcoming mistakes

### How do you handle a risk to your confidence or reputation following a decision or action that has not worked out as you had hoped?

Might your default style be to stick by your initial judgement, whatever the warning bells? Might you find yourself so uneasy that it's hard to think about possible routes forward? Or might you examine so many options that you can't make a landing?

The reality for all leaders in public and corporate life is that their judgements and behaviours are scrutinised intently. There can be a temptation to stick with a position for fear of looking weak. The awareness of being watched can make it hard to stand back and review the situation objectively.

### Leaders have told us that on such occasions they feel a personal responsibility to:

- Acknowledge mistakes early,
- Take a dispassionate view of new evidence
- Grip difficult issues in the moment and not keep putting them off,
- Be mindful of their own default behaviours and ready to seek help when they feel stuck.

### Where mistakes have happened and reputations have been damaged, we observe that leaders who cope best:

- Draw on a support network to help them keep things in perspective,
- Make time with their teams to reflect and learn, and chart a way forward,
- Develop a personal and team narrative that enables the learning to be acknowledged, and discourages endless recriminations,
- Remind themselves of the values and behaviours that they wish to be judged by
- Keep everyone focussed on outcomes and why they matter.

Leaders are forever needing to adapt their approach in the light of events. The learning can be painful when it challenges their way of looking at the world, yet it strengthens their resilience to future setbacks, provided they feel they have stayed true to their guiding values.

## 5. Managing difficult conversations

### If you face a difficult conversation with a colleague, is your instinct to get straight to the point, or do you craft your message to avoid a strong reaction from them?

Our default styles in this respect can be strongly influenced by upbringing and culture, as well as by personality. Perhaps you learned early on that disagreements need to be confronted, whatever the fall-out, or did you make your way in the world by seeking to accommodate others?

It's valuable to be aware of your default approach in difficult conversations and how it can be driven by your emotional make-up. It can help to stand back and ask yourself if this approach will always get the result you need.

### Leaders whose instinct is to be blunt have told us they learned to:

- Find out where the other person is coming from and what could motivate them to receive the message positively
- Ask for, and listen to, their perspective. Show respect for them as a human being.
- Avoid taking a fixed position and accept that compromise is sometimes needed
- Recognise that directness can sometimes be received as intimidating

- Stay calm when things get emotional and avoid retaliating.

### Leaders whose instinct is to be accommodating have learned to:

- Go into the conversation being clear about what the team or the organisation needs them to achieve – so that satisfying the wider purpose becomes more important than appeasing an individual
- Imagine how someone with a more direct style would handle the conversation – could that approach be appropriate in these circumstances, with this person?
- Have strategies for staying calm in response to an unexpected personal attack
- Be ready to press the pause button if a break would help the conversation.

If time allows, leaders tell us it helps to rehearse a challenging conversation with a trusted colleague – as long as that doesn't mean they keep putting it off. Delay can lead to escalation, and an even harder conversation further down the track.

## 6. Recognising your derailers

### What can derail you and stop you from being your best self? How well do you understand others' derailers as well as your own?

When we are under pressure, we can find ourselves defaulting to behaviours that we normally try to keep in check. The same can be true when we are bored and lacking motivation. Different people have different derailers, just as they have different strengths.

#### Derailers can include:

- Overplaying strengths
- Obsessing about the exact way that something should be done
- Becoming autocratic and refusing to listen to others
- Being abrupt and sharp with others if events do not go your way
- Seeing threats where they don't exist
- Withdrawing and not engaging
- Becoming too anxious to please
- Feeling unable to make decisions.

The first step in managing your derailers is to be aware of them, and ideally to have a conversation with others about what they notice.

Look for clues about events or behaviours that can trigger you. You might even want to stick these on the wall as a reminder, and add notes on what helps you to get back to equilibrium. It might be sleep, or music or exercise, or talking to a friend: what normally works for you?

#### When you are triggered in the moment, you might:

- Breathe deeply and give yourself time to think before reacting
- Check your body language and tone of voice
- Remember what strategies have worked well for you in the past
- Seek the perspectives of trusted others
- Look for opportunities in every adverse event
- Ask yourself how important the issue is in the great scheme of things: will it 'blow over' or is it more significant?

Above all, be mindful when you might be the cause of others becoming derailed. They will have bad days too when they need your understanding and patience.

## 7. Using a coaching style

**Could you use a coaching style more often?** Coaching can improve people's contribution, boost team performance, and ultimately take some of the pressure off you. It takes time and energy upfront, but who do you remember with gratitude, the managers who helped you develop, or the ones who left you to sink or swim?

**A coaching approach is not always appropriate.** In an emergency, everyone needs to follow instructions. In a case of totally unsatisfactory performance or poor behaviour, decisive action may be needed, rather than hoping that coaching will resolve the situation. But coaching is usually a good place to start.

Adopting a coaching style requires a leader to stand back from any personal reaction to an individual and remember that most people come to work wanting to do their best.

#### Try asking yourself:

- Am I providing enough clarity about the work to be done, the outcome that's needed, and the timeframe for next steps?
- Am I giving them space to explain what support they may need and what may be holding them back?

- What type of approach will work best for this person's personality? Does it help them to have written guidance to take away, or a diagram?
- How can I give feedback in a way that they can receive it?
- Do I know what motivates them? For example, if they are ambitious for promotion, can I explain how addressing this challenge will help them?

**Coaching is most effective when you are genuinely curious** about the other person and what would help them be at their best. It helps if you:

- Use open questions and allow the person time to think before they reply
- Listen carefully and build on what they say
- Check you have a shared understanding of what happens next
- Encourage them to draw on their previous experiences and to be confident they can do what's needed.





## B. Using authority well

### 8. Authority: How do we use it?

**How can you use your authority to best effect?** Being a leader gives you authority, and the right and responsibility to make decisions. Respect for your authority has to be earned. It does not automatically bring influence, followership, or even compliance.

Where a leader relies on **direct authority** to get things done, we encourage them to remember that:

- Most adults don't like being told what to do all the time. They want to learn and grow, and feel they have some control over their lives
- By delegating authority, leaders empower their teams to develop their own decision-making skills, and to use their own judgement on when to ask for help
- Strong team leadership creates followers out of free choice. It builds a trusting environment where people work creatively together on the challenges
- An over-controlling leader is unlikely to find time for the things that only the leader can do.

Some leaders can **underestimate the authority they bring to a role**. It is worth remembering that:

- You were appointed because of the knowledge, experience and track record that you bring. Your **reputational authority** conveys a right to be at the table
- Your role and expertise give you **convening authority** to bring others together to build understanding and work on shared problems
- **Relationship authority** can be far more influential than the formal exercise of power. When you work to understand where others are coming from, they are more likely to be influenced by your perspective, and accept your lead
- Authority can be **shared across a team** as a consequence of building alliances
- A surprising amount of authority can flow from **how you show up**, and whether **your body language and voice encourage others to listen to you**.

Authority comes in many forms. In the next three prompts we explore convening authority, relationship authority and how you 'show up' as someone with authority.

## 9. Convening authority: when can you use it?

### When have you brought people together with an outcome that was better than you had hoped?

We can underestimate people's willingness to respond when we bring different interests together to identify a shared way forward.

### We observe that those who use their convening influence well

- Have built trust with those they seek to bring together
- Are clear about the reasons for the discussions
- Create a context where individuals do not feel threatened or manipulated
- Seek to pace the engagement so that individuals feel heard
- Summarise points made and progress achieved at regular intervals
- Enable difficult issues to be explored in as dispassionate a way as possible
- Ensure that controversial aspects are covered at an appropriate time and are not ignored
- Recognise when a discussion has begun to be counterproductive and needs to be steered or concluded.

- Build support from colleagues in advance about the merits of a discussion and follow up afterwards

### It is worth remembering that

- Colleagues may be more receptive than you think to your convening a discussion or suggesting a dialogue. If they are not receptive you will have 'sown a seed' about the need for dialogue
- Clearly communicating in advance why a discussion is needed is key to success
- You do not need to be the chair to be summarising progress and suggesting ways forward
- An initial meeting that does not seem to have made a lot of progress will still set people thinking and often leads to subsequent progress
- The engagement may ideally be face to face, but well-structured virtual engagements are often better than long delays while an issue festers or is unresolved.

When we encourage people to use convening authority they are often pleasantly surprised at the results. We encourage you to think about where you might deploy convening authority to good effect.

## 10. Relationship authority: how can you use it?

### Relationship authority can often be more influential than the formal exercise of power.

A formal leader may get compliance with their instructions, but if their followers don't feel personally engaged and heard, they may look for an early opportunity to change leaders.

The informal leader of a network may have few people directly under their control, yet exercise huge influence because others trust their lead to coordinate activity and take good decisions.

In a high-level negotiation, it may be the formal leader who signs the contract, but first they need deputies who develop trust and work out mutually acceptable outcomes with their opposite numbers.

### To build your relationship authority, you might:

- Find out where others are coming from, what they care about, and what success looks like for them
- Look for ways that you can help them achieve their objectives, without compromising your own

- Be curious about their personality and what type of approach will get or lose their attention. Do they respond best if they see something in writing before a discussion, or are they never likely to read what you send? Do they expect a lot of detail or switch off after the headlines?

### It pays to build trusting relationships with key people before you need to make big requests of them. For example:

- Where you rely on a team or network, can you use 1-1 s and group sessions to get to know how they tick and to build confidence in a shared purpose?
- Where you have key stakeholders, can you find an opportunity to introduce yourself early in the relationship, and gain insight from others who know them?
- If there are multiple relationships to build, can you share responsibility for them across your team?

Relationship authority could be your greatest asset if you work on it.

## 11. Authority: how do I 'show up'?

**How do others respond to your presence?** How we 'show up' can affect the dynamics and emotions in a meeting, whether it is in person or virtual.

**When we enter a room and engage in discussion do others:**

- Welcome our presence?
- Have confidence that we will listen and engage constructively?
- Trust our contributions?
- See us as forward looking and not stuck in the past?
- Believe we will focus on solutions rather than admiring problems?

**We observe that leaders who bring authoritative influence:**

- Are fully present and avoid being distracted
- See the presenting issue as part of a bigger picture
- Are calm and measured in their contributions
- Are dispassionate in ensuring a problem is assessed from various perspectives
- Allow time and space for others to reflect and contribute
- Don't rush at decisions, while being clear on the timescales that need to be met

- Understand how to handle the emotional dynamics in the room
- Give confidence that a solution can be found.

**If you are not the most senior person in the room you can still carry authority:**

- Remember you are in your role for a reason and others want to hear from you
- Prepare so that you have something useful to say or a question to ask
- Position yourself where others can hear and see you
- Observe how others carry authority in the room
- Try speaking more slowly and deliberately than usual
- Wear or carry something that reminds you of your most confident self.

How we convey authority depends on the way we show up physically, emotionally and mentally. You can energise a discussion, or stifle a productive engagement, by how you interact with others. Hierarchy can be less important than the value of your contribution and the way that you make it. Can you experiment with how you 'show up'?

## C. Handling uncertainty

## 12. Handling escalating uncertainty

**How can you best lead through uncertain times, and see the opportunities as well as the threats?** Human beings crave certainty in their lives but it is rarely possible, and change is a part of life. Whilst over-optimism can lead to disappointment, a grounded and positive outlook is proven to help our mental wellbeing. Besides, it is at the times of greatest change that breakthrough innovations happen.

What can help you maintain your own equilibrium and give others confidence in your leadership?

**In our coaching conversations we notice that leaders who handle uncertainty well**

- Have a sense of purpose in their work and know what refreshes that purpose
- Talk with trusted others to help ensure their perspective is grounded in facts
- Are deliberate in thinking through risks and potential mitigations
- Concentrate on the things they can do to make a difference, and accept that some external events are outside their control
- Keep engaged in life outside work, however intense the pressure is in work

- Recognise when their resilience is stretched and take preemptive action
- Are mindful of the effect of their approach and emotions on those around them

**Might it be helpful to ask yourself:**

- Do I need to engage anew with my teams and colleagues about the way we handle escalating uncertainties, recognising this is about emotions as well as analysis?
- Am I reinforcing our sense of purpose, whilst being honest about current realities?
- Can I give everyone a sense that they are part of the solution to our challenges?
- Can I ensure that people who see opportunities get the space to bring them to the table?
- Could we support each other more as colleagues, to reduce the impact on our families?

When the pace is on it is even more important to take time to reflect and bring grounded optimism that you will get through this, however long it takes.

## 13. Where can you find fresh energy?

**Many of our coaching conversations are about how to find fresh energies for the challenges ahead.** Can you find a quiet moment to reflect on what sustains you, and what resources you have within you?

**What sustains you?**

Might you keep a list of the things that give you joy, or bring a sense of purpose to your life? If you put the list somewhere where you can see it, you may find it helps you to connect with what you really care about, especially when you feel drained. Examples we often hear include:

- Doing work that makes a difference in the world
- Experiencing the thrill of discovering new ideas or connections
- Basking in the company of the people who matter most to you
- Feeling a strong connection to the natural world and/or doing physical exercise
- Feeling confident in a spiritual dimension to your lives.

**What resources do you have within you, that allow you to face new challenges?**

We all know the feeling of going into work with a plan for the week, to find it is thrown into disarray by events. Seasoned leaders know that even if a situation is outside of their control, they can choose how they react to it, and resist being constrained by their stock response.

It can help to imagine a typical interruption to your day's work and write down the different ways you are likely to respond, emotionally as well as practically. You could then explore questions like:

- Who do I know who would respond differently in this situation? Is there anything to be said for trying their approach?
- Have there been times in my life when I have used a response outside of my habitual range? What happened?
- What different response could I experiment with in this situation, and what stops me from trying it?

These questions can be particularly helpful when you feel unable to make headway with another colleague or organization. Can you access a dormant part of you that would open up new possibilities? We all have more resources within us, if we can tap into them.

## 14. Stick or twist

**Leaders we work with are frequently faced with decisions about when to stick with their original plan and when to adjust their approach.** Often they face vociferous challenge and begin to doubt themselves. A fresh assessment of the evidence, and reference to their values, may strengthen their resolve to hold the line. Alternatively, it may lead to a change of course which needs to be carefully explained.

**What can help you decide when to stick with your original intent and when to adapt? Maybe these questions are useful?**

- Is there significant new evidence or information?
- Has the balance of support from key players changed?
- Are the long term consequences better or worse if the approach is changed?
- What is the perspective of trusted others?
- Might pride be holding me back from changing my view?
- Is there a risk that I bow to pressure and the loudest voices?
- What would be consistent with my values?

**Once you have made your decision, it is worth reminding yourself that:**

- Ruminating about past decisions will exhaust you and cloud your perspective on the future. Allow yourself to do what's necessary, then seek to move on without regrets.
- You cannot go back into the past and change what happened, but you can be deliberate in the way you look forward and see possibilities
- You may be clear in your own mind about the reasons for your decision, but others may interpret it in different ways. Engaging their commitment may be as important as the decision itself.

We take a view each morning about how we approach the decisions we take that day. We are often under pressure to make a quick judgement call. Key is being honest with ourselves and others about why we have held our line, or why we have decided to change our approach.

## 15. Effective feedback needs clarity and care

**Why is it so hard to give and receive feedback in a way that leads to positive results?**

Feedback is an integral part of our lives, whether at work, in education or in personal relationships – and it can be difficult to get it right.

Different personalities react to feedback in different ways – and everyone has an emotional reaction before their rational brain kicks in. The reaction might be surprise or anger, or it might be a deep sense of inadequacy. You might just think it's easier not to give feedback – but then the other person would be justified in saying that nobody ever told them what they needed to know.

Feedback is most effective when a person receives it as an opportunity to grow, or to leave old habits behind, rather than as a fixed verdict on their worth as a person.

**Questions leaders ask themselves before offering feedback on performance include:**

- Am I showing care for this person and their future when I offer feedback?
- Based on the evidence, can I offer advice and support on next steps?
- What is the language that works

best with this person, so they can receive constructively what I am trying to say? How can I tap into what motivates them?

**If feedback is about behaviours and relationships, is it worth asking yourself:**

- What is my motivation in raising this? Is there a genuine point to be made or am I offloading my own emotions? Should I wait until I feel calmer?
- If I get an emotional response to the feedback, can I keep my own reactions under control and focus on helping the other person to hear me?
- Will my body language suggest active listening and a desire to understand?
- How do I allow them enough space to reflect – possibly with some time-outs?
- Can we agree on a shared purpose, such as team success, that is important enough for us both to start a dialogue about what needs to change?
- Am I ready to take feedback on what I could do differently?

You can't change another person. You can only create a context where they want to change something about themselves.

## 16. Learning from what goes wrong

**What helps you handle situations when things go wrong, or events seem to conspire against you?** You may feel a mix of disappointment, frustration, and resentment. Your confidence in your own judgement can take a dip. What matters is how you respond.

**We observe that leaders who handle such situations well:**

- Accept that 'stuff happens' and that it doesn't help to dwell on what might have been
- Remember that no senior leader anywhere can expect a career without setbacks
- Draw parallels from other spheres such as sport where success and failure happen in rapid succession
- Recognise that many events are outside their control, and life is not always fair
- Know how they best reflect on an event, act on the learning, and regroup
- Have trusted others with whom they can work through their emotions
- Draw out one or two learning points from each adverse event

**Approaches that might be helpful can include:**

- Assume there will be maybe four setbacks each week and that if only two things have gone wrong it has been a good week
- Draw from the experience of scientists who might do hundreds of 'failed' experiments before finding a method that works
- Talk with others about what they have learned from mistakes and how they have internalised their learning and moved on
- Be ready to take responsibility for mistakes, but resist beating yourself up for things that were outside of your control
- Remind yourself of what has gone well, and remember to mark progress with your team
- Observe when you are at risk of taking things personally and know how you best protect yourself.

Key is how we keep disappointments, setbacks and mistakes in proportion. Remember what makes you smile and what gives you fresh energy. The best of leaders have learned hugely from apparent failures and intense disappointments. They draw from their mistakes as much as from their successes.



### D. Managing the chatter in our heads

## 17. Taming your inner critic

**How confident are you feeling about facing the challenges of the coming months? If you have doubts, where are these most likely to come from?**

Many of our coaching clients talk about their inner critic raising far more doubts than any external source. They may view their inner critic as a positive force that has helped them scale great heights. But this comes at a price if the critic is never satisfied. Constant self-criticism can feed self-doubt and insecurity, which holds us back from being at our best.

As you gear up for the next challenge, might you reflect on the following questions, perhaps noting down your answers, and periodically re-reading them?

**Notice what's happening...**

- What would an observer say if they heard you and your inner critic talking out loud to each other? Would they give your critic as much credence as you do?
- Do you show to yourself as much compassion and kindness in living with your imperfections as you seek to show to others?

- Is there someone in your past who is exerting a critical influence that you no longer need?

**...And decide on ways to respond**

- How have you tamed your inner critic in the past, or held it at bay?
- What helps you step away and regroup if the voice of the inner critic grows too loud?
- How might you limit your time ruminating about the past, since you can't now change it?
- Who can you share experiences with - since you are definitely not alone in having an inner critic to deal with?

None of this is easy. Brain patterns forged over many years can't be broken in an instant. But with practice we can choose how we relate to the constant chatter in our heads - and there are tools and resources we can signpost you to.

## 18. Staying resilient to setbacks

**How best do you manage your reaction to setbacks?** What is the story you tell yourself when events seem to derail you? Is your instinct to blame yourself or others, and does that serve any useful purpose?

A theme in our coaching conversations is keeping a positive mindset when things go wrong and self-confidence can be undermined. It can help to stand back and reflect on the learning from an experience, put events into perspective, and lighten the weight of responsibility you may be feeling. It might be worth pausing and:

**Reflecting on your experience...**

- When has a setback forced me to open my eyes to different opportunities?
- Which setbacks have been defining moments in helping to develop my resilience?
- How have setbacks shaped the way I balance boldness with realism?
- Do I still dwell on setbacks which are no longer relevant to my life - and can I let them go now?
- Might I share more about my response to setbacks with others who look to me for a lead?

**Being deliberate in looking forward...**

- What potential setbacks can I avoid through thoughtful preparation?
- Does too much depend on my personal leadership, and if so, how can I develop others so they share my thinking and know how to act in my absence?
- Can I smile more at the roller coaster of life, where ups and downs are inevitable and are soon overtaken by other events?
- How do I create recovery time and space when a setback knocks my confidence? Can I accept that this is not selfish and others need me to look after myself?

We can sabotage ourselves by self-talk that escalates our fears and apparent failures. Looking through a different lens can allow us to reframe setbacks as the most formative influences on our life journey.

## 19. Valuing your strengths

**Do you find it uncomfortable to articulate your strengths to yourself and to others?** Is it easier for you to describe what you see as your limitations? Could your description of your strengths be outdated, and fail to take account of how you have developed your impact in recent times?

We all aspire to keep developing, but there is a risk of downplaying the ways we add value. Reluctance to value and apply our strengths comes up most commonly in coaching conversations about pitching for a new role, or a promotion, but it is also relevant when it comes to influencing other key players. If they are not aware of your contribution, they may not view your perspective with the seriousness that it deserves.

### **We encourage leaders to:**

- Write down the strengths that they bring to their work, including the strengths they may overlook because these come easily to them. False modesty is forbidden!
- Remind themselves of what their greatest fans would say, and maybe ask a trusted friend to critique their list

- Gather examples of where they have used their strengths to achieve tangible outcomes
- Draw on their strengths, and the help of their allies, to address their development areas

### **Leaders have often found it helpful to:**

- Ensure that their narrative about their strengths is up to date, in terms of their influence and impact.
- Ask themselves questions such as “What would have happened, or not happened, if I had not been there? “and “What am I most proud of?”
- Ask themselves whether others are aware of their strengths
- Remind themselves that nobody is perfect, and that’s OK.

Many of us have an enduring message from childhood about not boasting or blowing our own trumpet. If that is true for you, there is little risk of you being perceived as arrogant or egotistical when you turn up the dial a bit.

## 20. What are we avoiding?

**Are you an expert in finding ingenious ways to avoid difficult issues?** Deliberately pausing to think a problem through and to check the quality of the supporting evidence helps bring perspective. But there comes a moment when the nettle must be grasped.

Facing into an issue can take courage when we imagine all the things that could go wrong, or the resistance we may meet. **A key question then is: “What could be the consequence of not acting? Might they be worse?”**

### **We encourage leaders to:**

- Name the top three issues they keep putting on one side
- Reflect on the reasons why some important matters never get above the line in the ‘to do’ list
- Question whether those reasons stand up to scrutiny: what would they say to an independent reviewer?
- Speak about or write down what is holding them back, and explore what could free them up to move forward
- Recall how they have faced into difficult decisions or conversations in the past

### **Leaders have often found it helpful to:**

- Seek the perspective of trusted colleagues about what they appear to be avoiding
- Deliberately set aside a time and location when they focus on issues they have been avoiding
- Reward themselves when they begin to make progress with a difficult issue, by doing something they enjoy as a counterbalance
- Recognise they are not alone in their hesitations and that beating themselves up doesn’t help anyone

It can often help to ask yourself what the holder of this role should be saying and doing – or what an admired leader with a different style might do? How would they recognise the difference between judicious delay and unhelpful avoidance? How would they balance the different voices in their head?



## 21. Self-talk affects others too

### **If you sometimes find it hard to manage the chatter in your head, might that be true for others as well?**

Leaders can be held back by their own self-doubt or self-criticism yet forget that other people may be wrestling with similar feelings. Venting or dismissive language from others could be hiding their insecurity. Defensiveness or a refusal to engage might stem from their fear of criticism or conflict.

An irritable reception to your presentation to senior colleagues might be nothing to do with you and simply reflect that they have had a difficult day. If you knew that others were dealing with a strong internal dialogue, would that influence how you react to them?

### **To increase the chances of a productive conversation with another person, might you:**

- Use positive body language,
- Build trust by asking questions that show a genuine interest in where the other person is coming from,
- Listen carefully to what they say and explore what might be unsaid,

- Show you can be open about your own thoughts and feelings when you encourage them to be open with theirs,
- Show that you value them and that any disagreement is about the issue. It's not a criticism of them as a person.

### **If you can stay calm and manage your own emotions, there is a better prospect that you will:**

- Create an atmosphere of mutual respect,
- Find out what they need for you both to move forward,
- Move to a focus on solutions rather than problems,
- Identify next actions that you can both sign up to,
- Better understand each other's emotional triggers ahead of future conversations.

As for the presentation to senior colleagues, stay calm and see if you can help them feel better about their day!

## 22. Managing the chatter in your head: next steps

### **Looking ahead, what will be the dominant voices in your head?**

How might you calm feelings of exhaustion or frustration? What encourages you and gives you hope about the future?

In these reflections about managing the negative chatter in our heads, we have considered how we might: tame our inner critic, stay resilient to setbacks, value our strengths, be conscious of what we are avoiding, and recognise that self-talk affects other too.


### **Themes that have resonated with leaders when reflecting on these themes have included:**

- How might I show to myself the compassion and kindness that I seek to bring to others?
- There is little point in ruminating about past events that cannot now be changed.
- Apparent setbacks can turn out to have built my resilience and longer-term contribution
- When I write down my strengths, do I notice that my inner critic gives undue emphasis to my weaknesses? I would not accept that from a friend so why accept it from myself?

- There is value in facing into difficult situations rather than letting my anxiety get the better of me.

### **Looking to the future we encourage leaders to:**

- Seek to move on from anguish or disappointment
- Ask themselves whether a sense of relentless expectation comes from within as much as from the outside world, and whether it has to be that way
- Park uncertainties about work and create opportunities which allow their batteries to recharge
- Cherish the gift of good relationships, searching out the people who make them smile, and bringing smiles to the faces of others
- Look to the future with a degree of hope, seeing opportunities in even the toughest situations
- Anticipate the positive influence they can have, and how that will feel.



## E. Creating a sustainable future

### 23. Listening is an art

**When working at top speed, and switching between meetings, is there a risk you miss key insights?**  
Have you sometimes looked back on a project and wished you had listened more actively to what others were trying to tell you?

Listening is an art. It is about giving our attention to what someone else is trying to articulate. It makes us better informed; it leads to more trusting and effective relationships; and it is sometimes the key ingredient for a project's success.

**When you want to influence stakeholders might it help to:**

- Be curious about why they think as they do, and where your interests could be aligned
- Use open questions to explore what they care about, and ask for clarification rather than assuming you know what they mean
- Focus your attention on what you are learning from the other person, rather than what you are going to say next
- Be aware of your emotional reactions to others' body language or tone of voice, and then consciously set those reactions aside so you can listen calmly

- Remember that someone who feels listened to is more likely to listen back.

**When seeking to draw the best from your teams:**

- Don't make a show of listening, then press on regardless
- If you ask a question, give the person time to think before they reply. Avoid the temptation to fill a silence with another question.
- Try the question: "What should I be asking you about this, and haven't?"
- Listen for meaning, and with a genuine desire to understand
- Remember that innovation flourishes best where people know they will be heard.
- Coach everyone to listen to each other and leave fixed views behind.

We know a leader who worked in another language for a year. When he returned to the UK, he recruited one of the managers from the other country to join his team. This person noted that the leader had been a better listener when he was working in his second language, and people had felt more motivated to deliver for him.

## 24. See the wood for the trees

**Do you worry about how to help your teams to navigate multiple interconnected challenges, when you are not sure of the way forward yourself?**

**Seeing the wood for the trees** is a consistent theme in helping our clients to identify where they and their teams can make the most difference. One way of breaking down the question is to ask yourselves:

### **As an individual:**

- What is it that must be done and can only be done by me?
- Am I prioritizing what matters most, or am I letting the urgent drive out the important?
- Is there a risk that I do the things that could be delegated or dropped, simply because they are easier to clear?
- What can I influence that is within my control, and how important is it?
- How do my priorities match the time allocations in my calendar?
- How do I give others a sense of direction and priorities, and then help them to adjust if the environment changes?

- Am I remembering to surface how others are feeling and finding out what they need to do their jobs well?

### **As a team**

- What is it that must be done and can only be done by us acting jointly?
- Are we spending our time together in a way that reflects our priorities?
- What is most likely to stall our momentum and how do we avoid that happening?
- How do we ensure we devote enough time and energy to the longer-term questions?
- Have we got a coherent approach to our key stakeholders?
- Are we remembering to celebrate our achievements, whilst staying focused on the goal?

We know that the answers are not easy, and that they may keep changing, but recording your collective thoughts in writing or diagrams is a great way of focusing minds on where to go next.

## 25. Connect with each link on the chain

**As a leader, you recognise the importance of building connections with the work of others inside and outside your organisation.** But the complexity of a constantly changing environment can feel relentless.

There may be a temptation to keep your head down and focus exclusively on the task or team in front of you, even though you know that will risk unintended consequences elsewhere. What might help build investment in a joined-up approach, however difficult it may be and whatever the time pressures?

**How best do we connect with each link in the chain? As individuals and teams, it can be helpful to reflect on questions like:**

- Could we describe clearly to a newcomer, how our work fits within a wider system, who the key players are, and where the interdependencies lie?
- How well are we working with those other players to understand how the overall system works for them, and what we need to do together to make it work better?

- What are the consequences for clients, customers or shareholders if we do not work together?
- What are the barriers to collaboration and how can we best overcome them?
- Are we prepared to give up resources or control if the wider system needs it to deliver shared objectives?
- How best do we role-model joined-up thinking and action to others?
- What is the shift we each need to make in our mindsets and behaviours to enable us to fully appreciate and support every link in the chain?

Systems thinking is hard – but we can all look around us and see the consequences where interdependent entities have not engaged with each other.

## 26. Which fires do I put out

**Many of our coaching conversations at times of major change or disruption are with people feeling pushed to their limits, whether in their work, their home lives, or both.** Leaders worry about the wellbeing of their teams and feel they can't show their own vulnerability. Team members notice they can be easily upset by words or actions from others that they would normally take in their stride.

At the same time, we see a huge shared commitment to doing the right thing and not letting the team down. People are proud of the difference they are making. They want to be able to look back and say they were part of something big and worthwhile.

There are no easy solutions that work for everyone – but might it be useful to know some of the approaches that people tell us can help. Could one or two of them work for you?

### As an individual, might you:

- Stand back and ask yourself: which are the fires I must put out, and which fires must be left to burn
- Resist beating yourself up when things go wrong: take the learning and concentrate on tackling the new reality

- Identify the signs of stress in your body or behaviours, and know which strategies help you return to your best self
- Find someone you can talk to about how you feel. If you worry about burdening them, say you don't need solutions, just a listening ear
- Recognise that the leader's emotions are contagious. Calmness inspires confidence – and admitting vulnerability can make it OK for others to admit what they are experiencing.

### As a team, might you

- Keep reminding yourselves of what really matters over the longer term
- Look for the opportunities, as well as the risks
- Stay focussed on the things that must be done and can only be done by this team working together
- Show curiosity about where partners and stakeholders are coming from, and what is most likely to influence their behaviours
- Avoid letting every meeting become transactional. Set time aside for the human connection and for moments that help you smile.

## 27. Capture the genius of your people

**Many leaders talk about colleagues who have stepped up impressively to the challenges of leading through uncertain times.**

They have gripped opportunities to contribute their ideas. They have taken responsibilities forward with energy and verve. They have relished the scope to try new approaches. They have been a catalyst for constructive dialogue about making progress amidst uncertainty.

You will have seen innovation all around you, despite the heavy demands on professional and personal lives. How can you now help your colleagues to crystallise their learning, and to use the stimulus of new ideas to refresh their energies? What might be needed to capture the genius of your people as they move into their next challenges?

**As individuals and teams might it be helpful to reflect on questions like:**

- Who has developed our confidence and contribution far beyond our expectations?

- How best do we affirm those individuals and teams who have grown their impact in tough circumstances?
- What do we now observe as latent qualities in people whose talents and potential we had not fully recognised before? How do we help them to grow further?
- Who has contributed well to finding innovative solutions and how can we back their judgment and draw out their creative gifts?
- Where people have struggled to realise their full potential, have we explored what would help them, including perhaps a change of role?
- How best do we acknowledge the pain that people have gone through and the personal sacrifices they have often made?

Finally, it must be a high priority to work out how each person can get the recovery time they need to keep contributing at their best.

## 28. Stay calm amidst the storm

**The last few years may have felt like a long dark period. There may be 'green shoots' or reasons for optimism but leaders know there is still much they must ask of their teams.** Many coaching conversations are about inspiring confidence that goals can still be met and setbacks overcome.

### **Resilient leaders say they seek to:**

- Share their humanity with their people, but not their anxiety
- Keep everyone focussed on the things that absolutely must be done, and drop or delegate second order issues or sideshows
- Give steers to functional experts, and then let them get on with delivering
- Project a positive attitude in the toughest situations, whilst staying realistic about what is possible
- Remind themselves that anything they say or do will echo quickly round the organisation, so it had better reinforce the key messages and not undermine them.

### **Might it be helpful for you and your team to ask yourselves how best to:**

- Stay calm amidst the storm
- Draw on all the talents amongst us so we balance a bias to action with a pause for reflection
- Provide each other with a safe space to express our feelings, and to ask for help when we need it
- Notice any escalation of tensions between us, and then manage potentially conflicting emotions sensitively
- Enable people to believe us when we say that mistakes are a prompt for learning, not recrimination.

The calmest leaders we know tend to be the ones who have survived a crisis or hard times before. Encouraging them to tell their story to others can itself inspire confidence for the future.

## 29. Float like a butterfly and sting like a bee

**We notice in our coaching conversations that leaders and teams are exploring what they have learned about agility, and the insights that will help them to address future challenges in a different way.**

We sometimes use a metaphor to convey the idea of staying flexible, yet knowing when to take decisive action. We explore:

### **How might we float like a butterfly...**

- What agile ways of working are now embedded in our mindset and approach, and how do we sustain them?
- What are we learning from the way that others respond to a fast-changing context, even if their sector is very different to ours?
- What trends are we observing in the wider world, and how best do we respond to the opportunities they bring?
- Are we actively seeking to increase diversity of thinking and outlook within our teams?

- What are our next steps in furthering our understanding of enabling technologies and how they can serve us?
- Has there been an irreversible shift in the way we view our world and how we seek to influence it. If not, should there be?

### **... And sting like a bee**

- When is it important to seize the moment and act fast, whatever the uncertainties?
- What might be getting in the way of us acting decisively when we know we should not procrastinate further?
- How do we ensure that hybrid working enhances and does not dilute our ability to act quickly when the situation requires?

Agility and decisiveness both require clarity of thinking, a learning mindset, and the ability to stand back and see what really matters.

### 30. Weave the golden thread of trust

**Trust - and how to sustain it - is the theme that runs through all of our conversations with leaders and their teams.** Trust is the golden thread that holds people together and allows energy to flow.

Mistrust slows everything down and distracts from a team's goals. In teams that are working well, people trust each other enough to put mistrust on the table, and give each other the benefit of the doubt when things go wrong.

Virtual or hybrid working carries the risk that less thought is given to developing trust. Meetings can become transactional with human connection lost. We observe leaders making a conscious effort to find out where others are coming from, and to spot misunderstandings arising from different personality preferences or cultures. Time invested upfront can save the need for intervention later.

**As leaders, might you reflect on how you:**

- Give people confidence that you will do what you say you will do

- Trust them in turn to do what they are good at, and to ask for your help if they need it
- Create an atmosphere where people talk freely about the “how” as well as the “what”
- Frame questions to enable tensions and anxieties to be surfaced and addressed

**In addition might you**

- Listen in a way that demonstrates intent to understand, and recognize that enabling someone to work through an issue is often more helpful than bringing solutions
- Encourage honest conversations which help everyone to learn from setbacks, and then move on, with a deeper shared understanding
- Acknowledge how past leadership behaviours may have contributed to mistrust, and that trust needs work from everyone.

### 31. What metaphors catch your imagination?

**Metaphors can stimulate our imagination and prompt us to look at things with a fresh perspective.**

What metaphors might ring true for you? Might a metaphor stretch your thinking about your approach to future challenges, and help you focus on where you can most make a difference?

Our booklet ‘Leading for the long term: creating a sustainable future’ was based around six metaphors. ‘See the wood for the trees’ and ‘Stay calm amidst the storm’ were the two that had particular resonance for our clients during tough periods.


**Coaching conversations with leaders and teams have also regularly returned to metaphors such as:**

- Put the rocks in the jar before you let any pebbles or sand go in
- Move off the dance floor so you can observe from the balcony
- Bottle the positives
- Look for the light at the end of the tunnel.
- Pace yourselves for a marathon, not a sprint
- Be conscious of the shadow you cast as a leader.

**Might it be helpful to reflect on:**

- What metaphors do you notice others are using? Can these give you clues and new insights into their personality and approach? For example, if they use sporting metaphors, are these about the solo effort or the team?
- Could you or they be using metaphors that unwittingly exclude team members who are not familiar with the context? If you still want to use these metaphors how do you ensure that their meaning is clear to all?
- What activities could be common to everyone in a team and provide parallels or metaphors relevant to their work context?

You may have one set of metaphors that you share with your teams, and another set that work for you personally and help to keep you grounded.



## F. Looking after your resilience

### 32. Rescue, repair and renewal

**During a very disruptive crisis or a major change we observe teams going through phases of rescue, repair and renewal.** When we notice these recurring themes we invite clients to stand back for a moment and reflect on their longer term direction.

We offer the following questions as prompts to ask yourself, or for use in mentoring or team discussions.

- What have I learned about my leadership in the last few weeks?
- What have I observed about individuals who are rising to the challenge, and how do I encourage their further development?
- How best do I check in with and help those who might be struggling?
- What are we learning as a team, both from miss-steps and successes, and how best do we embed that learning?

#### As you look forward

- What breakthroughs are we making in ways of working, and what past habits and practices do we now want to leave behind?

- How do we ensure continuing strong levels of communication and connectivity within teams and our organisation?
- How can we make time to define what future success might look like, in terms of delivery, behaviours and values?
- What is most likely to stall our momentum, and how do we avoid that happening?

**For some leaders describing the phases as Rescue, Repair and Renewal has provided a useful framework. For others, words like Recovery, Recalibration or Reconstruction have encapsulated a forward direction.**

What can help is to focus on one or two concepts which sum up what you are seeking to achieve and then to build a shared narrative about how best you jointly move towards that aspiration.

### 33. Handling emotional turbulence

#### How do we best manage the emotions that we and others are feeling during major change?

Emotions bubbling below the surface can be guilt, frustration, annoyance, anger, irritability, anxiety, despair, exhaustion, or unfairness. Coaching conversations are often about how to handle these reactions, ground ourselves, and find a constructive way forward.

We offer the following questions as prompts for reflection, whether on your own or with others.

#### Within yourself and your team...

- How best do we spot when we are at risk of being captured by a particular emotion?
- What can help us view a rising emotion as valuable data rather than an impending threat?
- What might help us to separate emotion from fact?
- Could it help each of you to discuss your vulnerabilities with a trusted colleague and acknowledge what can trigger you?
- What helps each person to acknowledge their emotions, pause to appraise the situation and find a way forward?

#### With others...

- How best do we understand and address the emotions of those around us?
- How do we balance genuine empathy with clear expectations of delivery?
- What is the best approach for surfacing the truth when there is denial or obfuscation?
- How do we assess the boundaries that we cannot ask people to go beyond?

#### A positive mindset could include:

- Acknowledge that your emotions have value but cannot be allowed to dominate your thinking
- Remind yourself of the strategies that work for you – and use them
- Know your anchors, whether these lie with your family, your professional calling or your personal values and beliefs.
- Know what gives you joy and allow the best moments to sustain you
- Believe that good can come out of any situation, however it is affecting you.

### 34. Are you team fit?

#### What will it take to be ready for the next wave of challenges?

Current coaching conversations are often about teams finding a sustainable rhythm for the coming months.

We offer the following questions as prompts for reflective time with your team. They can be used as a checklist, or you can pick one or two of most relevance.

#### Within the team....

- Are we taking enough time to stand back and think about the longer term?
- Are we clear about what must be done, and can only be done by us acting together, both now and into the future?
- How do we ensure our shared purpose is reflected in the way we prioritise our time, and what we choose to drop, simplify, or delegate?
- How will we draw actively on each other's strengths to achieve the shared goals?
- Is each of us open to changing our assumptions and approaches, and learning from others?

- Are we explicit enough about our values and behaviours?
- How readily will we ask each other for help when the going gets tough, and insist that each of us gets time out to recharge batteries?

#### Beyond the team...

- How well do we understand our stakeholders' evolving concerns and priorities, and what will it take to influence them in the coming months?
- If we're asking others to follow us into an uncertain future, what do they need to hear from us and what do they need to see us doing? Do they see us acting as one and taking collective ownership of decisions?
- When things go wrong, what will enable us to acknowledge, learn and move on?
- What is the reputation we want to have, and what evidence will support it?



## 35. Ensuring team trust

When teams emerge from major disruption or change into a new and uncertain landscape there are difficult decisions about future business direction and financial sustainability. Their own jobs, and / or the jobs of others may be at risk.

Statements about inclusivity and fairness may sound hollow. Yet these teams need to keep working together and trust each other more to ensure a smooth transition to the next phase.

### To build trust within the team might you:

- Spend some time reflecting on how you have worked together in the last few months, and how you intend to bring the best out of each other going forward.
- Encourage each team member to talk about their experience and insights, and how they want to lead now. Who has found new strengths, and who might need to rebuild their confidence? What have you noticed about events or behaviours that have built trust, or undermined it?

- Ask yourselves: “What do our people and our stakeholders need of us in the next phase? What behaviours would be detrimental? What’s the shift we may each need to make in our mindsets and behaviours?”
- Explore whether you trust each other enough to put any mistrust on the table and work it through.

### To build trust beyond the team might you:

- Use your communications to share something about yourselves as human beings, and what you care about
- Explain what you know about future direction, what you do not know, and what you are doing to address uncertainty
- Live the values that you have signed up to, challenge behaviours that go against them, and give people space to grow.

## 36. Managing your time and energy when working from home

**Hybrid working provides valuable opportunities to flex to the other time demands in your life – and can require very deliberate decisions about how best to maintain your effectiveness.**

### Questions to ask yourself when working remotely might include:

- What sequencing of the day is working best for me? Can I be more deliberate in planning my day so I that I concentrate on where I can add most value and use the times of day when I am at my most productive to tackle difficult things?
- What breaks can I ensure take place in my day and what boundaries can I set around my work commitments? What physical movement can I ensure happens to break up my day?
- What conversations can happen just as well by phone as by video link so that we can move around as we talk, especially with individuals I know well?
- Is there a case to spend more deliberate one to one time with individuals, especially new joiners, since we are not having the incidental conversations we would have in an office?

- When I am participating in virtual discussions how can I structure my contribution and the visual clues I give, so other participants feel listened to and are committed to the conclusions?

### And at a personal level

- What is the balance I need to strike between work and personal responsibilities and what contracting do I need to do with colleagues and family members?
- How best do I look after myself emotionally when I am holding my own anxieties as well as those of my family and my teams?
- How best do I acknowledge the differing emotional pressures on colleagues and ensure that we are able to progress the work we need to do together?
- What shifts am I making in the way I communicate that I will want to build into my work approaches over the longer term?
- What is the shadow I am casting over others at this time and how might I be deliberate in the tone I set and the expectations I convey? When am I able to laugh at myself and enable others to smile?

### 37. Leading virtually requires deliberate communication

**With an increasing number of individuals working virtually for part or even all of their time communication becomes more than ever.** Key is being mindful of people's emotional need for Clarity, Control, Connection, Celebration, and Empathy.

**Clarity** isn't easy for leaders to give if the broader context is changing day by day. But it helps enormously to tell people what you know and what that means for their role. Short regular bulletins through an appropriate mix of virtual channels give reassurance and a sense of direction, which in turn build trust. Judge what might work for your audience, and act on their feedback.

**Control** is important because people who feel powerless can easily despair. Each person needs to feel that their efforts contribute to the overall goal. Working remotely makes it even more important for them to feel part of a group or team with a clear remit and reporting line. This gives them a sense of shared purpose, and a reason to be in regular contact with others in the group.

**Connection** isn't only about the IT – it's about leaders sharing their own humanity. and connecting people to each other when they may be feeling isolated. The leaders who inspire trust are real people who tell personal stories. They always look for reasons to encourage others and to smile.

**Celebration** applies to every achievement, every day. You can't overdo it.

And **Empathy** is the thread running through all of this. Even people who are used to remote working may feel cut off from social interaction at work. We need to recognize this in the way we communicate, and the expectations we set. This includes people's need to go offline sometimes, provided you know they are doing their best to contribute. If we can provide help when they're struggling, we are much more likely to keep their trust and commitment.

### 38. Staying resilient through uncertainty

**There are periods when our working lives are turned upside down.** We have sometimes felt elated by what we have been able to achieve. On other occasions we have felt dejected, frustrated and unable to see a way forward.

**How best might you review where you are and what frame of mind could help you to stay resilient?**

**As an individual, might you ask yourself:**

- How best do I create reflective space so I can take back control of my priorities, look after my wellbeing, and give others the leadership they need?
- What have I learned about what helps me maintain my equilibrium and what can derail me? What is the shift I have made in my way of looking at the world?
- What positive and negative behaviours have I observed in leaders around me and what have I learned for my own leadership?
- What might need to grow and develop in me, to help me understand where others may be coming from, and to manage difficult relationships?
- Have I learned to accept that life is inherently uncertain and sometimes unfair and that's just how it is? Have I been able to learn from mistakes and move on?

- How might I show my appreciation to family and friends for their support?
- What is the positive difference I can make if I stay focused on what really matters?

**In a reflective session with your team, might you explore:**

- Are we aligned in our shared purpose and what we care about, and has that given us the strength to support each other in tough times?
- What have we learned about drawing the best from each other and keeping our collective focus where it needs to be?
- Are we bringing grounded optimism, and inspiring confidence we will find a way through?
- Are we vigilant about including everyone in our ways of working?
- What have we learned about our stakeholders and how we work with them?
- Might we look back on our shared experiences as a time of growth and companionship, however hard it was?
- What are we going to enjoy in our work as we look ahead?

## Questions for reflection

This checklist draws out a key question from each section of the booklet

### Questions for individual reflection might be

1. Where might I flex my leadership approach?
2. How might I draw more on the influence and authority I bring?
3. What might enable me to handle uncertainty with greater confidence?
4. How might I diminish or tame the chatter in my head?
5. How might I develop my contribution to building a sustainable future?
6. How might I best maintain my resilience when there is ever more uncertainty?

### Questions for team reflection might be

1. How do we ensure each team member is appreciated for the leadership insights and approaches they bring?
2. How do we use the authority of the team to influence decisions?
3. How can we become more open in acknowledging and addressing uncertainty?
4. What type of team chatter is constructive and when can unhelpful chatter disorientate us?
5. Where might we reinforce our resolve as a team to build a sustainable future?
6. How best do we look after our collective resilience and keep our equilibrium and sense of purpose as a team?



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### About the authors

This publication includes Praesta Prompts written by Hilary Douglas and Peter Shaw which were published between March 2020 and July 2023. Hilary and Peter are both coaches at Praesta Partners. Both of them were formerly Directors General in the UK Government. They have extensive experience of coaching individuals and teams in the private, public and voluntary sectors, nationally and internationally.

Recent collaborations are the book *'The Reluctant Leader: stepping out of the shadows'* (2016), the Praesta Insight *'The Resilient Team'* (2017), the Praesta Insight *'The Resilient Leader'* (2020) and the Praesta



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Insight *'Stepping up: leading with confidence'* (2023)

They also co-authored the Praesta Insight *'Job-sharing: a Model for the Future Workplace'* (2018).

Hilary and Peter draw from their wider experience of leadership roles. Hilary is a former Vice Chair on the Board of the British Red Cross. Peter is a Visiting Professor of Leadership Development at Higher Education Institutions in Canada, Australia and the UK and is the Chair of Guildford Cathedral Council.

### Relevant publications

#### ***'The Reluctant Leader: Coming Out of the Shadows'***

by Peter Shaw and Hilary Douglas  
Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2016

#### ***'The Power of Leadership Metaphors'***

by Peter Shaw, London  
Marshall Cavendish, 2021

#### ***'Shaping your Future Leadership'***

by Peter Shaw, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2023

#### ***'100 Handling Rapid Change Ideas'***

by Peter Shaw, London  
Marshall Cavendish, 2018

**Praesta Insight booklets available for download from the Praesta website:**

#### ***Stepping up: Leading with Confidence,***

Hilary Douglas and Peter Shaw (Praesta, 2023)

#### ***Wise and Responsive Leaders,***

Louise Sheppard and Jane Upton (Praesta, 2022)

#### ***Leading With Grace,***

Una O'Brien and Pete Freeman (Praesta, 2022)

#### ***Leading for the Long Term,***

Hilary Douglas and Peter Shaw (Praesta, 2021)

#### ***Leading Virtual Teams,***

Jane Upton and Mark Powell (Praesta, 2021)

#### ***The Resilient Leader,***

Hilary Douglas and Peter Shaw (Praesta, 2020)

#### ***Four Vs of Leadership: vision, values, value-added and vitality,***

Peter Shaw (Praesta, 2019)

#### ***What Value do Senior Women and their Organisations get from Coaching?***

Hilary Douglas, Janet Rubin and Louise Sheppard (Praesta 2019)

#### ***Job-sharing: A model for the future workplace?***

Hilary Douglas and Peter Shaw (Praesta, 2018)

#### ***The Resilient Team,***

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#### ***Knowing the Score: what we can learn about leadership from music and musicians,***

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Peter Shaw (Praesta, 2011)

#### ***Seizing the Future,***

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