

Your Mission Matters More than Ever

How to lead through the COVID-19 crisis.

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The Challenge

Every day, every hour, healthcare organizations around the U.S. are making hundreds of decisions in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the midst of this fast-moving crisis, how can your organization make sure your decisions are consistent with your mission and values at the heart of your culture?

While most large healthcare organizations have detailed response plans for the COVID-19 pandemic, they are typically operational in nature. It's critical to know that these plans and their execution are aligned with your mission and values.

This alignment doesn't happen automatically, especially in the face of overcrowding, triaging, resource allocation and other difficult decisions that come with a life-threatening outbreak. In the midst of a fast-moving crisis, even the best-intentioned people can lose sight of missions and values, with devastating consequences. We face such a risk now, as COVID-19 strains resources and places relentless demands on our front-line professionals.

Now's the time to make sure your people are up to the challenge of making difficult decisions with your mission and values top of mind. People's lives, and your organization's reputation, may depend on it.

Point B's Perspective

As you plan and mobilize your response to COVID-19, now is the time to make sure that a single, critical question is at the center of every decision:

Are we acting in accordance with our mission and values?

This is an easier question to ask, and answer, in ordinary times. After all, healthcare organizations and employees have dedicated their professional lives to caring for others. Helping people is their calling. Now, when employees, resources and systems under tremendous stress, it will take a concerted effort to make sure that your mission and values are driving every decision and action.

Your organization can take several steps to make your mission and values so integral to every decision and action that "doing the right thing" becomes as automatic as the response after calling a code.

Bring the voice of the patient to the table.

Many healthcare organizations have patient advocates or advisory groups. In times like this, it's especially important that the voice of the patient is present in your planning – from your command center to communications. Ask a member of your patient advisory to take part in press conferences, and prepare them for the role. When it's appropriate, including this person in your internal and external communications

can reflect and reinforce your commitment to your patients.

Make it second nature to do the right thing.

Your mission and values serve as a crucial filter for making the right decisions quickly and consistently. They need to be top of mind for all employees, even when – especially when – the unexpected happens and you must quickly change course or set difficult priorities.

Begin by hardwiring your mission and values into every decision-making checklist and process. Simplify your guidance around making decisions so the mission is the ever-present driver. Keep it as simple and “sticky” as asking a single question: “Is this decision consistent with our mission and values?” Empower all employees to call a stop to any activities that compromise patient health and welfare. Expect and encourage them to question any activity that appears at odds with your mission and values.

In the early days of HIV, front-line workers who were equipped with the facts and led with their values brought tremendous comfort to their patients through the empathy of touch. By acting on their mission and values, they also combated the stigma of HIV and built public awareness on facts, not fears.

Be transparent, and focus on the “why.”

At a time when the public is getting mixed messages about COVID-19, you can be a welcome source of clarity and candor. Explain the “whys” behind the decisions and actions you take. When you lead to understanding, you build trust and support among your employees, patients and communities. You can cut through the noise and have a calming influence.

Take your mission and values into the community.

Beyond the walls of your clinics and hospitals, your mission and values have the power to help others make positive, informed decisions for themselves and the common good.

Keep external communications crisp and focused on a few key messages. Give your public-facing employees the training needed to speak on behalf of your

organization in an authentic manner that honors your mission and values.

When you can, find visible ways to carry your mission and values into your community. If the pandemic has put a few of your regular programs on pause, you may have some capacity to organize food deliveries to the elderly, or call for blood donations. By living your mission and values in demonstrable ways, you can inspire the entire community to be more compassionate and caring as you go through this challenging time together.

The Bottom Line

We are all in uncharted waters with COVID-19 – and this makes it especially critical to let your mission and values be your guide. Use them to set a clear direction, inform consistent decisions, unite people around common purpose, and inspire acts of compassion and caring. While you can’t control just when this pandemic will end, you can control how your organization will be regarded when it does.