

Leaders: How to stop panicking... and carry on

By [Maiyo Febi](#)

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Working from home is the new corporate way of doing business as lockdowns and quarantines continue in several countries across the world in a bid to curb the spread of the coronavirus. As employees adapt and settle into making one location a place of recreation and professional productivity, some are adjusting to working harder than they ever have because of panicked leadership.



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Likely reasons for the panic are the sudden increased pressure, the challenges of remote working when one is accustomed to 'walking the floor'; calling impromptu meetings; sitting next to employees to oversee completion of critical tasks; or delegating tasks at the water cooler. Compounding the situation is the emotional stress and the gaping economic uncertainty that lies ahead; the virus has "severed the flow of goods and people, stalled economies, and is in the process of delivering a global recession. Economic contagion is now spreading as fast as the disease itself..." – [Harvard Business Review](#).

These times require leaders to be calm, optimistic, pragmatic and courageous, to inspire teams for continued business output. Bear in mind though that stress and anxiety are not the enemies of great leaders, they are healthy natural responses that need to be managed constructively. If left unchecked, a panicked, anxious leader can exacerbate the situation, leading to apathetic and burned out employees.

Here are four tips to help leaders overcome panic and distress:

1. **Trust employees** – Make it a point to trust that employees are indeed working remotely and avoid constantly checking up on the progress of tasks. Rather put in place reporting processes that will give you an overview of what is happening periodically. Delegate relevant tasks as the load is lighter when there are many hands to work; it also frees you up to focus on more strategic tasks that you haven't been able to get to (thus possibly contributing to your panic).

If you are worried that things will fail at this critical time, put in place monitoring measures. Not allowing someone to fail is stunting their growth; we learn and grow through failures.

2. **Use technology wisely** – Technology is there to make life easier. Assess which technology works best for the requirement and think about timing. Not everything needs a Zoom meeting, and sending a WhatsApp at 2am may not be ideal. In [France](#), the ministry of labour instituted a law that gives the employees the "right to disconnect" from email, smartphones and other electronic devices once their working day has ended. The measures were put in place to ensure respect for rest periods and work-life balance.
3. **Check on you** – It's important to check in with yourself to see how you are doing. Are you taking regular breaks? Take it a step further by self-reflecting. Have you allowed yourself to sit (experience) your fears and anxiety around the pandemic so you can work through it? Who can you talk to in times of distress?

Self-reflection is a building block for a balanced life as it helps us identify what is within and how it impacts our leadership, this can prompt us to change and adapt to lead more effectively. Often, we are too busy in a routine getting stuff done and moving from task to task with minimal consciousness. Self-reflection slows down the process and prompts us to listen to ourselves; it provides the space to take a breather and put things into perspective.

4. **Rationalize your thoughts** – Observing our own thinking can help minimize the amount of pressure we unnecessarily put on others. It creates an awareness of our intentions and values. Are you operating out of fear, anxiety and stress or is there a real business need for the requests and demands to be made? How realistic are the timeframes of the request? Are supremacy and obedience more important values than cohesion and trust?



We are in the middle of a global change and nobody knows exactly what the “new normal” will look like. Retrenchments, salary cuts and shorter working weeks have already been implemented by many organisations with more cost-cutting actions to follow.

Regardless of how we feel and behave, the situation *is what it is*; what is at our discretion is how we choose to react. We get to decide what meaning we give to the situation and this in turn influences how we behave. It could be a time to: reflect and improve skills; reinvent ourselves; re-strategise; adapt to a changing world; or a time to find the strength to get through.

ABOUT MAIYO FEBI

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