

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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Leading Amid Uncertainty

It has been said that uncertainty is like the weather: It is always there, part of the atmosphere, and over which we have very little control. The severity of uncertainty, like the severity of the weather, can rise and fall. Right now, we are all operating in an exceptionally uncertain environment – an undeniable if not exactly original insight. Creating a semblance of certainty is among the most important tasks leaders can undertake at a time like this. Some of the best advice from chief executives in this regard that I have come across has been published in *strategy + business*ⁱ (both the print and online versions). Some noteworthy approaches that leaders have sharedⁱⁱ include:

- There is no such thing as overcommunication. Even in “normal” times, minds have a tendency to drift to worrisome scenarios in the absence of communication – and that tendency is magnified exponentially when worries are justified.
- Reinforce your organization’s values. In times of crisis, organizations face a choice: to use their core values as a compass to navigate the challenge, or to set them aside temporarily when they have to make tough decisions that cut against these values, with a promise to return to them again in calmer times. The former approach will build trust and credibility – the latter will make it quickly evaporate.
- Keep doing the job. Yes, that may seem, well, obvious, but it can be easy for the focus on the crisis to overshadow the need to keep executing the organization’s overall strategy, even if a new plan has to be created to address the crisis. Organizations need momentum and purpose, and employees need to know that senior leadership is still focused on achieving the mission.

This last point – the need for momentum and purpose – is in fact at the center of my own personal leadership philosophy in good times and bad. The past six months have been beyond bad of course, and when uncertainty defines the operational environment, “the interlinked and mutually reinforcing attributes required to succeed in uncertainty are clear. Whether the topic is strategy or workforce, operations or deals... the same message applies. Organizations must have a bias toward action.”ⁱⁱⁱ

No one action, by itself, can dispel a heavy cloud of uncertainty or significantly mitigate its impact. But if organizations can get out of their defensive crouch and assume a more aggressive stance, they have a better chance of maintaining their balance and shaping their future. Building and harnessing the mutually reinforcing attributes of optionality, agility, and resilience will enable leaders to adopt the strategies and mind-sets that allow them to succeed in the full spectrum of uncertain outcomes.^{iv}

Our state’s law enforcement agencies have been exceptional at maintaining momentum over the past 6 months in the face of a series of unpredictable circumstances. The NJSACOP, too, has maintained our focus on our mission during these uncertain times. Early on at the onset of the current crisis we pivoted towards serving as the prime conduit for critical information to our members and their agencies. Building on this, we established an online Resource center and virtual briefings. The Association also accelerated our plans to establish an online hub for professional development, education, and training, unveiling the [NJSACOP e-Learning Center](#) last month. Perhaps more significantly, we are moving forward with an aggressive public affairs agenda – about which our members and stakeholders will be hearing much more shortly.

To paraphrase Albert Einstein, to keep your balance, you must keep moving forward. This is never more true than when confronting uncertainty and crisis.

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ⁱ The material from which I have drawn for this article can be found in the Summer 2020 / Issue 99 edition and the April 7, 2020 online edition.
ⁱⁱ Bryant, A. (April 7, 2020). A test for leaders: Creating certainty amid uncertainty. *strategy + business*. Retrieved from <https://www.strategy-business.com/blog/A-test-for-leaders-Creating-certainty-amid-uncertainty?gko=e653b>
ⁱⁱⁱ Jackson-Moore, W., Swanson, H., & Kande, M. (Summer 2020). How to succeed in uncertain times. *strategy + business*. Retrieved from <https://www.strategy-business.com/article/How-to-succeed-in-uncertain-times>
^{iv} Ibid.