

LEADING SBH DURING COVID-19

LESSONS WORTH LEARNING

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April 4, 2020

During times of great stress and uncertainty it is often helpful to go back to the basics, especially when you are leading a large, complex organization. These are just some of my thoughts given what many of us are facing today and what many may be facing tomorrow.

Over-prepare

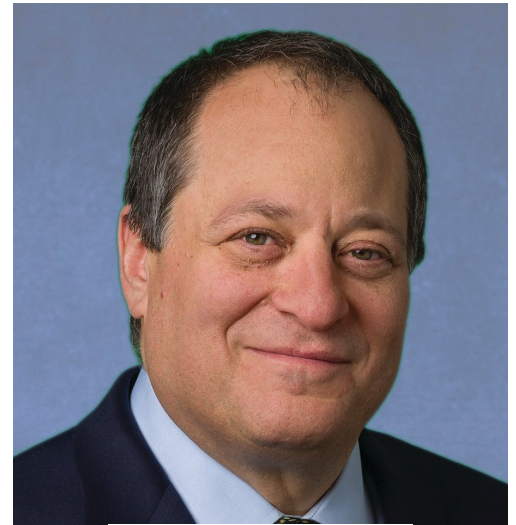
To start...you can never “over-prepare,” and you must never take for granted the value of great management and staff... therefore, spend the time to listen to your experts! Activate your emergency response systems early and develop a surge plan. Our chief medical officer, Dr. Eric Appelbaum, sounded the alarm very early on and pushed all of us to recognize and prepare for this unprecedented crisis. He predicted the pandemic would hit New York City hard, and as a result, we had many things in place before having to respond. I did tell him not to rehearse the panic, but we definitely planned for it. He is the force behind our clinical response and has been leading that response like no one else could. He has the full support of his team and mutual trust. He was also instrumental in trialing practices, such as sterilizing masks and working out the details of ventilator splitting before it became necessary, and it is now unfortunately necessary.

Be Safe

Protect your staff and protect yourselves and your loved ones to the best of your ability. Ensure you have more than enough Personal Protective Equipment in inventory. Recommendations change rapidly so one of your teams should be monitoring CDC and DOH advice. Check your ventilator and associated medication inventories. Implement social distancing immediately, even in your institutions. Wash your hands and focus on decreasing exposures and spread.

Communicate

You cannot over-communicate! It is imperative to communicate as much as possible and give staff opportunities to ask questions and make suggestions. You should have a system to do so. These are anxious times and knowledge is empowering. But also remember to communicate with your colleagues at other institutions. Call other local hospital CEOs early on to offer support and to ask for it. Again...knowledge is empowering.





Reassure and Thank

We have an amazingly resilient staff and they impress me daily, but we have to let them know their leadership has their collective backs! We have two different responsibilities - informing and inspiring. Our CMO and COO have been disseminating the **information** and I am offering **inspiration** to keep the team both prepared and aware they are supported. Our folks need to know that we “leaders” are thinking about them as much as they are thinking about our patients. I started a “Heroes’ Blog” to highlight all the great work they are doing and to reassure them that leadership is focusing on them while they are focusing on our patients. In addition, I also reach out with personal emails and calls to individuals about whom I hear inspiring stories. The number of those calls and emails are growing exponentially.



Be Nimble and Flexible

Things are fluid, and you must be able to be flexible and nimble. All suggestions are welcome. Consider doing things you wouldn’t have done in the past as circumstances and guidance are changing rapidly. The goal is to get the maximum impact for the maximum people. Don’t say we can’t before considering fully. These are not “normal” times.



Practice What You Preach

Develop policies around social distancing within your administrative spaces. Try to protect your internal leadership succession systems. For example, our CFO and finance vice presidents are never on campus together. Similarly, our clinical leadership team are never in the same place. We do not have in-person meetings, even though we share office space. Ensure easy access to hand washing and sanitizers.



Meditate/Relax/Live Your Lives

My beard is grayer than it was last week. Start your gardens, exercise, meditate, read, write, listen or play music. Your staff and family are going to need the “best you,” so take the time to recharge.



Remember Your Roles

As a physician, former CMO, and “operations” guy, it can be easy to fall back on that “doing” role, especially during a crisis. As the president & CEO, that is not my job. My job is to support, communicate, recognize and thank. You have to listen to and trust your team, and I do. That does not mean that you do not lead. It also does not mean that you do not pay close attention. I virtually attend every operations briefing and end-of-day summary; but I generally remain silent, unless I sense rising frustration and disharmony. I spend a significant amount of time on the phone these days advocating for SBH and our staff, in order to get our story out and ensure we have the tools and resources to take care of our patients and ourselves.



Thank

It is important to thank everyone often. Encourage your staff to also thank each other. Everyone is stressed out and anxious and a little positive reassurance goes a long way. I do it at every opportunity and it is heart felt.

I have personally grown as a leader during this crisis. And I truly hope that anyone reading this brief leadership advice never has to experience what we in New York City have experienced over the past 3-4 weeks, but if you do, and you are “leading” I hope this serves some small role in keeping you centered, focused and effective.