



**2021**

# **Managing the Maelstrom**

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## The Balance of Enlightened Leadership

1 January, 2021

Welcome to 2021. This is now the 43rd missive that I have sent since the first COVID lockdown in March 2020. I hope you managed to re-energize yourself over the holidays and to take the time to reflect on what 2020 meant and what 2021 will mean to you, as prompted in my last missive. I look forward to the chance when we can discuss it in person.

I wasn't sure how to start the New Year off, but then the 6th of January happened, and it all became clear to me. Like you, I was appalled by the assault on democracy and the brazen attack on a nation from an enemy within. It got me thinking about the nature of leadership and the various forms of leadership that were exerted before, during and after the events.

If you remember back to last year I wrote about the necessity for leaders to be enlightened in the COVID era. I defined the Enlightened Leader as one who practices three things:

- Authentic leadership – having a heightened sense of self-awareness and being real to your core.
- Servant leadership – caring for those who work for you and removing the interferences to their potential.
- Transformational leadership – continuously improving and transforming your team and organization.

It is important that organizations have this as their ethos. However, it is not enough just to do it, we need to expect and demand it of others as well. While you may be doing this already, as a leader of leaders, you also need to ensure that your Direct Reports have this ethos.

Also important is the balance of these three elements; there is danger in both over and under indexing any of the behaviours. You may find it helpful to treat them like a series of dials on a stereo, which you adjust to get the perfect sound. The right balance will depend on the situation, the people, and your own preferences. Sometimes you will need to turn up one while lowering another.

While you may be tempted to think that cranking all of them up to the maximum is the best approach, that can be both confusing and unsustainable. You need to figure out the nuance for the moment.

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If any are out of balance, then you have real problems. Did you see them in action this week?

Here are some hints:

- Over indexed on Authentic leadership looks like, "I only care about me, I don't care about others, and I have no desire to build something lasting".
- Over indexed on Servant leadership looks like, "I care for others at expense of the mission or business".
- Over indexed on Transformational leadership looks like, "I can not care about others and drive to achieve some unrealistic nirvana".

What might have been the perfect mix for this week? Remember, there are several right answers based on many variables. I'd love to hear your thoughts.

Before I go, however, I do have one more thought that came to me this week. Leadership is caring about the whole and not the one. Too often, the "great man theories of leadership" have over-indexed to the one, and that is how Trumps grow. (Also at the exclusion of gender as well)

So the next time you see a leader really ask yourself "are they here for the whole or just the self?"

I wish you a good weekend, and Peace, Order and Good Government.

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## Sanctuary Trauma

8 January, 2021

Here is another Friday and the Washington DC 6th of January events continue to fill the airwaves. For us in Ontario, the highlight is yet another Stay Home order from the government.

This caused me to consider that two things are threatening us right now: The physical threat of the virus, and the mental threat from the pandemic. For our clients where they have a proportion of employees in the workplace, the threat has been the virus's physical aspects first, and then the pandemic's mental threat second. I would argue that, for those working from home, the threat has been the pandemic to their mental wellness primarily and then the physical threat as secondary. This realization is why, this week, I have come back to mental wellness in my missive -- because the stay at home order will continue to impact the psyche of us all directly.

One of the alarming recent mental health statistics ran my blood cold. While it has to do with trauma in the first responder community, it has a bearing on all of us. The statistic was that 50% of the trauma responders reported was not from an event, but rather what is known in the field as "sanctuary trauma". Sanctuary trauma occurs when an individual who suffered a severe stressor next encounters what was expected to be a "supportive and protective environment" and discovers only more trauma. It doesn't take much to extrapolate this to the workspace. As I see it, the employee immerses themselves in work to escape the pandemic's difficulties and finds that the work space only makes it worse. What might be the sources of additional stress? Try these pain points:

1. Lack of clarity of authority
2. Lack of clarity of expectation
3. Struggles over resources
4. Unproductive meetings
5. Non-stop zoom meetings
6. Ineffective policies
7. Too much work to be done

There are two approaches to deal with mental wellness. One is to stabilize the employee and the other is to sustain mental wellness. Over the last months, we have noticed that our clients have been very good at stabilizing and dealing with mental wellness in the workspace. By stabilizing I mean coaching,

counselling, peer support networks and having sessions to check in with employees. I believe that the stabilizing has done much to reduce the effects of sanctuary trauma. The problem is that it is not necessarily sustainable, so sustainment takes a different tack.

To sustain mental wellness, it cannot be a "one and done" solution. It is an ongoing thing. It requires a change to our culture. Mental wellness issues will continue long after the pandemic -- it is likely the pandemic's legacy. So, what are the changes needed to our cultures? The first is openness and ability to discuss it. It means the encouragement to people to speak up if they are struggling. This will be the hardest change. The change has to occur in our managerial leadership. In past weeks I have discussed the role of the Enlightened Leader. The Enlightened Leader practices authentic, servant and transformational leadership. This, as well, is not enough on its own. The issues of the pain above are issues of management. They relate to tasks and organization versus how we engage with people. We need Engaged Managers and Enlightened Leaders as they are two sides of the same coin. In this way, we can sustain mental wellness and reduce sanctuary trauma.

Take some time to consider how your leaders are doing in both management and leadership. And consider -- is your organization creating sanctuary trauma?

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## Engaged Management

15 January, 2021

Welcome back to the weekly missive. A lot changed in a week—a new Head of State in one country and a resignation of the representative of the Head of State in another.

Last week, I talked about the idea of Engaged Management linked with Enlightened Leadership. To build sustainable mental wellness in organizations, we need systems to avoid creating sanctuary trauma where employees suffer secondary effects because they are unsupported in their workspace. We have to build organizations that care all the time and maintain or enhance mental health continuously. Enlightened Leadership can improve or stabilize mental health, but we need management practices that sustain mental health.

As I thought about this, I realized that not everyone sees management as essential for organizations. Leadership gurus have decried management too many times. The idea of the great charismatic leader has taken hold in the modern psyche at the expense of the equally critical management expertise. As Nick Forrest, our founder, pointed out in his book “How Dare You Manage”, at senior leadership levels management practices are more important than leadership. You can only directly personally influence a small group. This was the essence of Jim Collins’ “Good to Great” Level 5 leader. They set the systems in place. Management ensures the systems are in place to sustain mental wellness. “Management” is not a dirty word nor is it devoid of value. Management looks down the long road to create sustainable systems. This is the Deep Battle to sustain mental wellness in our people well after COVID is gone. That is the point our employees ask us “what are you doing for me now?”.

I feel confident to predict that there will be a “new” war for talent once all this is done. We are already seeing it beginning as employees choose to retire rather than face physical and mental threats at work. You can expect it only to get worse as they look back and ask themselves what was all this for? Not only will people retire, but they will seek out organizations that are more understanding, flexible, and supportive of the new (mental health) needs that have arisen. COVID, and the work from home experience, has given many people time to evaluate how best they work and what they truly want out of employment. A Manager (or Leader) who is still directing as if we are pre-COVID will lose their people. Employee experience with management during crisis times will colour how they view management in



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“normal” times. Crisis merely augments and exacerbates and reflects what is already potentially broken or needing attention.

So, the immediate task at hand is how do we set up the management practices that concurrently run our businesses and sustain mental wellness in the workspace? I believe it comes down to spending time on the basic building blocks of management and not relying on town-halls and great conversations – those are all good, but they won’t sustain it. Your personal charisma will only take it so far. It will be the management systems and processes that will carry it. It is about getting the leaders beneath you to take it seriously and think about it. Remember, management is a life-long craft and, as I said many months ago, we don’t take it seriously as a profession. To not do so will be at our peril in the long run.

This week we have seen the absolute requirement for positive mental health spaces at work. The resignation of our Queen's representative, The Governor-General, shows the effects of creating an unhealthy work environment. It took the management practice of creating a process where people felt confident and empowered to speak up about the mental health stressors they could not abide by to expose the situation. However, it was clearly a failure of management within the office and a lack of situational awareness to the realities of mental health within the team that allowed it to happen in the first place.

This may have sounded a bit preachy, but I intend to give you something that you can use to prod your people rather than necessarily for you—although we all can use a reminder. As one of the Forrest associates has repeatedly pointed out, there are many risks out there, but you won’t see them with your eyes closed.

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## Team One and Team Two #2

22 January, 2021

Another week, another missive. Last week, I talked about balancing leadership and management and how management is not a dirty word; it is a necessity. I got feedback and a request – if it is so important, what is essential in management?

The answer was easy, and it is something you may have heard me discuss before, and that is understanding the nature of Team 1 and Team 2. Quick definitions: Team 1 is you in your manager's team, and Team 2 is the team you lead. Here is why they are numbered this way:

- You owe your loyalty to Team 1 first
- You must demonstrate and “be” a follower before you can be a leader
- You take all your authority from your role in Team 1

You are the linking pin between Team 1 and Team 2, and you carry with you the context of the Strategy. Another point, not widely understood, is that your direct reports are the resources your Team 1 manager gives you to fulfil your accountabilities within Team 1.

Makes sense, right? There are all sorts of challenges to this but, most notably, is that organizations are too busy executing vertically at Team 2 and are charging off with their silos wreaking havoc on the organization. So we say this: you must be laterally integrated with Team 1 before you go to vertical execution in Team 2. It is in Team 1 we define how we will behave in the team and the organization and how we will live up to the corporate values.

I believe organizations' biggest mistake is that they do not laterally integrate in Team 1 before their leaders break away in their Team 2's. This creates the following organizational pain:

- Fights over resources
- Lack of trust
- Organizational fratricide
- Missed objectives and deadlines
- Disappointed customers
- No innovation
- Disengaged employees

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- Toxic workplace and workspace
  - Surprises and finger-pointing

This week it became clear when Tony Welsh, explaining Teams 1 and 2 to an executive group, elicited this observation from a participant: “after all these years I thought my job in Team 1 was to fight for my team”. It is time for a paradigm shift, and the mission comes first. It is about getting alignment. Failure to do so is the fault of that Team 1 leader. But, sometimes, the leader doesn’t see it. Ask yourself, is your Team 1 aligned and, if not, what is your Best Advice to your manager? But remember, Team 2 is there to serve Team 1... not the other way around.

In keeping with my past few weeks' messaging on mental wellness in the workspace, alignment of Team 1 is where we plant the seeds for a great work experience. Being out of synch and at war with co-workers does not create a safe environment. All that it takes to integrate laterally is time and dialogue. How much time do you spend on integrating your team now? It will pay off in the long run, before employees vote with their feet or their lawyers.

Final point, I hope you had the chance to engage in “Bell’s Let’s Talk” yesterday. It is important to make mental health a talking point – however, to sustain it, don’t just do it once a year, it is ongoing and reinforced with good management.

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## Team One Integration

29 January, 2021

We are back again with another management missive. As one of my readers commented on a Friday, “I need short missives”, so I will try to keep this short.

Last week I talked about Team 1 and Team 2 and the importance of alignment in Team 1. This week, I thought it would be worthwhile expanding on Team 1 integration.

As discussed last week, Team 1 is your manager’s team, and it is your first priority. This fact gets overlooked in leadership literature. The thousands of books out there teach you about leading your team (Team 2) and not about the crucial role you play as a Follower in Team 1 as the linking pin between the two functions. As we say, you have to have Lateral Integration before Vertical Execution. Team 1 members must be integrated laterally together.

If there is no Lateral Integration, you get the laundry list of symptoms I enumerated last week. Without integration, the big one you get is the four-letter word that starts with “s” – “silo”. We believe, in integrating the Team 1, you need to do these four things:

1. Define the scope and context of the work of the team. In many cases, this requires going back and reviewing the Strategy and orienting the team back onto that Strategy.
2. Ensure acceptance and deal with any resistance. People can be set in their ways, and they need to be all in agreement to ensure alignment.
3. Define the roles in the team. This means clarifying purpose in relation to Strategy and for what people are accountable.
4. Finally, establish the rules and guidelines for behaviour in the team. This ensures that we are clear on the values and we can follow them.

By taking these steps, you ensure a cascade of influence when your Direct Reports do the same exercise with their Team 2. If you are a leader and aren’t doing these four things, you can expect the pain(s) I outlined last week.

Alignment has become more important in the pandemic than ever before. Employees are at home alone, trying to fulfill a mandate. There is no management by walking around any more. You need to

take the time for alignment. Technology offers you a way to do it until you can do it face-to-face. When we all have vaccines, you can have everyone together on that critical team offsite to get them all on the same page. In the interim, it is never too late to start.

These are all the steps the Engaged Manager needs to take. By providing this clarity, you get the alignment, but you also reinforce mental wellness because you have taken the guesswork out of your people's lives.

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## Lateral Integration

5 February, 2021

Last week I introduced how lateral integration is critical to mental wellness. In other missives, I have discussed the concept of sanctuary trauma, a term I learned as Vice-Chair of Wounded Warriors Canada; the premise that 50% of trauma comes from what should be the safety of the workplace.

When confusion reigns among your teams because the world is in turmoil, and they aren't laterally connected, you take away sanctuary and leave the potential for workplace trauma in its place. Hence, why laterally integrating is so essential. Lateral integration provides:

- Clarity of direction so I can see the path ahead
- Clarity of expectation so that I don't have to guess what you want from me
- Clarity of knowing who is to help me achieve my goals
- Clarity of understanding who I can influence to achieve my goals
- Clarity, and therefore alignment, amongst my peers

Without clarity, people feel uncomfortable at a time when they need stability. By clarifying these, you reduce the uncertainty of the current world. In turn, these define a world where I have greater control.

Therefore, before your leaders execute their work, make sure they provide the unambiguousness of these things and give the necessary direction to integrate their people laterally.

I believe there is a short window for us all to retain the loyalty of employees. Once we are all vaccinated (whenever that is) the landscape of work will be changing, employees will be more mobile, their beliefs about work will be different, and their views of being employed by us will change. Now is the chance to show how enlightened our leadership and engaged our management has become, and integration is key.

As Tony said – “not everything has changed, but everyone has”. We have the power to show them that we care and get to be very professional in our managerial leadership to keep them from looking at the grass on the other side of the fence.

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## Tri-level Team

12 February, 2021

Here we are again; a new blast of winter has sent shudders across the continent.

This week's missive is a variation on the last few week's. I have written about Team One and Team Two and the need for teams to be laterally integrated before they go to vertical execution. So, today, I want to talk about another tool of lateral integration and that is the tri-level team.

A tri-level team, as the name suggests, has three levels to it. What makes it different is that when people think of teams, they think of the boss and their direct reports – basically two levels. The tri-level team is, as we've discussed before, comprises the Manager-once-Removed, the Managers, and their Direct Reports. Bringing the power of Teams 1 and 2 together collectively; the three levels of engagement. Tri-level teams are a powerful way to ensure alignment and clarity of expectation. They aren't how the group operates all the time, but it has a lasting impact when you bring together the three levels. The tri-level is a meeting. Time spent in tri-level meetings will reduce the need for separate meetings later on because you will have created alignment. Our clients' best practices are that these meetings are a minimum of 4 times per year. Sometimes the group can be large and anything over 50 unwieldy so you may have to do it in tranches, but it is worth it.

A tri-level team meeting enables:

- Providing clear context and messaging
- Clarifying who is doing what
- Resolving concerns, conflicts and roadblocks
- Clarifying cross-functionality

In the COVID era, it is even more critical than before to provide clarity. It isn't as good on Zoom, Webex or MS Teams, but it is doable. If you are at the bottom of the tri-level, you see how you fit in. It also allows teams to understand and connect with others because most work in organizations occurs laterally. If you are the tri-level leader, it gives you a chance to see your subordinate leaders at work and assess the talent at the lower levels. A golden rule to remember, as the tri-level leader, is that your direct reports should not hear something for the first time in this meeting. If they do, then you have not been aligning Team One first.

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It allows you to gauge the health of your team - not just via hearsay or choruses of 'fine' but through first-hand engagement with those teams. Your leadership and setting of alignment cascades comfort and cohesion, reducing the launch of cortisol and the emergence of stress, and engaging the broader team allows for the creation of a stronger support network to the individuals within them.

Vigilant and Steadfast



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## Leader Self-Care

19 February, 2021

Well, here we are, the 50th missive since we first went into lockdown. That means 50 weeks have gone by since I first started filling inboxes talking about managing the maelstrom. This week, as the anniversary, I wanted to come back to the past topic of the leader's self-care, namely you.

In the last few weeks, in talking with clients and friends, I have sensed a haggard visage, a sign of exhaustion in the voice, the loss of bounce in the step. Whether it is February blahs or the fact we are nearing a year with still no full sense of an end in sight, I am not sure. I am sure that when there is a move to normalcy, speed will increase as we try to make up for the lost time. So, now is the time to husband our resources and energy for that day not far off.

Here are some ideas for your self-care:

- Exercise – I know that many are doing it, but healthy body = healthy mind.
- Connection – making sure that we are connecting with others, checking in, and seeing how others are is critical.
- Visualization – Now is the time to visualize the finish line like the runner of the marathon. What will it look like?
- Seek Support – It is not the time to shelter in place but, like connection, it is about asking for help and relying on others.
- Action – Taking direct action on the little things will help to give you a sense of completion and personal power.
- Self-care – This is linked to exercise and direct action but, ask yourself, what have I done for just me recently? It, too, will give you personal power.

I think the most powerful things are connection and seeking support. Get yourself a "battle buddy" who you can trust to give you advice and who will hold you to being true to yourself and your path. As I have said before, this is an integral part of stabilizing mental wellness and sustaining it too.

My final thought as part of "connection" is passing this on to your team, family, and friends. We all need a little help now and again. Taking care of your health will set an example for employees and reduce the issues that arise when negative mental health takes the stage - burnout, fatigue, absenteeism, etc...

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People don't want to talk about their mental health, so positive modeling mechanisms they can emulate are essential to get cues without discussion.

Wishing the very best for you and your family in this last week of meteorological winter in the Northern hemisphere and meteorological summer in the Southern.

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Lessons Learned

26 February, 2021

Welcome back to the weekly missive. I hope you heeded my advice last week and took time for self-care. If you didn't, you will find last week's message below. and I encourage you to heed it now. I have been sensing and espousing that when we come out of this pandemic, (whenever and whatever that looks like), things will quickly pick up. Someone said, we can expect the "Roaring 20's". So this week, I want to steer your attention to reflection.

You have almost had a year at this, and what have you learned? I mentioned this many missives ago, but I would suggest that now is time to think and reflect on it. Many teams and groups refer to themselves as learning organizations, but you aren't one if you don't pause and reflect. Being a learning organization means that you learn from successes and failures to repeat the good and change the bad.

The best learning organizations I know first-hand are the NATO allies who have institutionalized learning. Their method is the After Action Review which occurs after every activity, whether training or real-time operations. It is a structured facilitated process to gather the views regardless of "rank" and discuss what was learned. We have adapted it to many of our clients to help them solve issues and find out why things went well.

I suggest now is the time to do that while you can. There have been huge learnings for us all this last year and if you can't capture them, you are doomed for a repeat. The process itself can help you to establish SOPs and is a great tool for engagement of your employees.

Some areas to consider are:

- How did your People work?
- How did your Processes hold up?
- How did your Tools perform?
- How did your Customer Engagement weather this?
- How did you execute on your Strategy?

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These are broad and high-level considerations. What would your leaders throughout the organization say has been learned about more tactical elements like:

- Monitoring and Coaching a distributed workforce?
- The resilience and adaptability of your policies and Best Practices?
- The technology and techniques to work together and serve your customers?
- The Judgement and Discretion exercised by and for your people and customers?

It is the accountability of leaders at all levels of an organization to always be practicing Continuous Improvement. This is how you bring that alive. These improvements need not be fundamental or monumental. Even modest improvements or tweaks can realize powerful results and ensure learnings are not lost. Make sure you are challenging all of your leaders to gather the collected wisdom from all of this and apply it.

As a final note on lessons learned, I am going to ask you for help. We are about to launch a unique international survey to understand how Covid has changed managers' relationships with their direct reports. It takes 10 minutes to complete at most. We hope to understand the dynamic that has changed for managers leading from a distance. I appreciate you are busy, so not to worry if you can't take part. In time, we will be offering the survey to organizations to get a sense of how their leadership has changed.

Wishing you all the very best, stay safe

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Predict

5 March, 2021

One year in. One year of writing these missives. It is hard to believe. Hopefully, you have found things in these writings to ponder, perhaps even pass on and, of course, deploy. Last week I reflected on the need for us to learn from this past year. For us to become learning individuals and organizations requires reflection and taking the time to do so. This week is no different, but I am suggesting this week becomes not looking back, but looking forward.

For me, I have spent part of this past year chasing trends. I have made it my goal to break out of that loop and to look to the future. Yes, it is true every day feels like groundhog day but, with every one of those days, we have inched forward (and sometimes backwards too). I don't know when the maelstrom ends and what it will look like but I can begin to imagine what the scenarios might be. The ones who get it right will be the ones out ahead as everyone else plays catch up.

I will add a note of caution here. Beware of the pundits who are selling what they would have sold before. The people that are using the predicament we are in to justify their previously held beliefs. Instead, it is a matter of looking at it afresh and seeing what really might be.

To do this, we need to use the thinking operation Predict. Interestingly, in our research on thinking at work, managers very often don't use this thinking operation. Predict enables us to judge how far out on a limb we can go. It is about reaching out and making a guess. Guessing gets a bad rap these days. We try to expunge guesswork in our age of data, but it is necessary and we have seen over the last year just how much has been guesswork. We have so much data and reliance on algorithms, we are loathe to make predictions and we are unwilling to take risks. In an era where there are no real benchmarks, we need to be good at making forecasts. It is the essence of calculating risk and it is through Predict that we can also estimate the probability of something happening. So to win in the "roaring twenties"(that is my Predict by the way) our job at hand is to extrapolate from where we are to where we might be.

Finally, by going out on a limb here, you will enhance your control of the world, which will improve your mental wellness. So, as you are learning from the past, you need to keep an eye out for the future. My strong suggestion is, you do what we at Forrest have done. Take the time to bring your team together

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and brainstorm what the future will look like for you. You will be amazed at the energy it brings and you will be able to find your next bound. This will be the precursor to that much needed team offsite in the future when you can have them together.

Wishing you and your family all the very best. Looking forward to the roaring twenties.

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Planning/Pretend

12 March, 2021

Welcome to year 2 of managing the maelstrom. In the last two weeks, I have been talking about looking both backwards and forwards, because now is your time to do so. If I am right, and economists seem to be pointing this way, we are about to have the roaring twenties – a boom of travel, spending, and economic growth. So, in keeping with this train of thought, this is the window to do your heavy thinking to be ready. We have discussed the need to see what you learned over the last year, and dedicated time spent here will not be wasted. Next, you need to start thinking about what the future looks like.

Questions that you need to be wrestling with are:

- What are the indicators of the new, new world?
- What will it look like when COVID-19 vaccines are in our workforce?
- What is our Strategy? What do we want to be in the new, new world?
- What is the plan to get there?
- What does our structure need to be?
- Which roles need to do what?
- What systems, processes, and policies need to change?

Many of the answers are not going to be clear yet. It might not be the time to make the declarations. After all, you don't want to make declarations that everyone will work from home based on employees views today, only to find that attitudes to working from home have changed once people feel safe vaccinated. As we say in the army, "no plan survives first contact"; that is not against planning, but it is against slavishly following the plan.

Last week, I discussed planning when I introduced the need for us to start Predicting the future. This week I want to go beyond the thinking operation Predict and introduce an essential Planning thinking operation. Thinking and planning are crucial bedfellows. You can't rely on your experiences here; you will need to think things through fully.

So, you need to take the time now, in the interim, to be planning. This is the one time in an existing organization's history that you can press "restart", so you need to make the best of it. To do that you need to Pretend. Pretending, as a thinking operation, is given a bad rap. It is seen as childlike and

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conjures up images of imaginary friends and tea parties. In reality, it is a vital business skill. It is all about looking before you leap. It is about making assumptions with purpose. It fundamentally looks to ask the question, “what if?”. Pretending is not a strong suit in Canada and the US in our database of manager's thinking styles. Instead, there is a desire to be realistic and avoid flights of fancy. But, if you want to come out ready to go into the roaring 20's you will need to Pretend now to rehearse for tomorrow.

To do your planning and pretending you may want to bring together that “tiger team” that I talked about months ago. Get input and ideas from others. There is no cost to hearing ideas, but beware when those become opinions, because people like to stick to their opinions so, instead, look for suggestions and Best Advice.

In the weeks to come, I will continue on this theme – that now is the time for thought. Very soon will be the time for action so keep your powder dry and your mind open.

Have a great weekend.

Steadfast and Vigilant



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## Challenge

**19 March, 2021**

In the last few weeks, I have advocated the importance of Thinking during these unusual times. We got through a year of uncertainty, and now there is a positive outlook on the horizon. It is time to plan now. As an old army buddy said to me this week, he was appalled at the business world's lack of planning at this critical juncture. Right now is the moment to be Planning and Thinking through how the future needs to look.

Today I want to introduce a new thinking process to add to the last few weeks' Predict and Pretend. This week is the initiator of planning. It is the one that gets you started to plan something new. This week we are going to explore Challenge. This robust thinking operation assaults the "same old way" by going out and kicking over the sacred cows you may have been harbouring and protecting. Those sacred cows may well be about old beliefs about your work, team, organization, or business. As I have said before, not everything has changed, but everyone has, so, Challenge is there to get you to question assumptions. It is about digging out any unconscious views and exposing them to get the best possible plan and solutions. It drives to always be the optimist in the room but, at the same time, to root out unthinking.

Challenge helps by:

- Questioning your unconscious assumptions
- Breaking habits
- Resisting conformity
- Questioning accepted wisdom

How to practice your Challenge:

- "Am I just following the herd?"
- "Do I have to do that?"
- "Are there any exceptions here?"
- "Why do I have to do this?"
- "Am I being unconsciously over-influenced?"
- "Am I sure we can't do that?"

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It helps you in your post Covid plans by getting you to explore. Once we are all vaccinated, it will be another new world. It won't just slide back to how it exactly was, and now is the time to capitalize on that. By challenging your old assumptions, it will help you to Pretend and Predict from surer footing. It will be your competitive edge. Those that explore and Challenge the norms will find paths that our competitors will overlook.

Right now we are surrounded by the confusion of what is true. I am not an anti-science guy, but it seems that there is no consistency in the "truth" espoused by doctors, politicians, media and the likes. It changes daily and leaves us wondering. Challenge helps us to see all things with a grain of salt. It helps you to question those things, at the same time to examine your own beliefs and views because they may be holding you back from your great leaps forward. So this weekend, go out and tip over some sacred cows and open yourself up to enable you to think through how the future might really look.

All the very best to you and your family,

Steadfast and Vigilant,

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## Redescribe

**26 March, 2021**

Welcome to the short week—the week of yet another lockdown and another week of groundhog days. This is the week that represents rebirth as spring begins to show us better days. Of course, all this is occurring in the second year of the pandemic and, at least in Canada, at a time when we really have no idea when it will get better.

In the past months, I have written about the importance of being aware of mental wellness for yourself, your family, and in your teams and I will return to it again this week. In the past few weeks, I have been writing about the need to start looking to the future and planning what the “new new” will look like for you and your teams. As part of planning, I have introduced key thinking tools to help you plan the future. In previous weeks I covered Predicting, Pretending and Challenging. The problem is that, in the face of looking at the future, things are looking dark on the horizon – cases are up, new variants abound, and we can’t seem to vaccinate people. So, in the face of this, how do you keep your head up and focus on this is a time for hope?

This week, I will introduce a new thinking process that helps with outward-looking and helps your mental wellness. This week’s process is to Redescribe. In our research on thinking in management, this is the least used process of all 25. Yet, it is crucial for your mental wellbeing and your overall day to day effectiveness. By exploring this today, I hope to give you a lifeline to deal with the challenges of your world.

Redescribe is just as the word suggests; it is to re-describe the reality of the current state. We experience the world as we see it, but Redescribe enables you to change your perception of that reality. It helps you change your perception of the world and look at things from a different angle. It is designed to help you explore to find new approaches to get you out of your current rut. It is to change your perception of reality. When we say “the glass is half full” we are redescribing. When we say “walk a mile in another man’s shoes” we are doing it as well.

Redescribe enables you to:

- Explore without evidence to find new approaches.
- Reframe the problem into an opportunity.

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- See the silver lining in the clouds.
  - View things from someone else's perspective.
  - Take what exists right now and repurpose it.

How this helps is for you to see the world through the lens of others. It is a starter to empathy and to sympathy – you step away from your perspective and choose to see it from another's. In mental wellness, it helps you to reframe and not be overburdened by the current world. Yes, the vaccines aren't here, but they will be. Yes, today was a bad day, but tomorrow is a new day.

To Redescribe, you need to ask yourself this question: "in what other ways could this be viewed?". If you ask this, your mind is working in Redescribe. If you ask it of others, you have launched them and broken them out of the tyranny of their current experience and their reality. The best leaders employ Redescribe to significant effect to open up opportunities in their teams.

So, as you look to this new state, this spring that is upon us, remember if you see a black cloud, look again! This will pass, and there will be better days. When you miss family and friends, remember the line you will meet again.

Wishing you and your family all the very best for this long weekend. Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Skilful Thinking (Back to Basics)

2 April, 2021

Welcome back to the missive. Over the last few weeks, I have been discussing a variety of thinking operations that are critical to effectiveness in COVID. These are the work of Jerry Rhodes in his seminal work on thinking in the workplace. But, in the last week, I have been confounded by the examples of awfully bad thinking that appear in the news, so, this week, I wanted to come back to basics about thinking.

All thinking at work is in order to do something. When I refer to thinking, I don't just mean the limited Myers Briggs definition but, rather, how do we engage our whole selves, mind and body, to do something. Thinking is the undiscovered country in business. It is the one realm that business has not set its sights on as an area for improvement and, trust me, improvement is needed. Issues like failed pandemic responses, collapsed businesses, and even personal stress are all signs of poor thinking.

Another angle is to consider how much of your paycheque or that of your employees is for their thinking? If you answered anything less than 80%, you are deluding yourself. So wouldn't it be worthwhile for us to get better at it? Wouldn't it be worth improving our thinking to help us make decisions, plan, sell or develop a strategy?

Skilful thinking requires us to use different thinking muscles and it can be hard. We can be habit-forming but that thinking habit that paid off in one circumstance may not be helpful in the next. Our thinking research with our clients this year has shown that people are sticking to their old thinking habits. They are not opening up to other avenues of thinking. They are not necessarily Pretending, Predicting, Challenging and Re-describing; instead, they are hunkering down in the maelstrom.

Learning to think differently requires effort and discipline. It is like learning a new language, but that new language will be necessary for the future. The pandemic has proven to us that we need to think differently. No one could rely on their past experiences in the pandemic solely to manage; it was all new and it required new and careful thinking. The roaring twenties will be no different because the speed of change will be more rapid, and we will face brand new challenges. Unconscious thinking will not move us from our present inertia; conscious thinking and directive thinking changes are what's needed to

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push through the pain, challenge, stillness to get to action. So what conscious action can we each take to demonstrate our commitment to thinking and thinking differently?

Put down the pen, and turn off the computer; take up the challenge to really spend time thinking, if you stop and think, you will have a likelier chance of thinking differently. Please join me on the journey to make thinking the ultimate managerial competency to help create those great places to work that deliver their Strategy.

Have a great thinking weekend

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Thinking at Level

9 April, 2021

Last week's missive focussed on the need to overcome the "tyranny of Do" and spend time thinking. Interestingly enough, this week really reinforced that need. In many of my client meetings, it became clear that people were not taking the time to think. The conversations I had were about the need to stop and think things through.

At the heart of the problem, I believe, is that many of us are not "thinking at level". Thinking at level is a Forrest short form for diving too deep. There is nothing more disheartening than when a CEO or other C-Suite dives 4 or 5 levels into the work details of those further down. I am sure you have experienced it. This is part of not thinking things through. In a desire for action, we believe we add value by getting into details that are better left to the professionals at that level. This, then, takes us away from thinking further out with longer time horizons which is our real work. Instead, we see value in us being firefighters. However, our time and energy is better spent in thinking longer-term and not getting mired.

The analogy of firefighting is authentic. At one point, when I was commanding the 4th Canadian Division, I was at a black tie dinner and got an urgent call from the Commander of the Canadian Army. He asked me what I was doing to stop the largest national park in Ontario from burning down, as a result of an errant artillery shell. Now, there were 5,000 troops ready to go and deal with it, and I had to stop my urge to go fight that fire myself; there were more than enough people to deal with it. They didn't need me getting involved; they knew their jobs and had hundreds of capable leaders to guide them. I just needed to know they had it in hand. I had a sleepless night not being able to control it, but I had been right by the next evening. In this situation, I had to discipline myself not to step in, and start planning if we needed the other 13,000 to be deployed, which was my real work.

Thinking at level is the same – being disciplined to do the longer-term thinking. A lesson learned by me when the desire to be involved happens is not to solve that problem but figure out how to learn from this issue to prepare for the next. The After Action Review (AAR) is a rarely used tool for organizations. You can call it a "post-mortem", a "hot wash" – whatever best suits – but stopping and thinking about what was learned is where the real value is. It creates a learning organization and teaches leaders that they can never get it perfect, but that continuous improvement is what they need to strive for. This is where

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thinking is better than doing, and it allows you to let people learn on their own and then to reflect and think about what they did.

So, the tool for you is the After Action Review and the challenge is to be constantly thinking, not about this fire, but how to prevent the next one. Leave those closest to fight this fire and, with your AAR, they will learn along the way. But, they won't learn if you do it for them.

The final point on AAR is that it formed the foundation of the Canadian Army in Afghanistan. In a war no one had ever fought before; they were able to learn quickly and adapt to changing expectations, enemy and terrain. In turn, the establishment of the Lessons Learned Centre in Canada enabled the lessons to be brought back and put into the training of those who were going to later be in Afghanistan. So the final step of the AAR is to share the knowledge and get good at it.

If you take the time to think these things through and avoid firefighting, you will build your team and organization, and you will be overcoming the tyranny of Do to be a thinking leader.

Have a great thinking weekend, stay safe.

Steadfast and vigilant



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## Managerial Hubris

16 April, 2021

First off, my apologies for last week's missive – it was a bit long. I wanted to reinforce the need for us to work at the appropriate level and learn from what has happened before. This week, I will stay on the tack of thinking, but I wanted to explore an issue that came up several times this week. It is that of managerial hubris.

Hubris is excessive pride or over-confidence and, unfortunately, it is all too common in managerial leadership. It is a poison that infects teams and destroys trust. It's important to remember that its origins are in Greek Tragedy, leading to nemesis or ultimately downfall. Hubris also signals a disconnect or a loss of connection with reality. So, leaders who aren't aware of what their organizations are doing lower down are guilty of hubris. Leaders who don't cascade their strategy and intent further down are creating hubris for themselves. It also shows up as arrogance and, all too often, a desire to find faults in others while ignoring our own. That hubris (or arrogance that they are the only ones who know) is what causes leaders to fall into the Tyranny of Do talked about last week – it is that hubris that causes leaders to dive down in work. Hubris can be short-sightedness after a period of success – so long-term planning and goals can combat it.

I believe its roots are threefold:

- Façade – the need to maintain an exterior image to keep others at bay and to maintain our status with others. We know deep inside (consciously or not) that we have flaws, but we need to keep up those appearances.
- Perfectionism – the misbegotten belief that perfection is attainable and that I am either there, or striving for it. Perfectionism is the sure route to unhappiness because it is unachievable.
- Lack of Confidence – the root of demonstrating over confidence is to actually lack real confidence. While this may appear at odds with the definition, it is core cause of the other two.

While nemesis is seen as an inescapable demise, hubris can be controlled before it becomes fatal. Through self awareness and reflection, we can come to grips with our own fallibility to lead a happier life. Humility is the other ingredient that is essential and critical for leaders. As soon as we realize, deep down inside, that we are flawed beings, we can break the stigma of hubris. As soon as we see ourselves as no better than anyone else, we have achieved humility. I have said it before in these

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missives, I have made thousands of mistakes in my life but hopefully not the one of lacking humility. Humility, as a concept, gets a bad rap. It doesn't mean rending your garments and exposing all your weaknesses or being self-effacing; it means being grounded in respect, tolerance, and understandings that are mutually beneficial for the organization and the individual. I think it is about trust in those you hired, to do the work you hired them to do. It is trust in your strategy (that you are cascading properly) and willingness to accept Best Advice from those who have the expertise. Humility is not resting on your laurels, but doing that far-sighted and future-looking evaluation.

As leaders, this is so important because people will only follow you so far. They will follow your hubris just so they can watch you fall from grace, but they aren't really following you. Our job as leaders is to deliver the strategy while having a positive impact on others. In other words, we have a moral imperative to create great places to work where people flourish and reach their full potential. That will not happen if we believe we are better than them. A humble leader doesn't lack vision or confidence, they just recognize that business is a team effort and constant learning is needed. It is forward propulsion and not the inertia of hubris.

So beware of the hubris around you. It is unhealthy for you, your teams and those who believe they are better.

Have a great springy weekend.

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Ethics #2 (Moral Principles)

23 April, 2021

Welcome to the 60th missive since lockdown, and here we are back in a stringent lockdown again. Last week, I talked about hubris and its impact. This week I want to troll the depths of another topic that is similar – ethics, and integrity. Much is written about these two, but they are essential to understand, not just today but as you plan the future of the new normal.

Ethics are defined as the moral principles that govern a person's behaviour. Sometimes, too often, we take a short form of this and say this or that "wasn't ethical" but, I believe, what we really mean is that it lacked integrity. Words matter and sometimes it is worthwhile to ponder them. I am going to use the limited definition of integrity as being "whole and undivided with your moral principles". After all, it is the root of the word.

We all like to think we have ethics but what happens if we behave contrary to them? How will it appear? It will show that we are not whole with what we say and what we believe. When others perceive that disconnect they will not trust what we say and so the spiral begins. So, the two are intertwined, but when was the last time you thought of these things?

This brings us to consistency. Even though things need to evolve and adjust, the fundamental basics of ethics and integrity need to remain the same. Moral consistency engenders trust. Trust creates effective teams. If you try to work in an environment that runs contrary to personal standards, you will quickly discover discomfort and friction, and erode your ability to exist in that sphere. A lack of consistency infers, and confers, a measure of arbitrariness to a person's concept of morality, which ultimately seems like they have no "real" moral code and are just making things up as they go along. Arbitrariness is pretty much anathema to business.

We have seen in business that Covid has changed people. We have seen that, as a result of needing to survive, people have cut corners. We see that financial strain has reduced due diligence in organizations and I would suggest the same in individuals.

So, some questions to consider on your Friday afternoon or Saturday morning:

- What are the moral principles that guide your behaviour?

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- What are the moral principles for the team?
  - What are the moral principles for the organization?

Human beings are all different and diverse – we have different experiences and upbringing – so, in entities like teams and organizations, we need to establish and express a common standard. This is essential to the exercise of accountability. Now is the time to reconsider where we stand. When you bring your teams back together you will need to be clear on what is important. Even more so, it would help if you thought about the impacts of Covid on people, your organization, and even the supply chain that supports your business.

If you are wondering what on earth am I talking about, consider this: How well did your principles hold up over the last 60 weeks? How has Covid strained your perspective? Even if it had a tiny impact, you can expect it to have done the same to others.

Back to last week for a moment, straying from your ethics is an act of hubris. Too many times we feel equipped to make the excuse that “this circumstance is special and I am still a good person”. So beware and be disciplined and vigilant for those moments.

Remember, not everything has changed, but everyone has.

Have a great weekend

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## Managing Managers

30 April, 2021

Happy Friday! Here is yet another weekly missive. Last week I talked about Integrity and Ethics, the week before was about Hubris. My intent in those two weeks was to raise some of the issues that I have been seeing; however, this week is about the solution. To say the answer is “leadership” is a cop-out. It is more ingrained than that and, to be more specific, it is about managing managers.

The management of managers (or leaders, if you so choose) is what I see is really at issue for organizations. The issues of integrity and ethics, while posited as individual concerns, are really an organization problem. People whose hubris blinds them to damage they cause are also an organizational issue. The distinction here is that it is an issue of accountability and not responsibility.

Accountability is about holding someone to account for something by applying good or bad consequences for what they do. In contrast, Responsibility is a personal feeling of obligation. Responsibility is ok when you are alone in front of the TV, but we need to exercise accountability in organisations. If my ethical standards are not meeting the organisation's integrity, I need to be dealt with, not just rely on me to change independently. If my hubris is damaging, it needs to be dealt with; you can't expect me to change my spots all on my own. We need a new standard of expectation for our leaders; they need to be held to account, otherwise they poison the organization.

All the literature on management and leadership overlooks the critical roles that Managers of Managers perform. They keep the organization going in one direction. They ensure that the ethics and integrity of the organization are maintained, and they stop potentially damaging hubris. It is a different role from being merely a manager or a leader because you are not leading employees but in fact, leading leaders. Here are some of the key points that Managers of Managers ensure:

- Clarity of context – so that lower levels understand why things are happening
- Cascade of the strategy – they ensure that the strategy is meaningful to each level of the organization
- Clarity of the roles – not just what people are doing but how they need to interrelate further down
- Clarity of expectation – this is where we clarify what is acceptable behaviour and what is not

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- Talent development and succession – this role looks to who will replace the managers in the pool of talent further down.

The first level of managing managers is the Director level in most businesses, and it continues all the way up to the CEO. Too often, we forget this critical role. It is how we align organizations and ensure that there are no end runs. Too often, we choose to get involved in or revert to our technical know-how and overlook our role as professional managers. The first levels of management are the quasi-leader quasi-technocrats. You live the tension of being a subject matter expert and a subject matter mentor. This level is the first level of the professional management class I have spoken of in other missives.

These Managers of Managers are the guardians of great places to work because they are professional and don't allow behaviour that is cancerous to the organisation's health. In turn, they align the organization by corralling the multitude of individuals and ensure they are all rowing in the right and same direction.

You are about to hit the point of the great reset and you need to prepare to align your leaders anew. This is your chance to exemplify the Manager of Managers role. When we all come back together after vaccines and social distancing – that is when you have the chance to (re)consider and clarify. It is your chance to establish the new standards because COVID has changed a lot. Again, while not everything has changed in COVID, everyone has. When you do bring them together, you need to balance listening to what has changed and telling them the expectations. To do that, you need to start preparing now.

Have a great weekend, stay safe and still wear a mask

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Manager Direct Report Relationship

7 May, 2021

Last week, I wrote about the importance of a professional management class and managing managers. Of all the management skills, managing managers is often the biggest gap for organizations. All the management language is about frontline management. Rarely do we talk about the skills and activities required in leading leaders as distinct from general leadership skills. The books talk about knowing your team, but very few talk of what it means to manage managers. There is a difference between these things and their approach. This was proven to us this week.

As you may remember, we sponsored a survey on the Manager-Direct Report relationship; thanks for taking part, those that did. The returns were fascinating. We are pouring over it now and, in due time, we will produce an Executive Summary. (For those that wish to review the whole report, we can make it available to you.)

The intent of the survey was to determine what are the impacts of being forced to work remotely on the Manager-Direct Report relationship. The findings that Michael Anderson and Herb Koplowitz explored were in the comments that were made in response to specific questions, and many were the concerns of multiple respondents labelled as “bosses”.

An interesting piece that struck me were the concerns at what we term the “Executive Level” (Stratum 4 for those who know Stratified Systems Theory, or the VP level and above). In particular, Executives disliked the remote work arrangement when their social capital was compromised, meaning they could not develop relationships with their workforce and teams. With remote, everything is scheduled. With conversations having to be coordinated, “small talk” becomes a thing of the past in favour of getting right to the work. The hallway check-ins and water cooler conversations where you would normally do the more personal check-ins don’t exist, so, rather contrarily, you have to find ways to schedule that organic time to keep connected. The impact of compromised social capital is that trust, cooperation, and a sense of shared values and approach are gone. We have seen this time and again where the team's fabric is strained by lack of connection, too much emphasis on the work or task, and new faces joining groups. These three instances are beginning to be an issue in team effectiveness and cohesion.

If you are feeling this, or are concerned for your team, here are a few things to consider:

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- Take time to deconstruct – force getting together virtually with no real agenda but just to talk and understand where people are (many tried this in the early days, and then it petered out – perhaps time to revisit).
  - Consider when we are vaccinated – when you bring the team together, what do you need to do to tune up your team?
  - Consider the one – are there one or two in your team that you sense or feel maybe needing that extra connection? Now is the time to make that connection.
  - Consider your boss – is there time you could carve out for a non-structured meeting to get to know where they are and for them to get to know where you are?
  - Consider less formal means of communicating, like Slack or Text, to do a simple reach out that doesn't feel out of obligation. Where new members would get the onboarding lunch out or drinks with the team, you need to find an online version of that to replace it – it can't be ignored.

As I said last week, we lack a professional-managerial class, but, if you consider these things, you can instill professionalism in your managers. Management is not just about tasks, but about connecting the tasks and the people, and managing the inherent tension between them.

I wish you another glorious lockdown weekend; all the best to you and your family.

Steadfast and Vigilant



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## Dais Management

14 May, 2021

Well, here we are – that tipping point where spring is fully underway, and we get to plant without fear of frost—happy Queen’s birthday to all those celebrating it this weekend.

For this week’s missive, I will be brief. I mentioned last week that we had the results of the management survey and are poring over it. The perspective or takeaway from the survey this week is what we call Dais management. A Leader’s habit is to see themselves on a pedestal of sorts and reflect differently on those above and below. In the survey, respondents saw their relationships with Direct Reports as different from their relationship with their Manager. What Dais management does is makes us suspect those below us and more oriented to those above us.

Case in point – Managers felt more disconnected from their Direct Reports than from their own Managers. In training sessions, Dais management would come up when we asked leaders what motivated them, and they usually ascribed fulfilment and engagement in their work. In contrast, the presumption of Employees’ motivation was purely paycheques. Dais management makes us feel disconnected from our people, it makes us feel we are somehow different. In reality, there is a common human trait of wanting to be engaged and treated as we would treat others.

The point here is to recognise it and take the time to really get to know the perspective of your Direct Reports; not to pre-judge and make assumptions. Covid has not helped, but when you get the chance, make sure you exercise the golden rule of leadership “know your people and promote their welfare.” In the weeks and months to come, this will be easier when you have that first face to face in over a year, but you can start the planning now. Try these questions:

- What are their aspirations?
- What don’t I know about their background? (family, experiences)
- What do they value?
- How do they like to engage with me?

In these ways, you step down off the pedestal and engage your people, so you know them as well as you know your boss. In other words, the relationships need to be symmetrical.

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Have a great long weekend if you can and, as we used to say in the army, “ease springs” – relax those coiled work muscles to give yourself a genuine break.

All the very best to you and your family

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Future Evaluation

**21 May, 2021**

As a continuation of the few last weeks' missives, I wanted to keep on the findings of our survey, only this week with a twist.

Back 14 months ago, as offices emptied and employees raced to the relative safety of home or stood by their posts in factories or behind teller wickets, work dynamics changed. There was a change to work, and there was a change for those delivering work.

Managers were left to define a new normal for their people; some did it well, and others not so much so. Employees tried to find their way in all this. They no longer had the daily connection with their bosses. Inadvertently, it led to a form of empowerment. This was not empowerment by design but of de facto. The employees at home alone were truly on their own and the factories were set aside by head office. There was no over the shoulder check by bosses, no micromanagement. Good bosses set goals and let their people get on with them.

Employees working at home were on their own. I believe they have by and large have stepped up. They have worked hard.

For sixty plus weeks, I have harped on about how “not everything has changed, but everyone has” – in this case, both have changed. This empowerment has set an expectation for future work and engagement. So what will the future look like for your team?

It is time for us to think and consider what we want the future to be.

Here are some thought starters for your weekend:

- Have you paused and assessed the current state of your team?
- Do you know what needs to be done for them?
- What will the team look like when there is a new normal?
- How will you give back to them for all their efforts?
- How will you get them back and engaged?
- How will you inspire those who are coming back?

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- How do you want them to feel?
  - What will empowerment look like in the future?

In the next few weeks, I will be coming back to this topic of The Return. Part of the reason is it provides sanity in this current lockdown.

So for now, have a great weekend and for those in the US, have a great long weekend.

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Trust

28 May, 2021

Welcome to Friday again, I apologise that this week's missive is longer than usual and not for the faint of heart.

Writing a weekly missive is difficult work. Not because, after 70 missives, I have run out of ideas, but rather that there are too many issues that come up in a week. For example, this week was originally going to be about the rights of Employees to be safe physically, psychologically and socially. I also realised that I needed to send out the results of our survey. But then, as the week wore on, my mind became consumed with the genocide of aboriginal peoples in our residential school system and the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. This issue has taken up all my waking moments as I struggle to fathom how these things can happen in our society. What to do? I am going to try to synthesise these disparate thoughts through one topic, and that is Trust.

Trust is the critical social bond between human beings. With it, we can move mountains. Without it, we despair and withdraw. Trust, in business, is as essential as effectiveness and efficiency and, without it, you lose engagement or the discretionary efforts made by your Employees. As the saying goes – it can take years to build it and then, in a moment, it is lost. In leadership situations, trust has two sides: the sender and the receiver. The sender, or the leader, has a sense of their intent and must decide if they trust their direct reports. If they don't trust their direct reports, those same direct reports become un-trustworthy and, soon, this is felt by the receiver and a spiral begins. Once the receiver (direct report) no longer feels trusted, they disengage and do not trust their leader.

This leads to the first issue that I was going to write about – the right of every employee to be safe physically, psychologically and socially. Once, as an employee, I don't trust the intent of my leader, I no longer feel safe. I question – if I were to become injured or unwell as in COVID, will they look out for my physical and mental well being, or will they allow me to suffer or be embarrassed in front of my peers? If I don't trust the strategy or vision, I will no longer follow it or work to my fullest potential in fulfilling it.

This issue of trust came up in responses to our survey. Specifically, it was the issue of trust in the new world of working remotely. Those who responded reported that there were issues of trust. Trust as a

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boss looks like – are they doing what they should be doing? Trust as a direct report looks like – do they trust me and give me freedom? There is a huge tension between these two sides and it represents the reality of remote work as much as it does regular work. The art here is to get the balance and it is up to leaders to very carefully consider that balance in all that they do, because if you fail to consider it you may inadvertently damage or destroy trust. An untrusting organisation is an eroding or dying one.

Finally, as I mentioned, while this may not be the usual tone or content of these missives, I feel I cannot be silent in the discovery of the 215 bodies in the mass grave, as well as the murder of indigenous women. I am deeply struggling with my own concepts of trust. For me, these two issues reflect another issue of trust and the misbegotten trust in a hierarchy. Children were ripped from their families right up until 1996 and forced into schools far away and assimilated into a foreign system. They trusted the hierarchy. Those on the periphery trusted that all was well. Instead, a sinister and horrific system of abuse was perpetrated against a people all based on a severely flawed belief system. In this case, it reflects the fundamental truth that trust needs to be earned. It is not bestowed. And just because one holds a of position and supposed authority, it does not automatically grant anything near trust. In all of this, the real issue was that no one, who should have, spoke up. Government, media, police – all those in power stayed silent. This is how the darkness creeps in, and as result no one is safe. Personally, allowing this to go on has shattered any trust I have our nation's hierarchy.

Truth and trust go hand-in-hand. Trust, once earned, is not perpetually granted. It must continually be given, explored, and reciprocated. It can be eroded and taken away in a moment. And broken trust is catastrophic and demoralising. It takes exponentially more effort to recover trust than to gain it in the first place. Part of being a leader of trust is being authentic with your feelings, and knowing your people and promoting their welfare. With this deeply upsetting news, you may wish to seek out how your employees are responding to the news and ensure you are being cognizant of their mental health and safety.

So, in summary, as leaders, we need to always be examining how our actions can impact trust. We need to be mindful and servant leaders in our approach to our people so they feel safe. We also need to speak up and not allow the hierarchy to go unchecked. As Nietzsche said, the 'Will to Power' is great, and we must always keep it in check, particularly in our subordinated managers.

So ask yourself, do my people really and truly trust me and how might my actions damage trust?

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Have a thoughtful weekend.

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Management Survey

**4 June, 2021**

Happy Friday all,

Last week's missive was a deep and long one so I have decided to make this short. I wanted you to have the Executive Summary of the survey completed by the Forrest team of Herb Koplowitz and Michael Anderson. It is attached to the missive this week.

The survey was to determine the impact of remote work on the Manager-Direct Report relationship. Many of our clients were thrown full-blown into managing remotely or managing remote teams as they had never done before. The results of the survey show that there was an impact. In past missives, I have alluded to issues that surfaced in the survey such as trust, management behaviour, dais management, and evaluating the relative comfort of levels of management with remote work.

I would suggest that, now, it is about what are the implications of working remotely in the future? In the "Great Return", remote working will be a new normal in some form or other. So, what have we learned to inform us for the next stage?

For me, the big issue is that, as leaders, we are more uncomfortable with remote work. What do we need to do now to prepare our leaders who will lead new teams or lead teams in new ways in the next few months? What will it look like, and what clarity do we need, and what are our choices? The survey will give you some insight. It may be imperative to pause and find out what your people learned and determine how you will come together.

Finally, thank you for taking part in the survey. Once you read the summary and are interested in seeing the survey's full results, just reach out, and I will furnish you with a copy.

Wishing, you a restful weekend and all the best to you and your family.

Steadfast and Vigilant.



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## Perfectionism

11 June, 2021

As the week wore on, this week's topic came to me. Throughout these many weeks of missives, I have hoped you would look at the topics through three lenses: yourself, your direct reports and your organization. If you happen to be a manager of managers, then that is an important additional lens.

This week, the issue of perfectionism in leaders came up several times. As you read this, consider it through the various lenses. Perfectionism in leaders is a very dangerous issue. By "perfectionism", I mean the drive to be perfect and its consequences and impact. Perfectionism bites us twice – it impacts our satisfaction and the core of ourselves, and it also bites us by impacting our relations with others.

To understand the bite to ourselves, I often use the phrase that perfection, by its nature, is the sure route to unhappiness. As we know, perfection is the enemy of good. It goes beyond high achievement. Perfection is about trying to do the 110%. But this is a fallacy. What happens is that, in your strive for perfection, you are pulling resources from other areas of your life to try to achieve your goal. You become single-minded and won't be able to balance yourself, your resources, and your needs. So, in your strive for 110% in one area, you lose percentage points in another. To a perfectionist, this is unacceptable, and where the mental health issues begin to arise. Thoughts of "failure" and insufficiency begin to become rampant because you aren't achieving pinnacle achievement across the board as you've demanded of yourself. We can't silo our perfectionism – it's all or nothing.

The second bite is when we turn that perfectionism on others by judging people by an absolute standard. As humans, we are flawed creatures. The leader that sets a standard of expected flawlessness sets unattainable criteria and expectation. It spoils our relationships as we search for the flaws and then raise them in joyful attempts to catch out people. We inadvertently don't trust the work of others and thereby make them untrustworthy. In turn, if we delight in and continually find their flaws, they too will not trust us. The spiral begins again, fueled by a misbegotten standard inside us. In the long run, we create an organization where mistakes and faults are sought out at the expense of learning. The people whom you need to stay will tire of this and move on.

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Of course, we need to continuously challenge our people and the status quo, but consider the balance between a sense of continuous improvement and learning with that of a perfectionist culture that stamps out engagement and discourages initiative.

Typically signs of leaders perfectionism are:

- Jumping to judgement about what and how people say things - instead of realising that people are merely trying to formulate their thoughts.
- Gleefully finding and exposing flaws in someone's work or thinking while missing the opportunity for learning, coaching and development.
- Diving into detail, information and experience to try reduce risk instead of making forecasts and instinctive calls.
- Judging someone's behaviour to be based on their single-minded focus on what is important to them rather than understanding what makes people tick

So, again, while these may not reflect you, we are all responsible for rooting out perfectionism and opening up to be real and authentic leaders. As a result, our lives will be much happier and the lives of those who give us their will be as well.

Have a great weekend.

Cheers

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Planning for Reconnecting

18 June, 2021

Welcome to the first Friday in the second covid summer,

I thought this week would be a bit lighter than previous weeks. It is to be a bit more inspirational. It is about considering the future and the opening up as the vaccine juggernauts keep going. It will not be long now. Some businesses have already started their protocols and have begun gathering. Many are waiting and using the summer to be the buffer as people start to take holidays before they consider a return to work in some form. If you are part of this latter group, then you have an opportunity to plan and prepare.

For weeks now, I have reinforced the mantra that not everything changed in COVID but everyone has. If this is true, what do you need to plan for, and what planning do you need to do? As you may have noticed recently, I have been advocating that you spend time reflecting and thinking. In other words, step away from the Tyranny of Do and ponder. The summer will give you that unique opportunity.

Here are some thought starters to ponder:

- What is the state of my team?
- What does my team need?
- What systems need to be in place?
- What do you notice about your team and the members?
- What do you need to know about your team's beliefs and aspirations post COVID-19?
- How does your team see themselves and their peers?

Several weeks ago, I gave you the results of our survey on the manager-direct report relationships. That has led us to realise that perhaps it is easier to reflect through a structured process. As a result, we have created a manager questionnaire to help you ponder the state of your team. If you would like a copy of the questionnaire, we can provide it and help you interpret the results.

If you are interested in trying the survey, just send me a note back.

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I wish you a thoughtful first weekend of summer in the Northern Hemisphere and the first weekend of Winter in the Southern Hemisphere. All the very best to you and your families.

Steadfast and Vigilant.

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## Planning for Reconnecting #2

25 June, 2021

I am writing this week's missive understanding fully that it likely won't be read given long weekends and the real start of vacation time. I am writing from quarantine hence the context of this week's missive. My life somewhat got back to normal when I went to work with an executive team in the United States earlier this week. It was the first time the team had been together since the pandemic hit, and it reinforced what I have believed and discussed for some weeks now.

Teams need to come together. The human condition is that we need to be amongst others. I believe even the most ardent introvert would agree that there is a time to be amongst others. While this particular meeting was only 2 days, it had a profound effect on everyone in attendance. Issues were resolved and connections were rekindled.

The world is gradually coming out of lockdown and people need an outlet other than Zoom calls to do their work. As one participant said, "we had made do with technology and believed it was working, but this was an exceptional leap forward". After all, virtual meetings only engage two of our very human senses of sight and hearing.

So, as you start to consider bringing the team together, here are some things to consider:

- How clear is the team on the strategy?
- Are we structured to deliver the strategy properly?
- Do our systems and processes really support us, or do they inhibit us?

Do our policies inhibit creativity, adaptability and innovation?

- Are we clear on how to work together?
- Do we really know one another?

Last week I made the offer, and it still stands. We have created a questionnaire to help you assess where your team is. I will send it to you if you would like to complete and we can discuss it afterwards. Have a great weekend and enjoy the true beginnings of summer. All the best to you and your family.

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Hard and Soft Thinking

2 July, 2021

If you are like me, you have probably been trying to make sense of what is going on in our world. The pandemic brought fear and dread to the forefront of people's minds. While that may have abated somewhat, it is still around. In the weeks and months that have followed, we have seen a general dissatisfaction amongst the public. As I pondered this issue, it got me thinking about how binary our world has become. It is either one extreme or another and this comes from our thinking.

Jerry Rhodes identified the binary nature of thinking in his seminal work *Effective Intelligence*. He termed this as Hard and Soft thinking.

- Hard thinking is objective, tangible, outward-looking, and impersonal – thinking from the head.
- Soft thinking is subjective, intangible, inward-looking and personal – thinking from the heart.

In our work with *Effective Intelligence*, we have found that, during COVID, people are really living and sinking into their Thinking-Intentions Profiles. But, in particular, there has been a burgeoning of Soft thinking. If you have wondered where anti-mask and anti-vax has come from in the face of clear evidence, look no further than the proliferation of Soft Thinking. While these examples are extreme, the roots are understandable because people have been forced to think in terms of being very subjective and personal. As they first faced the personal physical, then a mental threat, and then that turned to concern for family and friends, it all became a very inward orientation as they struggled to make sense of the world around them. If you are still not sure, consider how you felt with more stories of residential school issues or even the shuttering of Canada Day.

As I have said in the missives these months, not everything has changed, but everyone has. We need to consider the employees returning to work in the weeks to come and the ones already in the Zoom calls. Their world for almost two years has oriented to soft thinking. So, when we come back to whatever the return to work looks like, we can anticipate less corporate loyalty and more of “what have you done for me lately?”.

The disruptions are potentially only going to get more pronounced and we need to plan and be prepared for a very different workforce. The implications are big if a post-pandemic migration or hiring

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race happens and talent starts moving. It is liable to be a very emotional and irrational work environment and we have to prepare for it.

To prepare, consider that logic, data, and ingenuity will not necessarily win the day. You will need to combat like with like. You will need to be in soft thinking and demonstrate that you will add value, empathise with, and inspire them. Otherwise, you will encourage the MFM or “middle finger movement”.

So, as you are about to press the great reset, consider what you need to do to engage people who may be thinking very differently than before. You will need to practice the golden rule of leadership: know your people and promote their welfare. To do that, you will need to get close to them. Consider that first face-to-face team meeting and what needs to be done.

Have a great weekend.

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Return to Work – Stop and Think

9 July, 2021

Thanks to all who reached out last week. In the vein of last week, I would like to continue to focus on thinking but based on an issue that has come up from several clients; return to work. We had believed that most if not all of our clients had made their decisions and plans for a return to work were fully in place. However, we received many requests to help them think through what they should do.

The issue is that several things have happened:

- Some clients were quick in the early days of the pandemic to set their policy, but circumstances have changed since then, so they have had to rethink.
- Some clients have pointed out that there are so many differing viewpoints on best practices out there that there is no clear cut example to follow.
- The situation is still very fluid, some places are opening up, and then others that were open have had to shut back down rapidly, i.e. The Netherlands and LA county just today.
- Employees have changing and shifting views, concerns and desires.

On top of all this there are endless reams of articles, opinions and untested “Best Practices” out there... with no real appreciation for the realities of one’s own firm and that we have to do what’s right for our firm, not the most recent “hot take”. So in all this what is one to do?

I suggest stop and think. A focused pause now will alleviate reams of re-evaluating and re-adjusting later on. Flexibility will be an asset. No plan survives first contact and all that. “Stop and think” is not a one and done activity, and will happen many times over during the planning process, but an initial one will be essential to set the stage for future adjustment.

Spend the time thinking it through and have a framework to make the decisions and the plans. The framework enables you to be as Hard thinking about it – cognitive, impersonal, external and objective versus Soft – emotional, personal, internal and subjective. That same framework will help you sell it later by showing your thinking.

Another thing is don’t follow the herd; too often, to reduce risk, we take constructs, models, and ideas from other places and businesses, but they are not really our circumstances and particular



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predicament. Some examples are taking lean manufacturing from Japan and applying it to a public relations firm in North America or agile software development built in the San Fernando valley in staid banking. These often fail because they first are “not of the body” and you get organ rejection. The other is they are not of the Strategy. In this case, they do not link to what we want to be and what is important to the organization.

So your return to work plan must be based on the Strategy. Once it is Strategy-based, it needs to reflect the structure and what is required from the structure to deliver that Strategy. Then it needs to have the leadership behaviours and processes to enable it.

To do this, you need to think it through with good Hard thinking. The requests we got were for the thinking processes, and we have started work on the things that you need to consider. It will take your thinking but you know your organization best, so you need to set your criteria for success and then look at the ideas and options, not the other way around.

Wishing you all the very best in this endeavour, time is running out, but with careful thought and the engagement of your leadership, you will have the plan that will meet your needs and desires.

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## Olympics and Management

16 July, 2021

Happy Friday, July 23, 2021

This week's missive will be short. The focus came to me last night as I watched the beginning of the Olympic games. As is the case during the Olympics, the TV networks go to great lengths to interview the athletes to tell their stories and what the games mean to them. I was struck by two things: the first was how emotional these athletes were describing what it means, and that got me thinking, secondly, about what they have gone through.

I can understand the emotion. All those years of preparation only to have the cancellation thanks to COVID last year. Then on again, and now the Games being greatly reduced. What struck me was the professionalism, determination and discipline in the face of this all. If organizations could bottle that energy and determination, just think how far they could go. This brings me back to a topic of previous missives.

In the past, I have written about the lack of professionalism in managerial leadership. All too often, people in managerial leadership roles are nothing more than technocrats. They don't take their role seriously. When I say this, I mean they treat managerial leadership as something to be done off the side of their desk, something that detracts from being an accountant, lawyer, or supply chain logistician, to name a few. Instead, what we need are people who treat it like a craft. It is a lifelong learning. It takes time and energy, and discipline to follow it through.

In our leaders, in all walks of life, we need that professionalism and single-minded dedication of the Olympic athlete running a marathon that is the length of their entire career. So, as you watch the Olympics unfold, think about your leaders under you and around you – do they share the same determination, and how can you inspire them to be their best?

Have a great weekend all the very best.

Steadfast and Vigilant

## The Leadership Path

23 July, 2021

Happy Friday again,

Last week I said it would be short and, apparently according to some, it wasn't – so, I will make this short(er). It is an announcement of sorts. Forrest & Company has decided it is time to make the call and move things forward.

We have decided that we will launch The Leadership Path this Fall. This will be our 43rd iteration of the program.

I am including it in the missive because of our rationale for launching it. We had many clients asking when it would start again. The questions arose from a desire by some clients to recognize the efforts of the high potential middle managers. These clients wanted give their key people an experience that will help them as they hit the great reset and get back to the beginning of normalcy.

The Leadership Path is a five day intensive off-site experience at the Briars in Sutton where participants get to know themselves better in order to answer the key leadership questions of who am I, why am I here, and what am I trying to build. We feel that there is going to be a need for leaders to explore this coming out of COVID because not everything has changed, but everyone has. After the five days, they enter into a period of coaching to get them on their Path, and then another 3 days of workshop almost six months later to develop their management skills in a simulated environment.

So, the question for you is – what are you going to do to recognize those High Potential leaders in your organization and help them on a Path to be the best they can be?

Have a great weekend. All the very best to you and your family on this Canadian long weekend. Get the rest needed and recharge for the days ahead.

Steadfast and Vigilant,

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## Return to Work Questions

30 July, 2021

Welcome to August,

Many thanks to everyone for your encouragement over last week's announcement that we are bringing The Leadership Path (TLP) back. The re-launch of TLP in these crazy days is the Forrest & Company version of return to work. Return to work is a hot topic. Return to work is a misnomer as a member of our team pointed out, it is really return to the office. We have begun to create a database of how companies are approaching the great return.

Return to work is the essence of the challenge of leadership; delivering the strategy while keeping the people engaged. The tension between task and people will be very strong as organizations plan for return to the office. The strains will be real, and the prospect of a looming war for talent will make organizations gun shy not to meet the employees' desires.

This week, an interesting aspect came to light. A client had surveyed their employees, through Human Resources, to find out how they wanted to return to work. In trying to find out what employees want, beware of asking the right questions.

Questions launch thinking. We find that organizations are not very good at asking them. If you ask a question, you are asking someone to stop and think. As our client found out this week, the questions' nature did not answer what people wanted and may have led the employees to the questioner's personal goals. The results have made it impossible to determine a plan.

Surveys will need careful choices that reflect what you really need to know in order to make the choices as to how to best return to work. Some things to ask about the questions you will ask:

- Do they reflect the questioner's bias?
- How might the stresses of the time impact how responders answer the questions?
- How might we implement results from the results of this survey?
- When should the survey be released?
- What work follows to implement the results? Are we prepared to do that work?
- What are the potential second-order effects if we ask this question?

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- How might the audience perceive the questions?
  - What external influences might impact acting on the results?
  - How might the results from the questions impact our strategy and operations?

These questions are better to be considered before you look to find out what people think. If you have launched and then have to retract because these issues were not considered, you run the risk of it being one of those cases where employees say – “well, they already had a plan, and our opinion didn’t matter”.

Good luck with this. It is the true test of leadership to deliver the tasks whilst still positively impacting people. Remember, as well, that these may not be the same employees you had 17 months ago.

Have a great summer weekend.

Steadfast and Vigilant

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## Patience and Understanding

6 August, 2021

Happy Friday the 13th.

The last time I remember one of these was the 13th of March 2020; let's hope this one is not as momentous. I have been travelling a lot lately and thinking about the return to the office that I discussed last week. In my travels, I have realised that there are a number of challenges we will all face in return to work/ office / normal.

The first is, who is returning? In the places where I have travelled, I have noticed that things have not been able to get back to normal in several cases. For example, I finally had the chance to get a haircut after 7 months, only to find the barbershop didn't have enough staff to cut my hair before my flight home. In another instance, there was no room service in the hotel because they did not have enough staff. These all point to that while we thought we would get back to normal, we may not get there anytime soon given the talent shortfalls. The shortfalls may be because of fear, or maybe it's easier to make money from the government than work, or even whether values – organisational or personal – have changed. They all point to the reality that normal is not around the corner.

The second realisation was that those returning have been out of practice for a very long time. This was evident watching flight crews forgetting the basics, creating confusion at gates and forgetting the nature of good customer service. Nowhere was this more evident than in a packed customs hall – a security guard wandered around with a piece of luggage left at security trying to find the owner. Happily, they found the owner who apparently hadn't missed his suitcase. Luckily, it wasn't a device, and I could get on my way safe and sound. People have been away and have forgotten their fundamentals. We will need to be prepared for this – that they have been out living another life and will probably find it hard to get back into our old groove.

So, in addition to us trying to figure out what to do about workforce vaccination or non-vaccination, we will have to have patience. Patience and understanding are going to be critical skills in the next few months. Not everything has changed, but everyone has. We need to start planning for these changes now before we are caught off-guard, expecting something that may not be there on D-Day.

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I challenge you to think about what D-Day looks like and imagine some of the changes you may face. The truth will likely end up being far stranger, but any preparation helps prevent being caught off-guard.

Wishing you a great summer weekend, take the time to recoup. We will all need our best thinking in the weeks to come.

Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic

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## Self-Care Redux

13 August, 2021

Here we are, the last week of August. This is the 76th missive since the great Covid evacuation of 13 March 2020. Looking over this week, the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated immensely, Delta variants surged, going back to office stalled, and we are in a ludicrous political campaign, to name a few.

It is exhausting. The emotional roller coaster continues for each of us and our people, and it feels like we are not getting off anytime soon. So, this week, I want to come back to a simple construct – leader self-care.

In weeks past, I talked about this, but it feels like it is worth a revisit at the tail end of the summer.

Leader self-care is a critical element of organizational effectiveness. If our leaders are not taking care of themselves, then the organization will suffer. Here is where the leader of leaders needs to step in to make sure they are and to lead by example.

Here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- Who is taking care of themselves, and who is not? Stop and think about it. In your assessment, who is overreaching, driving, and not relenting? Are there those that have lost the drive as well? Has apathy replaced drive? Time, perhaps, to get them to step back, recharge, or conserve their energy?
- How is your body feeling? How are you physically? Really? Are you tired? Are you getting exercise? What do you need to do about it?
- How are you emotionally? How are you feeling? Are you in reacting mode to stressors? Are you not sleeping? Is your mind or heart racing?
- What is your outlook? What do you believe in? What do you really think the future has in store for you and your family? What will you do about it?

These obviously aren't exhaustive, but intended to get you thinking and self-assessing. These all revolve around control. Control is what we need these days, where so much is beyond our power to influence. As a result of not being behind the wheel, we are buffeted by the maelstrom. Feeling powerless eats away at us emotionally and, in turn, physically. So focus on "direct action", do things,



make things happen. If you are a manager of managers, your engagement in your manager's self-care is control you have regained. Your personal self-care is also about controlling your world.

So, in this final week of summer, take the time to recharge and renew yourself. Focus on yourself and others, and you will find new power to mold the outside world's influence.

Take care and hold tight to those things that matter.

Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic

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## Making Our Mark

**20 August, 2021**

This week's missive is coming to you from my cottage in the Thousand Islands on the last day of my vacation. It is a reflection from looking at the night sky here. I spent my life looking at the stars, and the night sky has always fascinated me. In my army career, I spent time under those stars and navigated by them as needed be. So they have a special place and value.

Looking at the sky reminded me how small and insignificant we are in the big scheme; a flyspeck on a flyspeck in a flyspeck of a flyspeck etc. That could have been disheartening, but it got me thinking. We all are trying to make something of our lives. We aren't necessarily messianic in our approach, but we all want a degree of control and influence on our world. But if we are so insignificant in the universe, how do we live that full life?

It hit me that the ability to help others, our community and our society is how we make our mark. It isn't about our hubris and ego; it is about our concern for others. It is about making a difference so that others can flourish.

How do we do that? It is through leadership. There is a very real need for leaders to shepherd our current world. That world can be our family, our community, our country or our planet. My stargazing also gave me pause for thought on the critical role of the managerial leader in helping others. Too often, we have our heads down at work and don't realise the vital role we play in enhancing the lives of others.

So if you get the chance, in the fading days of summer, look up and wonder at it all and consider what you do to help others.

Happy Labour Day to you and your family. Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic

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## Feelings of Fear

27 August, 2021

So, we are past Labour Day and well into September. This week's missive considers a phenomenon we're seeing in the Canadian Election campaign and how it may be a bit of a harbinger of things to come. (I have no intent to get involved in politics, and many of you that know me know where I stand on the subject.)

The phenomenon I am referring to is the rise of this angry, disgruntled, and sometimes violent turnout following Justin Trudeau's campaign. I may be wrong, but I don't remember seeing this vehement reaction in previous campaigns. It shows that we aren't immune to these things that have happened elsewhere in the world, but it also indicates a body of frustrated and angry people. In watching this, I can't help but think that this is the new normal – that people are frustrated, angry, worried and scared.

These feelings of fear come from many sources. There is ongoing concern for our physical selves, fatigue from lockdowns, precautions and ever-shifting guidance, and a sense of being "done with it". These are all contributing to this fear, unease and disgruntlement. The fear comes from not being in control. An example is people who chose to get vaccinated, but rail against the idea of a vaccine passport to go anywhere.

It is a challenging time and is shaking many of us to our cores.

This last year and a half has shown that not everything has changed, but everyone has. It is a reminder that, as we consider getting back to the office, there is likely a very disrupted body of workers out there. So, we really need to listen with empathy to understand where people are at. Zoom meetings have managed to hide the subtext of people's lives and worlds.

As the week goes on, watch closely, see how the mob is beginning to build and remember that this is potentially that harbinger of a disgruntled workforce waiting to come back to the office. While many have maintained patience and will be understanding of us navigating uncharted territory, others will bring their fear, uncertainty and ennui to their work. How they come back, and what they come back to, will have a lasting impact. It's also one of the few things you can influence.

Hopefully, I am wrong, but, as they say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Perhaps we need to redouble our leadership efforts now to engage and hear what our people are feeling.

You have an outsized ability to influence the return of your people. Listening to them, acknowledging their fears, frustrations and hesitations will go a long way to creating a more stable and productive return to work.

Have a good weekend

Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic

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## Trust

**3 September, 2021**

Last Friday was the twentieth anniversary of 9/11 and with it came back the flood of images of that day and the world that it set in motion. On reflection, I realised that 9/11 and COVID were the seminal moments of my life. I grew up in the Vietnam era but remembered little, and yes there was the crash of 2008, but they pale by the comparison to 9/11 and COVID for the impact they have had.

Last weekend I listened to an NPR broadcast about the long-term effects of 9/11 and how it has set the stage for where we are today. The broadcast posited that 9/11 set the stage for the current rejection of those in government and positions of authority because it begat the Iraq invasion and a multitude of conspiracy theories. While, arguably, the seeds were planted before 9/11, those in authority extends to those who are touted as experts. Perhaps coincidentally, the explosion of social media has led to a rejection of expertise and knowledge in all institutions. I can find anything to reinforce my opinion at the click of my mouse.

We live in an age where we no longer trust. We no longer trust governments, institutions, experts, pundits, and the media to name a few. We also no longer trust our leaders. On an individual basis, we may still trust our boss because we are closest to them, but do we really trust the institution we work for? If we do now, will we continue to do so for the days and weeks to come?

Trust in leadership has been gradually whittled away. So, as we go forward, we need to be aware of this trend. We need to be vigilant to rebuild trust in our leaders and our institutions. As I said last week, there is a seething undercurrent in our society, and we need to beware of it.

Finally, to help rebuild trust, I have heeded the advice coming from the missives and am currently working on the manuscript for a book on managerial leadership. The book intends to give a framework to enhance trust in our leaders and our organizations to help create great places to work. So, look for the book in early 2022.

Steadfast, Vigilant, and Optimistic

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## Professional Managerial Class

**10 September, 2021**

Many thanks for all the support as I finish off my book. While it will have aspects of the missives, it follows a narrative about which I feel strongly. My passion is the need for a management profession. I had the opportunity to discuss it this week as the keynote speaker at the Canadian Institute of Actuaries Appointed Actuary Conference.

As I have in the manuscript, I argued that what organizations really need for their effectiveness and to face the challenges of our VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world is a profession of management. We have professions for many other aspects of organizations (lawyers, doctors, accountants etc), but we don't have a professional management domain. We need it because management is a craft. It involves lifelong learning and effort. It isn't one training program and limited support over careers that last decades; it is daily, weekly, and yearly. It is the one common role throughout all organizations, but we fail to professionalise it.

By management I am specific, it is all about managerial leadership. Unlike other business books, I argue the two concepts are interlinked; one is no better than the other. They are integrated, for there is no management without leadership and no leadership without management.

My argument in the book and with the Actuaries is that a critical role ensures this professionalism and is not to be found in the business books currently on the shelves. That is the role of the Manager of Managers. Business books are replete with leading your team as though they are associates, but very few teach about the role that really helps and directs the manager, and that is their manager. The issues and challenges in organizations are often dropped at the feet of "managers". I believe we don't look far enough; the problems are the problems of those managers' managers.

So consider your own organization and its professionalism. Ask yourself where your managers are in ensuring the professionalism of your managers. For example do they:

- Hold your leaders accountable for being good leaders;
- Do they ensure there is clear context for your leaders;
- Do they coach their leaders to be better leaders;

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- Do they plan the career paths two levels down to ensure you have a talent pool of future leaders;
  - Do they teach your leaders;
  - Do they set the example for all to follow?

A little homework for you on the first weekend of Fall. All the very best to you and your family.

Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic

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## Truth and Reconciliation

17 September, 2021

Here we are on the day after the first Truth and Reconciliation Day here in Canada. For our International friends, this is where we wipe off our Canadian smugness and admit that perhaps we are not as idyllic as we seem. We have chosen one day as our way to reconcile centuries of oppression. Thursday was a day to recognise the days that we traditionally dragged Indigenous children from their homes and sent them to schools to be made non-Indigenous. This practice, while rooted in the mentality of a century before, continued until 1996. What occurred in those schools is the stuff of horrors, and the fact it ended only 25 years ago makes it that much worse.

So, how does this fit into managing the maelstrom? Besides being a truly shameful story, it is about the fact we need to be curious and to know our history. I am not self-righteous here. My good friend, Dr Carmen Lansdowne, started to sort me out this week when we met for dinner in Vancouver. She taught me "you know nothing, Jon Snow", to quote the tv series. I may feel bad or angry, but I don't know how this has impacted generations of lives, futures, and days. As the Executive Director of the First United Mission in the lower East side of Vancouver, and First Nations herself, a product of this system, she taught me that I have a journey ahead of me. While I may be empathetic and sympathetic, I know nothing.

When I, and colleagues, started the Ranger Foundation in 2015, I thought I was doing good by raising awareness of First Nations issues in Northern Ontario. It was to make Bay Street in Toronto aware of the work of the Rangers, who are 95% Indigenous, who protect and care for the communities and peoples of the North. The point was to show the challenges of the North and just how so many lives live by a thread, and it only scratches the surface. If you have ever been to the North, you know what I mean. But Carmen proved to me it was around me everywhere. Not just a Northern issue. It is an issue of every street corner in Canada. It is in our very fabric.

Yesterday, I said this on Twitter and I stand by it: "Great, we are having a Truth and Reconciliation day. However, let's make it every day. As a nation, we need justice, not symbols; potable water, not flags; we need to do better every day. We need to learn." It is not about virtue signalling and saving this for convenient moments on the calendar. It needs to be with us every day as we go forward.



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We have been given a gift. We need to look at this and truly learn what our Indigenous People have been through. We also need to revel in the fact that despite all this, they have survived. They have taught us a huge lesson. They have shown through their example as they struggled in a society, not of their choosing. They have lived in a life and a world stolen from them. Yet, they have come through it all. So, our purpose is to acknowledge and revere their example. We need to rectify past wrongs, and that starts by truly acknowledging their experience.

Truth and Reconciliation is an opportunity to atone and an opportunity to learn that, in the face of this, our Indigenous People have shown us strength and determination.

To be clear, I have no right to say these things from the privileged platform on which I live. However, as you can see, this all has special meaning to me.

My challenge to you is to practice and encourage awareness and empathy (yes, that word again). Recognition of the myriad lives, experiences, and nuances of your people and what they may be dealing with at any given time. What may be a moment of reflection for some, may be a deep rooted pain for others. It is not your job to solve it, or balm it, or fix it, but to support and bolster.

The weekend is upon you to reflect and contemplate the Indigenous message and what you may learn from it for us and our future.

Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic.

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## Risk Redux

24 September, 2021

This week is all about Risk. It's a subject I have mentioned several times in the missives, but it keeps coming back as a major determinant in human behaviour. It isn't just about COVID, but COVID has certainly heightened our awareness.

Risk, and its emotion fear, are very powerful forces. They act as a governor on our lives and can be quite debilitating. It is interesting when I mention the two together; people often negatively respond, almost saying, "I'm too tough to be afraid of risk". My answer is that fear is a spectrum, running from being a bit nervous to paralyzed into inaction.

Risk governs the decisions that we make. It has influenced a variety of things:

- Do we implement a vaccine policy?
- Do we travel?
- Do I comment on someone's actions or performance?

These are all examples of risks, and our fear factor and thinking denote that some are worse than others.

I believe that one of the critical roles of managerial leaders is to both manage and mitigate risk. We need to do it every day. So ask yourself: are you consciously assessing risk, and are your leaders consciously considering risk every day? It is through the conscious assessment of risk that we begin to assuage fear.

Our risk approach is simple, but very effective.

1. What is the worst thing that can happen?
2. What is the probability of that?
3. What is the severity if it does?

This approach makes it a conscious projection. It may be done with limited information, but it always requires a judgment call to predict. Once you have wrapped your head around the probability and severity, you can begin to mitigate the risk.

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So, this long weekend of Canadian Thanksgiving, give thanks for all you have and consider the role of risk in your life. Can you make its management and mitigation that much better?

All the very best to you and your family,

Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic,

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## Risk Revisited

1 October, 2021

Last week was all about risk, but I barely scratched the surface. Amazingly, risk overshadows every decision that we make. We unconsciously make risk assessments every moment of our lives:

- Do I tell my teacher the answer to their question?
- Do I report this variance to my boss?
- Do I comment on this issue in the meeting?

All of these are variations of the scale of risk. We will be comfortable with some answers and less so with others. In our field, we see risky behaviour all the time. In many cases that riskiness is a result of the "Tyranny of Do", or people just feeling the need to act without thought, and then issues suddenly arise. In other cases, we see people who are frozen by risk and unable to bring themselves to act, causing untold hardship. Both extremes have their own risks. So, it is important for us to be conscious of the scale and consider the nature of risk as we go about our daily work.

I was jolted into this awareness this week as I did work for a client in Florida. Having come from Canada where masking, social distancing, and vaccines are the norm, I found myself in a place where wearing a mask makes you feel like an outsider. A simple example, but it reinforced in me the nature of risk and its evil cousin, fear.

Unexplored risk can lead to fear, which can be debilitating and, by the same token, fearlessness which leads to recklessness.

So, to build on last week; where are your people on the risk scale? Do they know how to consciously assess risk? And how good are they at it?

As I said last week our risk approach is simple, but very effective.

1. What is the worst thing that can happen?
2. What is the probability of that?
3. What is the severity if it does?

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As my friend and mentor Jerry Rhodes pointed out, this model didn't go far enough. In steps 2 and 3 you need to summon all your best predictive skills to assess them.

But, once you have made that assessment, you can be the master of risk by developing your plans to mitigate the likelihood and the impact. This is why a careful assessment of risk will pay off in the long run – not just to reduce fear and recklessness, but also to help you deal with the imposter that risk is.

So, ask yourself: where are your people on the key thinking skills and what can you do about it?

Have a carefree weekend managing your risks.

Steadfast, Vigilant, and Optimistic!

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## Getting Back Together

8 October, 2021

This week I am returning to a missive topic I first sent in June. It is all about getting back together. Over the last month and a half, I have travelled across North America as senior leadership teams start to connect in person. In June, I wrote about the electric energy created by an Executive team coming back together and, in some cases, colleagues meeting for the first time with their peers.

That energy has not dissipated. People naturally need to come together. We have all made do on Teams and Zoom, but it is very different when we are actually together again. Sure, most tasks could be completed and achieved remotely, but what was the impact on people? Humans are social creatures. We feed off the energy of others. When in an-person group setting, the immediacy of interaction and the ability to read social cues create environments in which innovation and thought can flourish. On Zoom and Teams, people can be multi-tasking while in the room, or even just turn their camera off – with in-person meetings, you must be present and engaged. Similarly, in-person meetings breed spontaneity. Organic conversations which don't always occur in scheduled, hard-edged Zoom calls.

In June, it looked like a new day was dawning, but then the prospect of Delta variant set everything back. Leadership teams pushed out getting together. They chose to wait and play it safe.

For the last two weeks, I have written about risk management, I would suggest that this is one of those cases where you need to do a careful risk assessment. It is time for evaluating the risks of getting together, but also the risks of not getting together.

It may be hard to quantify, but the mental wellness risks of people not getting together may outweigh the chances of contracting COVID. It has been a long 19 months of pandemic lockdown, and we have all changed. You need to understand what those changes are. There's a reason why "breaking bread together" is an enduring method of people-engaging. You take the new person out for lunch. You have drinks together. There's something to be said about the barriers that are broken when you remove the veneer of "work" and just be present with each other.

So, consider bringing them together to find out how everyone really is. Some topics I have seen lately:

- What are we working on?

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- How are we feeling?
  - How should we communicate?
  - What are the problems we face?
  - How are our teams and employees?
  - Lastly, where are we in our strategy?

In my opinion, the best meetings have a flexible agenda. We talk and listen and then truly hear where others are at. Don't lose engagement in favour of efficiency.

You may already have met but if you haven't, make sure you save space for fun. We all need it. Consider this an inoculation against what may be in the future.

Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic.

## Bring the Team Together

15 October, 2021

Welcome to another missive. This week I will build on last week's, which was a build on the week's before, and all are about bringing your team back together. Last week's launched a series of interesting discussions from people not ready to "go back to the office".

At the beginning of the summer, I launched a series of missives about the moment when you bring your team back together. At that time, it seemed that many were preparing for that, and then, I am not sure, but I think the Delta variant of Covid got in the way, and many organizations backed off plans of meeting face-to-face.

To be clear I am not advocating everyone going back into the office. I am advocating taking the measured risk and bringing people back together to meet face-to-face, whether for a few hours or a full day. In my experiences with teams these last few months, I have seen teamwork beginning to falter, I have seen open animosity and general disgruntlement. As leaders, we may not be fully aware of these things, but it is around the edges in many cases. Its ultimate manifestation is people leaving the team entirely, either literally or mentally.

Covid and work have been a burden of endless hours and efforts with little change and adjustment. People are tired, and they are missing the all-important real human interaction. In a Teams or Zoom meeting, we can only use two of our senses, and humans are sensory beings. The phone and email even further reduce our ability to connect with others. All of these things were meant as short-term stopgaps for physically connecting as human beings. If those short-term solutions are for the long-term, we need to rethink what effective connection truly means to us.

There are always those who may be shy and not eager to connect, but it is time to consider that important face-to-face connection for the greater good and the team's betterment. There are risks for sure but, as I said last week, the risk of not doing it may be far greater.

Wishing you a great weekend with your family and a Happy Hallowe'en.

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## The Calling of Leadership

22 October, 2021

After one year, this is already beginning to feel like an annual missive, but here we are in the run-up to Remembrance Day. Across the Commonwealth, fourteen days before 11 November, we all start wearing poppies as a sign of respect for our fallen, reflecting on the carnage and horrors of the First World War.

For years, Tony Welsh and I have minimized our military careers, preferring not to rely on our experiences. This is because Hollywood movie imagery has created a misconception and judgement, without an understanding of what goes on and the nature of service before self.

We were lucky we had, as I say, to have had “one foot in the canoe and one foot on land”. We were reservists, so we were able to live two lives; one military and one civilian. However, that time taught one thing that I feel should be carried over into the civilian world. In the military, there is what is known as the “profession of arms”. It is all about constant professionalism, constant honing, and constant learning as we go. Unfortunately, in the civilian world, management or leadership are not seen the same way. There is not the same sense of the profession of leading others. Instead, our vocations are whatever our skills sets are; operations, IT, HR or the likes.

Leading others is a calling. There is a sacred covenant between the leader and the led. It isn't just a job or a task, it is a profession. It is something that needs to be worked on and continually sharpened. Whether in the crucible of battle or the boardroom; leaders hold their people's careers and lives in their hands. With that reality, there is a need for every leader to be the best that they can be. They need their bosses to help them and lead them but they need to take the covenant seriously.

Those who went before me, I am sure want a world of peace, where we would take care of others and create a world without strife. This is what we should expect and demand of every one of our leaders either at work, home, or in our nations. This will create great places to work and great countries to live in.

As we head into Remembrance Sunday, and then Remembrance Day, I hope you will heed this because whether protecting the nation or caring for others, the torch has been handed to each of us.

We need to take our roles seriously, without hubris, because of the sacred trust, and every day we need to be better than the day before. Join me in the movement to an age of professional managerial leadership, because at this moment, our world needs it.

For me, it has been lifelong learning. I have made mistakes all the way along. But it is a profession that requires reflection, humility, and authenticity. It is a career of continuous improvement, and every day, I learn something new.

As we go into Remembrance Day, think well on all those who took the oath seriously and gave their tomorrow for our today.

Have a great weekend.

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## The Manager Once Removed

29 October, 2021

This week's missive is based on various conversations this week with CEOs and Executives. The issue at hand is that Employees are leaving at an alarming rate. The problem is not just front-line, but key players are leaving some for new roles, while others are just walking away. At the heart of the issue is that not everything has changed in COVID, but everyone has. If you see this phenomenon, it may be a reflection that people's beliefs, goals, and desires have changed.

I gave it a lot of thought this week. I have a potential solution. If you are not dealing with this yet, this may be timely; if you are in the midst, there may be a way to stem the flow.

During COVID, a lot of people were evacuated to their homes. They were removed from the rituals of their corporate lives and their sense of their careers. For various reasons, whether real or imagined, they may be wondering about their career paths. This isn't helped by the preponderance of popular thought that "you need to be in charge of your career", "you can't trust your boss to look out for you" and "you can't trust the corporation". Suddenly, while working from home or within vacant offices, they have become disconnected.

What I propose is that you activate the role of the Manager-once-Removed (MoR). The MoR is the role that is accountable for talent in an organization (not HR). Its premise is that I have a Manager or boss that manages my work, and my boss's boss focuses on my career path. To keep this short, I won't go into all the reasons and welcome any questions about why and how.

Let me explain how it can work.

- The individual's Manager engages them and advises that their Manager-once-Removed would like to discuss their career path with them.
- Then the MoR meets with them and explores their hopes and dreams – where they would like to go in the business. At this point, the MoR is taking on a mentoring role. The MoR can give tips and techniques, but is there to discuss possible roles in with a greater breadth of perspective than the Manager.
- After that meeting, the MoR and the Manager then meet and discuss what development is required and discuss the current capability of the Employee.

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Suddenly, because of one meeting, your Employees realize two things; that they have a Manager who focuses on helping them with their work, and another senior Manager is interested in their career path. The senior Manager is also in a position to do something about it. Suddenly, they aren't alone anymore.

This may not stave off any departures, but it will show that you care. By the same token, nothing ventured, nothing gained at the expense of, at the very most, 20-30 hours. Beyond halting departures, you will likely get a more engaged workforce. You also get a handle on succession and talent management, all for the cost of an hour per employee.

So, consider this it may be some of the best time spent and will help you in the long run. If you get it happening throughout the organization, you will be set up for the great reset yet to come.

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## Leader Self-Care #3

5 November, 2021

In discussions with a member of the Forrest Team, Jason Legere, he suggested I return to a past topic this week, one which figures in my book. The subject is leader self-care. It seems timely to revisit this now that we are approaching the confluence of two key events: one is the approach of the Holidays, and the other is the Great Reset and getting back together.

Where the leader self-care comes in, is to be very mindful of not overextending yourself. Whether it is making sure you don't try to jam things in to have them done before holidays or ramping up for some form of return to work. There will be a natural tendency to try to get it all done, and you may run yourself ragged.

In our quest to meet a holiday deadline or other milestone, we tend to put our heads down and attempt to plough through. In that single minded drive, we may lose sight of the engagement we truly need to be efficient and productive. As everyone tries to do the same, the team cohesion erodes.

So, as a leader, there is another element: personal interaction with your team. To get things done and connect with everyone, you need to be cautious. In the drive for the quantity of getting to as many tasks as possible, you have to balance against quality.

Within the furor of the season, we need to learn to harness the power of the pause. A mindful moment of (re)evaluation every so often, before continuing down the path of work, will allow you to take a moment to re-engage, steady yourself, and recalibrate.

Take time to ask yourself these questions:

- How well am I still taking care of myself?
- How well am I spending the best time with my people?
- Am I able to truly listen? Am I able to ask the right questions?
- How well am I taking the time to set the context of the big picture issues?
- How well am I setting priorities?

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The last two questions are about the care of your leaders. You add value every day by setting context and priorities. No one else can do that for your people, and if they are leaders, they need them both.

So, in the dark doldrums of November, take the time for self-care and considering the needs of your people. Time spent here will pay off in the long run.

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## The Nature of Change

12 November, 2021

This week, I want to discuss some observations about the nature of change with clients. Have you noticed the tensions that fill our world? It seems impossible not to. Since March 2020, humanity has been subjected to changes that only a tiny part of society could have anticipated. There were no experiences for society to rely on or ground themselves within those changes, and the reality between truth and right was confused as everyone tried to make sense of their world. Within all this tension, there has been a real sense of danger that, again, few could have anticipated.

As we start to come out of this crazed time, there has been a pent up frustration in business to get on with things. They have tried to get out the gate and create the change that propels their businesses into the “roaring twenties”. The challenge is to move the business forward, utilizing workforces who are battered and bruised by the events of COVID.

The real question is whether enlightened leadership will lead these masses through all of this, or become the purveyors of dark satanic mills who will expect obedience and create even more change to an audience of workers already full of change.

This week is my realization that the workforce is potentially full. It isn't that they aren't change-ready or are change-resistant; it is that they are change “full”. As Enlightened Leaders, we need to take this into account. We need to have empathy and recognize how our people are feeling. This is more important as we contemplate creating more change that will impact our people. It is like travelling through white water in a canoe only to reach the lake and, suddenly, find strong winds and waves that make the traverse impossible. People are exhausted, with no energy in their tank, and their arms and back are burning.

Our job as leaders is to be aware of this and know exactly where our people are at. The shepherd knows when their flock can traverse no longer. As Enlightened Leaders, we need to pay attention that we are not asking too much. We need to know our people and promote their welfare.

So ask yourself, while the nature and tension within your business require change, where are your people? Ask yourself what the pace and tempo of change that your people have faced and are facing

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is? Are they ready for more change? Can they endure it? The final beware is that those tensions you have noticed may just boil over and you can expect to lose talent either physically or mentally.

With the weekend here, and a long weekend in the US, take the time to think about your workforce and consider how much more change they can handle.

Have a great weekend, and stay safe—all the very best to you and your family.

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## Risk Statistics

19 November, 2021

This week, Marc Tasse, our associate and expert in risk, shared with me some alarming statistics that he has been gathering in his work at the University of Ottawa. While I had written on the nature of risk in the COVID era before, these statistics gave me pause for thought.

I am not sure how much leader mind-time consciously goes into thinking and reflecting on risk. The information that Marc provided is pointing to some very big issues in the weeks and months to come. Unchecked risks can become reputational and, in the court of public opinion, can be damaging for your business. If further unchecked, they become a legal liability.

One of the stats is based on a survey question of whether respondents had faced an ethical dilemma in the last 12 months. 50% of respondents stated that they had 1-5 times, and another 26% stated they had more than 6 times in the last year.

So, what does this mean? I think it is clear the risk to your organization is huge in the age of COVID disconnection. COVID has led people out of the office and into their homes where they are left to make choices on their own. The risk, then, is that the wrong turn in an ethical dilemma because I am “on my own” is higher. It also means that as employees we have to be that much more ethical beings.

If that isn't enough, in another survey conducted by Marc, 42% felt that the ethical issues resulted from pressures and greed, and another 48% by the lack of controls and no fear of consequences.

For me these were sobering numbers. So, the next question, then, is what to do about it? As leadership development experts, we believe this all rests around the issue of accountability; in other words holding people to account. The employee cannot feel alone and disconnected.

Some thoughts on how to deal with this prospect:

- Do your risk assessment. Is there the possibility of ethical dilemmas for your people?;
- How attuned are your leaders to the risk of ethical breaches?;
- How close are your leaders to their people?;
- Will your leaders be able to sense the challenges for their employees?

These won't solve it, but putting our heads in the sand won't either. Remember, not everything changed in COVID, but everyone has. What was unthinkable before may be the new norm. The solution is the engagement of your managers with their people today and every day.

Have a great weekend and all the very best to you and your family.

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## End of the Year Run Down

26 November, 2021

This week is a contemplation missive. This is an opportunity for you to consider for yourself and your people. It is nearing the end of the year 2021, and is time to pause and reflect on where you are. The topic came to me as I considered where my own mind was at, I heard how others were feeling, and noticed behaviours in others.

The end of the year is always what I call a run down. You know it is the end of the year and you are just trying to get things done. Knowing there is an end-state for me and I believe others, it is a frantic time of sorts and a lot of energy is put out to cross that finish line. This year is no different in that regard. What makes this year different, I think, is what is looming on the horizon. Just when we thought that there was light at the end of the COVID tunnel it was, in fact, that oncoming train, the Omicron variant. Things were getting back to normal – kids were at school, people were planning vacations out of the country for the holidays – and now the variant looks like it is poised to send us all backwards again. As someone said to me, this is like March 2020, only now I know what is likely to happen.

What has given me pause for thought is that I have seen (only superficially albeit) stress reactions. People are losing their bounce. They are getting annoyed at little things. An ennui feels like it has set in and people are fatigued. Whether it is the uber driver, the co-worker or the store clerk; the telltale signs are there.

So, what to do about it? In ourselves, we need first to pause and see how we are feeling. Next, we need to do that “out of body thing” where we try to observe how we react to things. Are you noticing a difference? Are you behaving differently?

Then, for our people, first consider what they may be going through. Are the prospects of vacations dashed? Are the chances of them being together with loved ones no longer going to happen? Are they going to be facing the challenges of kids at home in the New Year? This is the time for empathy and seeing that these things will affect how people feel.

From insight comes understanding, and a path to resolution comes from an understanding. Engage in a dialogue, ask them how they are feeling. The root of the issue is that we may be losing, or have lost, a

degree of control in our worlds. By engaging in that dialogue, you are taking back that control, you are helping others and you will help them to understand how they can gain their own sense of control back.

I hope I am wrong on this. I hope we can sail through this holiday season like years before but, if we can't, it is best to meet it head-on and recognise how it may impact us and others.

I would ask you, though, if it impacts you to truly start to plan to unplug and revel in the joys of everyday life. This too shall pass and to Keep Calm and Carry On.

Here's to hoping for the best. Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic

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## Hope

**3 December, 2021**

This week's missive is short. It feels as though a lot of people will already be on holidays and so, if you are, I hope you have unplugged and are not furtively going through e-mail while spending time with family.

This is the eve of another Christmas; yet another Christmas of uncertainty. But, the premise of this time of year is Hope. The story is that a new hope was born in the dark days of that time.

So, as a point of light in the darkness of these days, it seems that while we are getting buffeted by the latest COVID variant, there is renewed hope that the pandemic will move soon enough to be endemic. As the days start to get longer, this is the time to give hope and inspire it in others.

If you gather with others over the holiday, give thanks for that ability. If you cannot gather with others, rest assured this, too, shall pass, and a new day will dawn. As I said last week, Keep Calm and Carry On has as much meaning today as it did in the midst of the Second World War.

Have a terrific holiday unplug, and rest up for the next phase.

Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic

## Year in Review

10 December, 2021

Here we are again, poised on the edge of the New Year. New Year is an important time for me, when I take stock of the year that was and prepare for the year that will be. It is about the chance to start with a fresh foot into the next twelve months.

Had we been paying closer attention at the end of 2019, we might have foreseen what 2020 would have been. But, it often doesn't work that way, and we will still get surprised as the year goes on. That doesn't mean you shouldn't reflect or plan, just be prepared to adapt those plans to changing circumstances.

New Year is the opportunity to reflect and think back on what we learned from experience and how that will inform us for 2022. So, take some time to consider:

- What were your three great successes of 2021?
- What are the lessons learned from those successes for 2022?
- What were two setbacks in 2021?
- What are the lessons learned from your setbacks for 2022?
- Who did you lose track of in 2021?
- Who will you reconnect with in 2022?
- What are your goals for 2022?

Wishing you a very Happy New Year, and welcome to 2022!

Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic,

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## New Year, New Thinking

17 December, 2021

Welcome to the New Year. Strangely enough, it doesn't feel different from the old year. Congratulations on another orbit around the Sun.

Here we are at yet another inflection point in managing the maelstrom. At this point, this is the 94th missive and, sorry to say, I have not given you the solution to the challenges we face. I may have given you solutions, but not the one solution. I would argue that, while I may not give you an answer, I have started to give you the questions.

The point about all these weeks of questions is to get you to think. I firmly believe that thinking is the undiscovered country. While thinking is at the root of all our success, it is also the least understood and utilized skill that we have as human beings. Every endeavour of our lives relies on thinking, yet we spend very little time trying to hone this skill. I believe we don't think about thinking because it is hard work. It is a travail, and it requires discipline, resolve, and determination – all the hallmarks that seem to be missing in a society that wants the quick fix, the easy answer, and the ultimate solution.

If you are not convinced that there is a dearth of good thinking, look at where we are in the midst of the pandemic. There is no space for working by rote, using old models and experiences; it has required thinking. The successes (or misses) are representations of good or bad thinking. So, if we want better results we need better thinking. To put it simply, our failures are the results of bad thinking and our successes are because of good thinking. While luck and randomness may enter into our results, we owe it to ourselves and others to be the best thinkers we can be.

To be clear, when I say “thinking”, I mean how you employ your whole self to deliver something. This is a most important definition for anyone who is employing human beings to do work. For it is for their thinking that you are employing them. Be crystal clear here, you employ people to use their thinking. In effect, you are renting their thinking. There are two ways to look at this: you can be a robber baron and just take them for all they have to offer, or you can be the farmer who plants and nurtures their crop. The robber baron will toss aside those that don't provide an immediate return. The farmer grows the capability and reseeds every year. They plan crop rotation, they ensure they don't overstretch the land.

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You as a leader must decide, will you be the farmer who cultivates or will you be the robber baron who exploits the land?

If you are the former, the next missives will be to help you encourage the land and the people. They will be all about how to assist you and others to think through the challenges ahead. They will be designed to help you to learn to be the best thinkers you can be.

As I look on the year ahead, this is all I can offer you – a way to think through the challenges ahead. I do not have the answers, you do. I just have the questions; hopefully it is both what you need and want.

Steadfast Vigilant and Optimistic



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## Thinking Redux

24 December, 2021

As promised, this week's missive is more on Thinking. I am singling out thinking because I believe it has a bad reputation. In our society, we are driven by the "Tyranny of Do", where we focus on Doing to the detriment of Thinking. "Just do it" and "get on with it" are all the indicators of this Tyranny of Do. A premium is placed on doing, where thinking is seen as weak, almost as though it is frightened of "buckling down and achieving it". All thinking in work is to Do something, but we have placed a premium on the doing side and not the thinking.

I see this time and time again in the senior leadership of organizations. The effort is on "getting results" and not thinking. We refer to this as not working at level. It is where we feel the need to bring about tangible results. It is not about planning or looking to the future horizons for the business. In many cases, it is the misbegotten belief that, "I add value to my team by demonstrating that I am doing something". The problem with it is you are taking the "doing" away from the levels and layers below. Chances are likely that what you are "doing" is going to be actually be the work of your Direct Reports, not yours. In essence, you compress the organization and crush the employees below you in your drive to prove value.

Thinking is critical. Planning, postulating, and conceptualizing is essential in today's Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous world. If you "do" too fast, you will commit yourself to a precipice from which you cannot withdraw. I realise fully that, in the face of VUCA, you cannot be sitting thinking you will need to act, but, you need to summon your thinking to the new horizons and consider what might be.

If there is a niggling thought that you may be facing the do tyranny imposter, ask yourself these questions:

- How soon must I act?
- What is beyond me acting upon this thing?
- If I move now on this, what will be the quality of the result?
- Is there more I need to know?
- Are there other perspectives that need to be taken into account?
- Will action now provide triumph or disaster?
- Have I taken away the freedom of movement of those below me?

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- Am I working at the level my organization is paying me?
  - Do I really add more value or am I the imposter?

By asking yourself any of these questions, you have broken the chains of tyranny. You are forcing yourself to think. By asking others or encouraging them to consider these questions, you get them to think. It is, after all, what you and your people are paid to do. And, if that is for what you are paid to do, then why not build your skills and that of others?

Don't be a victim of tyranny; instead, step up and be counted as a thinker.

Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistically thinking,

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## Skillful Thinking

31 December, 2021

We are back to the issue of the importance of thinking. We do “thinking” every day, but how often do we do it consciously. Today you probably unconsciously went from your bed to your morning routine. We all do that, but what happens when the routine is shattered by out-of-the ordinary events? We have to pause and think.

Covid has taught us to take nothing for granted and the speed of change has been supersonic. Thinking has been critical during this time because we have not been able to go back to autonomic thinking; we have had to pause and ponder.

So, when do you need skillful thinking? Well, as we have seen during Covid is one case. With little experience to rely on, we have had to use logic, gut feel, data, ingenuity, and imagination all to be able to sort things out.

In our experience, where our clients need their best thinking in these circumstances:

- When you are faced with taking action, determine what to do.
- When you are under stress, exhausted, or run down.
- When you are facing risk, doubt, uncertainty, or fear.
- When you are facing an ethical dilemma or one where there are competing values.
- When you need to be faster, more efficient, or cheaper in what you are going to do.

Now, ask yourself these questions - when you were last faced with any of above:

- Did you stop and think it through carefully?
- Were you able to develop as many options as possible?
- Did you gather the data and perspectives of others?
- Were you able to make a timely decision?
- Were you able to share with others how you came to your decision and thereby retain their confidence?

The last bullet is important because it represents a reality of the human condition – we must always be rationalizing our thinking to others. Because thinking is the ultimate diversity, we all do it differently. So, be prepared to sell your thinking, always. There will be more on selling your thinking next week.

I wish you a great weekend, and the chance to practice your skillful thinking.

Steadfast, Vigilant and Optimistic