

Neutralizing the Imminent Tsunami

LEADERS MUST ADDRESS THE FOURTH COVID-19 PANDEMIC WAVE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL MALADIES BY TURNING ANXIETY INTO POSITIVE ENERGY.

BY TONY O'DRISCOLL

As the world sluggishly emerges from the deathly grip of the COVID-19 pandemic, the “everyday superheroes” who spent the last three years risking their lives to combat the virus now are cautioning that humanity’s conflict with COVID is far from over. In fact, many warn it is just beginning.

The first pandemic wave abruptly outstripped the ability of global healthcare systems to deal with the unprecedented volume of life-threatening COVID cases. The second wave surfaced as patients with urgent non-COVID-related medical conditions left untreated flooded into available healthcare facilities. The third wave began as patients with ongoing chronic conditions that had to be put on hold finally were able to secure medical help.

Medical professionals around the world believe the fourth pandemic wave will dwarf the last three: a tsunami of psychological maladies. Studies from the World Health Organization (WHO) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) caution that the prolonged stress of an omnipresent existential threat, profound disruptions to our daily habits and routines, and continued uncertainty about what the future may hold are contributing to a more sleep-deprived, distracted, and depressed world.

SUPPORT FROM LEADERSHIP

As the fourth pandemic wave comes crashing down upon our organizational shores, leadership must be fully prepared to support our most indispensable asset: the human beings who quite literally breathe life into our organizations each day. To do so, we must nurture our people’s resilience to counter their brittleness, and empathy to reduce their anxiety. We must foster their adaptability to cope with non-linearity and their intuition to overcome incomprehensibility.

At last year’s Global Peter Drucker Forum, Xavier Huillard, chairman and CEO of Vinci, a \$50 billion global construction company with 215,000-plus employees, eloquently argued that instead of exerting energy to drive productivity and increasing employee anxiety, leaders must absorb the anxiety of their people and translate it into positive creative energy.

I have a hunch that Huillard is a student of history. In 1924, Mary Parker Follett, a pioneer in the field of organizational behavior, observed, “*Leadership is not defined by the exercise of power, but by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those led.*”

As we struggle to make sense of today’s Brittle, Anxious, Non-Linear, and Incomprehensible (BANI) world, leaders would do well to heed this sage advice. **f**



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