

Mind Your Head

“I think that you will agree that we are living in most interesting times. I never remember myself a time in which our history was so full, in which each day brought us new objects of interest and let me say also, new objects for anxiety.”

You might be forgiven for thinking that these words were uttered in recent times on one media outlet or another. In fact these words are the musings of Joseph Chamberlain in 1898, the father of Neville Chamberlain. They sound like they could easily have been said last week!

For over five years, I’ve been talking about the ‘new normal’ on our in-company and open leadership programs. I have to be honest, I’ve had many bewildering looks from leaders in education and in business over those years as I’ve sought to promote and unpack the concept. Now however, everybody seems to be using the phrase. It’s everywhere!

But what does it mean for leaders and businesses as we look into a very uncertain and unpredictable future? I would like to offer some thoughts and suggestions for a changing local and global landscape and where we might need to pay attention within our organisations. Particularly towards those who have a leadership role or simply the ability to influence and impact others.

I’m sure we have all reeled at the suffering, the statistics, the failures and successes spilling out of a season of great turbulence. A time of fear, anxiety, frustration and uncertainty.

I would suggest that we need to ‘mind our head’ in terms of the way we of think about the why, how and what of the new workplace. The way we think about our teams and the individuals within them. The way we think about ourselves, our roles and our potential to influence and impact others around us. And may I say, the way we think about our families and friends. There are a number of ways we might do this in the months ahead as set out below for your consideration.

1. Growth Mindset

I have been very interested for some time in the research carried out by Carol Dweck from Stanford University among others. 'Growth versus fixed mindset' is a term coined by Dweck. Here are some of the characteristics of a growth mindset that will be needed in the new normal, the post-covid organisation:

- Embracing challenge and uncertainty - keeping an open mind, seeing possibilities
- Open to and willing to learn from constructive feedback and criticism
- Persistent in the face of setbacks and disappointments
- Inspired and influenced by the success of others and not threatened by it
- Failure seen as an opportunity to learn, adapt and be changed
- Resilience and emotional intelligence

2. Agility Mindset

Leaders who demonstrate agility don't wait for a phase to be completed before entering the next one. They re-create or perhaps more accurately, co-create new templates, patterns and routines for working, collaborating and constructing paradigms. One only has to look around today to see diverse examples of this from the use of virtual/mixed reality equipment by medics to innovative arrangements and initiatives in schools. Out of chaos, creativity emerges.

3. Safety Mindset

It could be argued that safety will have to be seen as more important than efficiency. There'll be few who will not have been reminded of the importance of health, well-being and the need for edifying relationships. The post-covid organisational environment may well be more considerate and people-centred as we all have been faced with the things that really matter in life. Authenticity, understanding, inclusion and a sense of purpose and belonging.

4. Optimism Mindset

Closely associated with emotional intelligence, optimism will need to be in great supply. I'm careful not to confuse optimism with positive thinking, I see them as distinctly different. I've been challenged by the work of Martin P Seligman in his book 'Learned Optimism'. Seligman suggests that, "When we encounter adversity, we react by thinking about it. Our thoughts rapidly congeal into beliefs. They become so habitual we don't even realise we have them unless we stop and focus on them."

It is my firm belief that we have an opportunity to think about our thinking as we move forward and perhaps think very differently and as a result, see a new set of beliefs emerge about the nature of work, the importance of relationships and a return to our core values and purpose as the platform for everything else we do.

Bill Roy

Director – Chameleon Education