

PRAESTA

Leadership thoughts a year on...

Praesta Ireland
www.praesta.ie
Tel: (01) 2066724

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Leading businesses at this time in the world is different and difficult. Here we share what our clients in Ireland and internationally are telling us about what is helping them lead well, one year into a global catastrophe.

My Self

Leaders are as tired, pressurised and worried about family and friends as everyone else. Yet we need to show confidence, remain calm and hold a clear and positive vision. We are managing challenging organisational expectations, and teams with depleted energy and resilience, at a time when our own personal resources are stretched as never before.

What helps? *Self-care, Connection, Perspective*



Self-Care

We are used to achieving success through hard work, focus and determination. 'Self-care' can sound soft, something that weakens resolve, and has not been part of the business lexicon. But we know from professional sport that success only comes when hard work, focus and determination are supported by disciplined self-care of mind and body. The world of work is no different.

Stressed, anxious and tired people do not inspire or lead well.

How you 'are', is how you are as a leader.

Four reflective questions to consider:

- *If I were my own best friend, what advice would I give myself right now on taking proper care of myself?*
- *What do I know I need to do but have been avoiding or not making time for?*
- *What would help me laugh a lot more?*
- *Would more (or some!) mindfulness practice, self-compassion exercises, breathing techniques strengthen my resilience?*



Connection

Leadership is lonely at the best of times but even more acutely now. After a year of lockdown most of us are feeling some sense of isolation, separation and restriction. Teams are looking to us for answers and certainty at a time when answers and certainty, locally and globally, are in short supply. We are making decisions with less information and wider impact than before, and the responsibility and uncertainty can feel isolating. Leaning into connection with others is particularly important now, to share the sense of common experience and purpose.

Meaningful connection helps keep us grounded and resourced.

Three reflective questions to consider:

- *Who would I really enjoy talking to, if I could?*
- *How far beyond the people I live and work with have I connected in the last few weeks?*
- *Are there ways I could connect more meaningfully, move beyond the transactional conversations, with family, friends or at work?*

Perspective

The space around us has become small. Working from home, meeting deadlines and targets, unable to commute or travel. Our living companions always know where we are, the organisations we work with can reach us at any time. It can feel as though we are deep in the trees; the wood and wider world are invisible. We need to stretch to sense the wider space, the options, the possibilities.

Keeping an open and wide perspective raises energy and a sense of possibility.

Four reflective questions to consider:

- *If I were to climb up on a balcony and see my life now, playing out on the floor below, what would I see?*
- *What is going well? What else?*
- *If I knew for certain that the work targets would be met, what action would I take today?*
- *Imagining a year from now, February 2022, what do I see and feel, looking back on what I gained from this experience?*

My Team

Teams are being tested in 'once-in-a-lifetime' way. There is nothing in the team performance literature about how to excel in a global pandemic. It is an unprecedented and unanticipated experience for everyone, bringing simultaneous stress to individuals, teams, organisations and markets. The threats are clear, the opportunities less so – but they are there. Teams are experiencing tensions and losses along with new strengths and possibilities.

What helps? **Optimism, Connection, Reflection**

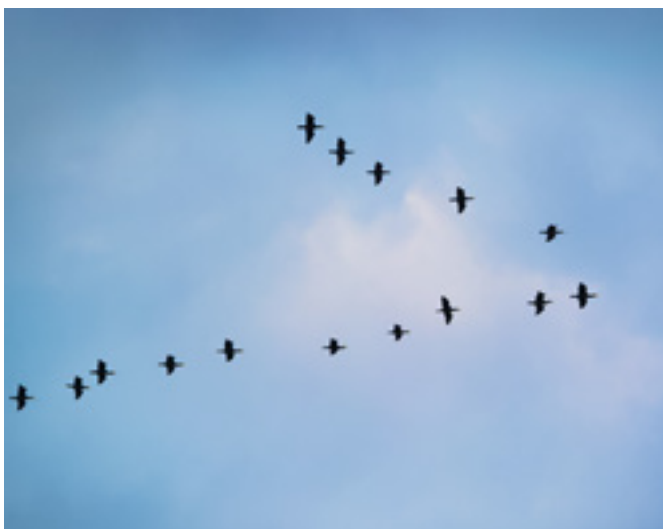
Optimism

Optimism is an intangible emotion with a very tangible effect. Optimism impacts a team's performance, fuelling energy, resilience and creativity. An optimistic team sees the possibilities and finds the opportunities. Optimism has been difficult to access over the last year, but we have developed and nourished it within our teams so that their best thinking can emerge.

Optimism improves our thinking, energy and adaptability.

Four reflective questions for the team to consider:

- *What have we gained or learned as a team over the last year?*
- *How are we stronger and better than we were pre-Covid?*
- *What can this team, and only this team, achieve now for the business?*
- *What would be a creative and nourishing goal for us to achieve in the next 6 months?*



Connection

Positive relationships within teams are important in ordinary times, but in extraordinary times they strengthen, sustain and empower a team to a new level of performance. Virtual meetings and physical restrictions have frayed the quality of work and friendship relationships and increased a sense of loneliness. Online coffees and catch-ups initially met the relationship needs in our teams as people were brought together by the shock of the crisis. A year on, the catch-ups have faded and many have settled into their separate silos of responsibility.

Restoring meaningful connection breathes new life into a jaded team.

Reflective questions to consider:

- *What is being lost in the way we are now?*
- *If we were really connected and had a sense of genuine shared purpose, how would we be?*
- *How can we restore and refresh our thinking?*

Reflection

Reflection is like exercise and drinking plenty of water – we know it is good for us, but we resist it. We leave it to the end of the day, or week, or to never. In a world where forward momentum is highly valued, it can feel uncomfortable to slow down, stop, and look back. When we spend time with our teams reflecting on what we have achieved, how we have felt, and how we might be better, we become powerfully more effective.

Shared reflection improves shared performance.

Questions to consider:

- *How have I been, as a member of this team, over the last year?*
- *How have we been, as a team, over the last year?*
- *What have we achieved and how have we achieved it?*
- *What did we leave behind?*
- *What do we wish we had done differently?*
- *What must we bring with us, as a team, into this year?*

Useful Links:

- [Breathing Your Way to Clear Thinking](#)
- [Self-Compassion](#)