

Chapter 4

Claim Your Seat at the Table



One day you woke up and the whole world changed. Now things are very strange. The world is dealing with people being unemployed, underemployed, and some are still working, but in unfamiliar territory. The global health pandemic snatched normalcy, affecting every person and touching every industry causing economic disruption that would put your best skills to test.

Yet, you sit in an extraordinary position. You are among those in a leadership role with key responsibility for helping to implement how the organization will adjust to meet its immediate objectives. You are the hitch pin, each day moving fluidly between executive leadership and a larger team of employees who action the company's

new set of directives. Things are moving incredibly fast. Employees are disgruntled, confused, and emoting complaints repetitively as others grapple with a different set of burdens as they face being unemployed.

Meetings are happening twice as often. Decisions are being made on the fly. There is no playbook or standard operating procedures to guide this process as government mandates and company policies change by the week, and sometimes by the day. Pause, take a minute, and remove your hand from the panic button.

Life is yet another term for 'keep moving forward.' The challenge comes when a shift occurs that throws you off balance. Feelings of fear, panic, and a host of other negative emotions can quickly hold you captive. You become impatient with not being able to control the process. This is a difficult place to be because you question every aspect of your current experience, standing in this crisis, armed with limited or no answers. There should be some consolation in understanding that this situation is not personal. It is a global pandemic that has affected millions of people, and while we struggle with the notion of how we will pay bills or stay employed, people keep losing their lives. That helps to refocus and set the mind on managing things within your control.

Instead of fighting feelings of frustration, anxiety, and being overwhelmed - deal with them. Use them as energy transformed to move you forward. The strength needed to arrive at your next destination as you discover how you contribute to making things better for the organization and yourself. While it is true you are in the midst of a crisis, you still have control over situations more than you may know.

In any crisis, you have a choice:

Nihil facere. Take no action. Be still and be a spectator observing the movements of the day.

-or-

Carpe diem. Seize the moment. Recognize the incredible potential this has to be a defining moment in your career.

Throughout the book I have discussed when a crisis comes it is also when the best innovators rise to the surface. I shared how Uber emerged as a market dominator during the economic mortgage fall of 2008. But much of what will be discussed when looking back on the historical record of this pandemic will speak to the great moves made by companies and global organizations. Little attention and study are usually given to the integral role middle and senior-level leaders play in shaping and executing the company's new or adjusted vision. That is your job.

You must widen your lens to envision what will be required of you now and what will be different for you on the other side of COVID-19. In the present, your small skills will be magnified. You will be required to demonstrate the multitude of attributes that define a resonant leader leaning heavily on your Emotional Intelligence (EQ) skills. The bar must be raised where there is deep thought that goes into the deliberate actions you take to engage with team members, peers, and senior leadership. This time will delineate your ability to put into practice the leadership skills acquired and expected of you as a reflection of what you have asked of other team members. How you chose to manage the conditions that unfold throughout this global pandemic will be the epoch that defines the trajectory of your career.

1

Moving the Needle

As a business professional, you have spent years cultivating your career. Whether through your academic achievements or your ability to use your innate capabilities to climb the corporate ladder. You are among some of the fortunate people who continue to be employed.

You are a part of what helps to sustain some sense of sanity in the world of business and for the customers they serve. Yet, the pressures of being in this environment is something you have never encountered before. Difficult situations throughout your career have arisen and you've successfully made it through them all. But this situation is different. It is global with no handbook or standard operating procedures (SOP's) on how to proceed.

What is in place is the years of experience and training that you can draw on to pull from your toolbox that will help you innovate and find a way to be a significant part of your organization's path forward. That is the mindset you must use to move the needle.

This is a rare occasion. It's a time that will determine your future when you pay greater attention to both sides of the coin. The side where you play a critical role in helping the organization find its footing in the new ecosystem, and the other side of the coin where you determine how this will impact your career as you seek to acquire your seat at the table. It is not unusual that people with leadership roles, heads of departments, managers, or directors are at times absent from the decision-making table. It is definitive evidence that position does not always equate to power. Instead, influence and impact are a milestone on the road to earning your seat.

Hear is something that may come as a surprise. COVID-19 unlocked a latent chamber of skills for you. You are learning to pilot through the conditions of a global health pandemic, the economic downturn that is occurring at the rising crest of how the business will remodel itself around the world because of technology. This is all happening simultaneously. At one end, five generations of talent are moving in and out of the new ecosystem. At the other end is where you determine the effort that must be made to acquire your seat at the table. It is not unusual that people with leadership roles, heads of departments, managers, or directors are at times absent from the decision-making table. It is definitive evidence that positions do not always equate to power. Instead, influence and impact are milestones on the road to earning a seat. When you evaluate the dynamics of these factors and the immense contribution key decision makers at the table will have on shaping the future, the significance of you having a seat can be understood.

2

Getting to the D

The Decision-Making Table is occupied by individuals with strong business acumen. They possess a willingness to contribute, the capability to make a difference, and are trusted for their input on important decisions for the business. Gaining trust is earned by taking proactive steps to find ways to participate in the growth process, tackling challenges and consistently producing beyond expectations.

Occupants of the table work across culture and between departments by using strategic management practices to eliminate pain points.

They are the “how-to” and “go-to” individuals within the company because they know how to link departmental objectives with company initiatives using data to realize a positive impact on the bottom line. To have a seat you should be:

- An eloquent communicator.
- Acutely aware of the breadth and depth of company operations and the impact of your area of work.
- Know how to engage in constructive conflict.
- Define the problem, offer a resolution, execute the solution.
- Become aligned with the vision and mission of the organization.

3

Branding Your Career

Most people dedicate a small amount of time to craft the career they want. More time is often spent on finding a job that results in a position that often does not exercise full potential. To build a career is to be purposeful in defining what you want your life to look like and what strategic decisions you are going to make to reach your destination. The process of getting there is a journey, but it requires continuous cultivation. What does that look like for you? How are you spending time during this disorder to bring order and direction to your professional life?

If I asked you to take a ride with me, the one question you would probably ask is “where are we going?” Planning the way forward for your career is the same. There should be a clearly defined goal.