

Communicating THROUGH Volatility

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COMMUNICATING THROUGH VOLATILITY

It's human nature to find comfort in knowing what to expect. But while we might crave predictability and routine, it's how we navigate sudden curveballs that defines us. As leaders, we must calmly guide our teams and communities through these moments of heightened uncertainty.

This type of leadership can feel daunting, though. Mission Partners' research shows that 51% of purpose-driven leaders say "leading through challenging moments" is one of their top communications challenges and concerns.

Finding the Opportunity

Volatility is inevitable. Whether it's a sudden change in our relationships, a merger of organizations, or stress from the political landscape, the uncertainty can weigh on us. Volatility is often met with increased social tensions and heightened emotions—but it also provides an opportunity to lead with vulnerability and invite others to do the same.

With transparent, authentic communication rooted in empathy, we can better support our audiences through our leadership. We can reinforce our values and encourage open, respectful dialogue. Remember: At the end of the day, we all want to be acknowledged and accepted.

HOW TO WEATHER THE STORMS

Keep an Open Mind

- 1. Start From a Place of Curiosity.** When your organization is navigating a difficult path, it might feel like you need the answers right away. Instead, come into conversations with a mindset of “I don’t know all of the answers right now, but I’d like to understand.” Simply staying humble and receptive to new information can build credibility and trust with audiences throughout the volatile time period and beyond.
- 2. Acknowledge Different Viewpoints.** During periods of distress, there will be moments when you face difficult questions or are overwhelmed by a conversation. Being able to acknowledge differing viewpoints signals that you understand what’s being shared and that you appreciate it, even if you disagree with it. “I appreciate you sharing, and I can see where you’re coming from,” can go a long way.
- 3. Create Opportunities for 360-Degree Feedback.** According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), 83% of U.S. workers suffer from work-related stress, and 54% of workers report that work stress affects their home life. Volatility can spike stress levels, making it all the more important for leaders to model organizational values and actively listen. Provide opportunities for your team to share their experiences with you through 1:1 check-ins, town hall group discussions, and new or proven communication channels that allow for timely conversations.
- 4. Listen More than You Speak.** Volatility can create false urgency. It’s important to slow down and listen, first. Radical listening encourages us to listen without preconceived notions, to listen to understand, and to listen to learn. It requires focused attention without considering what we’ll say next.

Invest in Your Organizational Culture

- 5. Set the Tone, Now.** Leaders are responsible for letting their teams know what language and behavior is acceptable within an organization. Communicate with respect, humility, and compassion, and ask your team to follow suit. Building an organization’s culture takes time and consistency—don’t wait until you are in a volatile situation to set ground rules about how team members should treat each other.
- 6. Lead with Empathy.** In seasons of volatility, empathy can be your greatest guide. Practicing empathy with team members may include tuning into a colleague’s facial expressions and body language, giving them your full attention, and seeking to understand their viewpoint rather than defending your own. Even if you might disagree with a colleague, empathy encourages us to find our shared commonalities instead of focusing on our differences.

- 7. Prepare for Future Needs.** Eventually, the volatility will slow and there will be a “new normal.” If new communication channels were set up to address the volatility, such as regular town hall meetings or weekly newsletters, consider letting these channels continue as a way to create a smoother transition for your audiences. Over time, you can evaluate whether the channels are still needed. If new instances of volatility arise, your organization can quickly resurrect these channels.

Communicate Thoughtfully and with Intention

- 8. Know When to Speak Out (and When Not to).** Before adding your voice and viewpoint to public dialogue about external hot-button issues, such as elections or protests, ask yourself these questions: “How closely related is this to our organizational values?” and “Do our actions as an organization back up our words?” You might also consider who you could alienate if you speak out and who you could alienate if you do not. Which audience is more important to you? The answers to these questions can help leaders determine what to say, when to say it, and how to convey the information.
- 9. Be Clear, Open, and Present.** Volatile situations are inherently unpredictable and often rapidly evolving. In these times, it’s especially important for leaders to be on the frontlines to assess needs, listen, and share information. To increase stability for your organization, keep lines of communication open and provide regular updates, even when news is difficult. A lack of clarity and transparency can breed rumors and anxiety, which erodes trust.
- 10. Stay Steady.** Choose talking points and positions that you can stick to, no matter what. This doesn’t mean you can’t stay open to new information—it simply means that your core convictions should stand strong. You can’t have clear values and then decide that sometimes you’ll compromise them. It comes down to clearly and definitively knowing who you are and who you are not at your core. Ultimately, your team and community should be able to anticipate your viewpoint.

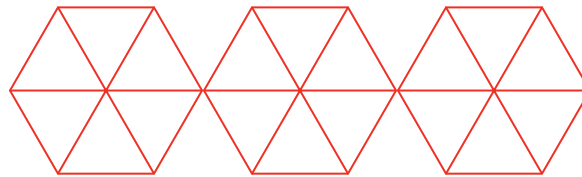
TAKE ACTION

To better prepare your organization for periods of volatility, start here.

- Reflect on the last time you approached a problem with pure curiosity. How can you integrate this mindset into your daily routine?
- Consider what's holding you back from practicing empathy and radical listening on a consistent basis. How can you remove these barriers?
- Take a look at how your team is bringing your organizational values to life. How can you be more direct about your expectations for how team members treat each other?

The Bottom Line

During periods of volatility, leaders do not need to have all the answers right away. Instead, we look to our leaders for compassion, understanding, and transparency. Volatility is an opportunity to lean into organizational values and build deeper connections.



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