

# Getting To The Heart Of The Matter: Living Through Pandemic Times

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 By **Pamela Stroko**

It's hard to believe that just three months ago we were discussing the talent economy as having a shortage of available workers and brainstorming ideas on what would attract great people to an organization and get them to stay. That talent marketplace hasn't disappeared forever; it is just on hold for a while. We are now at a defining moment in time. From this day forward, we will refer to the evolution in our organizations as before the pandemic, and after the pandemic. Then we will seek to tell the stories about how we made it through this difficult time.

It seems like for the last few years, we've been consumed with defining the future of work. It involved issues like remote work, flexibility, AI, machine learning, virtual teams, and the like. With the beginning of the pandemic, the future of work happened overnight—for most of us, sometime in the middle of March. Companies were scrambling to set up remote working arrangements for their workers, buying laptops, expanding broadband, organizing work to happen remotely. Then we had to figure out what to do about the changes that literally happened overnight:



1. Do managers know how to work with remote teams?
2. How do we connect people and build relationships virtually in a way that is meaningful and supports each individual?
3. How do we care for people and secure their safety?
4. Our teams took on four-legged members that became the stars of WFH Twitter.
5. How do we migrate work so work from home can be productive and contribute to the financial success of the enterprise?
6. Then there was Zoom, which was challenging for many, at first.

And beyond all the change that comes with redefining work, organizations were redefining their brands by the way that they responded to the pandemic. I am particularly proud of Oracle's response, because it enables faster pipelines of treatments and vaccines. In a nutshell, Larry Ellison worked to create a database so doctors and patients can enter information about treatments and their efficacy and outcomes. With over 100 vaccine candidates in the pipeline, and a number of treatments being leveraged (Remdesivir, as an example) physicians have more information to make treatment decisions, and that can save lives.

Other companies have donated large sums of money and food to feeding America. Personal protective

equipment has been purchased and distributed to healthcare and front-line workers, restaurants all over America are taking their excess food and delivering meals to hospitals. Oofos is delivering the most comfortable shoes on the planet to ICU nurses at New York City hospitals. Organizations all over the country are showing the best of who they are to help us all get through this. That is so important today, because more than ever, employees want a connection to purpose and values in their organizations. They want to see themselves in those actions and feel a part of the whole—the place where every contribution matters and everyone makes a difference.

So, what makes an organization a workplace where you can do great work even in the most desperate situations? First, let's think about inclusion in the broadest sense of the word. Everyone wants to be an insider—no one on the team wants to be an outsider looking in. So, however we show up at work, we want to matter. People want to know that who they are as individuals is just as important as what they can do. Diversity and inclusion isn't just about race or background, it is about understanding the individual at the core of who they are and encouraging growth and development so everyone can do great things to the best of their ability.



At the beginning of this year, different HCM thought leaders were pushing the idea that this year we should focus on the “Human Enterprise.” Well, the truth is, organizations have always been a Human Enterprise; it’s just that at times we forget that. When things get challenging, we rediscover the contribution and importance of our people.

This uncertain time can bring out the best in us and in turn help us to bring out the best in others. The Poet, David Whyte, brings out the greatness in us all in his poem “The Journey.” He writes:

Sometimes everything has to be inscribed across the heavens so you can find the one line already written inside you.

Here is to celebrating ‘the one line already written inside you.’



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Fear isn’t an easy thing to admit to, but people are scared. They fear for their safety and that of their families. They are concerned for their livelihoods. They wonder if they were to be infected with the virus, could they survive—there is an ever-present anxiety that is always looming in the background. They turn to their peers for a kind word, a connection, a word of encouragement. And this is where we come in as human resource leaders: to steward the heart and soul of the organization. To support people, to help secure their safety, to engage them in meaningful ways, to help them make it through this inflection point. It is an awesome responsibility, and to do it well is humbling.

So what is my advice in the midst of all of this? It is simply this—to live and work out of reverence for the human condition with all of its greatness and flaws. Build relationships that matter with employees and customers—the kind where you care for the people in your tribe. Help people learn and grow in the midst of difficult times. Connection and collaboration are at the heart of remote work and it is up to us to make that happen every day. That level of care and support uplifts the individual and offers them an alternative to fear.

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