

Rapid-Response Preparation

Just as early birds catch the worms, leaders who react to upheaval with decisive, quick actions are more likely to succeed. **BY SARAH LEVITT**

There's a common denominator shared among my most successful and talented clients. They don't wait.

They don't wait for their organizations to catch up.

Or for the "right time." (Whatever that is.)

They don't hunker down and hope that a tsunami of change blows over.

Instead, they grow to meet the future, making a deliberate choice to invest in themselves. They know that disruption is always coming, that challenging circumstances and unforeseen obstacles are a given. They know that the best bet they can make is on themselves, particularly during difficult times.

These leaders are not inclined to wait for things to improve. And they don't take a back seat when it comes to driving the future. Instead, they get out in front by investing in themselves, rain or shine.

And they do it in four distinct ways.

First, they are invested in their work, and they are engaged by it. It's something they enjoy and from which they derive meaning. Rather than viewing it as a drain, they are energized and fulfilled by it.

That doesn't mean that things are always smooth sailing or without challenges. We've seen over these many months of the pandemic that passion does not preclude difficulty. But navigating the choppy waters of business is buffered by their determination, their commitment and their stamina.

Their passion is industry agnostic. I have clients across a wide range of businesses, from technology to professional services, from pharma to higher education. And I see this, over and over again.

Second, leaders who invest in themselves also invest in others. And they do this inside and outside their organizations. You might see their papers in industry journals or read their articles on social media. You likely hear them speak at conferences or see them leading panel discussions. They often serve on boards.



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They take care and effort to help their team members grow, and they support their reports in rising within their organizations. I've had clients who have literally lost sleep over concern for their team members and their trajectories. These executives make themselves available to help peers, even when there's nothing that they derive from it directly: no credit, no extra compensation, nothing.

Leaders of this sort are known as contributors who invest in others as part of their brand. It's what they've become known for, sometimes without even being aware of it. Their involvement in any project or initiative helps, rather than hurts, the effort.

Third, leaders who invest in themselves also invest in change. Rather than becoming paralyzed or stymied by disruption, they use it as an inflection point, as an opportunity.

What kind of opportunity? To be on the lookout for great talent to add to their teams. To assess risk and gaps on their bench so they know where new talent might best be utilized. To better prepare for the next glitch and put processes in place where they were lacking. To examine new markets and new product lines. To use the uncertainty to create more certainty for their customers and distinguish themselves and by truly knowing what those customers need.

To become exceptional at leading in a work-from-home context by keeping their teams connected and engaged and ascertaining what team members need most, including flexibility with standard work hours. To support their direct reports to step into stretch roles that might not have been available before.

Lastly, these leaders don't hesitate to invest in their own development. Whether through their organizations or privately, they seek out opportunities to stretch themselves and their thinking. They ask for feedback, and they mean it.

They commit to a path of growth no matter how high they ascend. And they do this in a multitude of ways. They want their blind spots illuminated. Oftentimes, they have assembled a cabinet of supporters, throughout their careers, who will tell them the truth, particularly during difficult and challenging situations. They cultivate and build relationships with colleagues outside their organizations for idea exchanges.

By finding trusted spaces with other like-minded leaders, they can share their challenges and their questions and their learnings. And they view executive coaching as a top-tier athlete does: as an investment in furthering their career ascension, no matter how accomplished they already are.

Successful people don't wait. They get out in front.



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