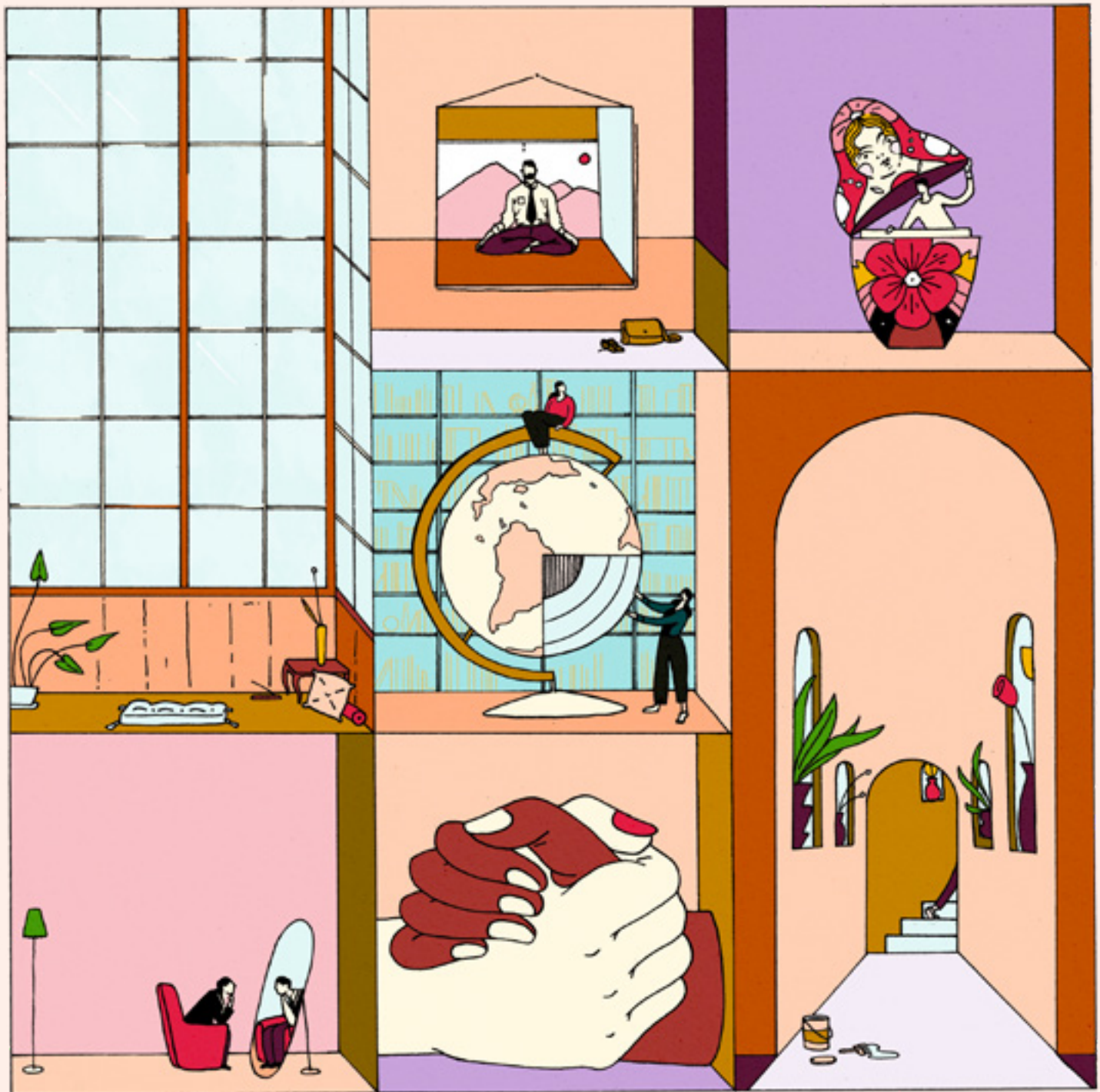


Working through crisis

A Culture Amp toolkit for more humanity at work



There's no playbook for periods of crisis

Throughout the global pandemic, the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, and widespread economic crisis, our world as we knew it flipped upside down. While there's no playbook for periods of crisis, we created this toolkit to help you work through it.

2020 plans: out the window. Quarterly goals: thrown off track. What the year held for each of us personally, professionally, socially, financially: reframed and in some cases completely scrapped.

In response to the global upheaval, we launched WORKING THROUGH IT, a collective, seven-part journey through crisis. In the series, we connected with some of the best of the best in HR, culture first leaders, and our own colleagues to get a better sense of how they approach uncertainty.

Our goals: to discuss the highs and lows, find community in our struggles, and to swap stories for staying resilient when things get tough.

Though we're nowhere near the end of this challenging time, we have reached the end of that unique seven-part journey. But this likely won't be the last crisis we face in our lifetime, so we created this toolkit to leverage our learnings for future periods of uncertainty – no matter how large or small.

Toolkit

PART 1

**Focus on wellbeing
before anything else**

PART 2

**How to create
boundaries as
a leader**

PART 3

**Navigating difficult
times with empathy**

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**Turning uncertainty
into new opportunity**

How to use this toolkit

Each section references a unique challenge faced over the last few months, but also applies to the range of emotions we experience during times of rapid change.

We found that some of the most important “tools” that we’ve added to our toolbox aren’t just tactical – “how to” guides and survey templates (though we have those, too). They’re mindfulness practices that gave us pause from work. They’re ways we learned how to rest our bodies and brains. And they’re mantras that we chanted in the back of our minds when we thought things couldn’t get any worse than did when we still had to show up.

You can start at the beginning or jump to any part that feels relevant to you and your team. This guide isn’t meant to solve all of your problems. Rather, we built it to offer a unique perspective from humans that want to help you care for yourself, your company, and your people.

Focus on wellbeing before anything else

When unexpected changes happen, it can be impossible to stick to routines. During the COVID-19 pandemic, morning yoga was swapped out for childcare, those hours spent reading for pleasure were spent spiraling through the news, and mid-day meditation was booked over by urgent meetings. But we quickly learned that attention to wellbeing helps with everything from decision-making to sleep to relationships to performance. So before anything else, in this part we encourage you to focus on employee wellbeing.

How to reimagine wellbeing at work

Mental and physical wellbeing: When our brain experiences stress it impacts our hippocampus (critical for long-term memory) and prefrontal cortex (critical for attention, decision-making, and focus). Dr. Wendy Suzuki, Professor of Neuroscience and Psychology at NYU, recommends giving your brain a break whenever you feel anxiety or stress peaks. “There’s a reason why deep breathing is one of the most ancient forms of meditation in our culture,” she says. This basic exercise stimulates our parasympathetic nervous system and naturally calms.

Tip and tool: Breathing exercise from our friends at [Calm](#). Save it to your favorites, link to it in your 1-on-1 agendas, or put it in a calendar invite that your entire team has on the books each day.

Emotional and spiritual wellbeing: Addressing emotional wellbeing at work can become critical to helping employees survive and thrive in challenging times. “Emotions are not only part of our wholeness but they are intimately connected to our ability to be creative,” says Larissa Conte, Founder of [Wayfinding](#). Her advice: make space for conversations about grief, trauma, and stress – the emotions are inevitable and “by denying grief and focusing on life we are denying a certain aspect of our being.”

Tip and tool: Larissa Conte offers this [Toolkit for Turbulent Times](#) to help people build resilience.




INSIGHT

“Especially in response to challenging situations or circumstances, we can easily fall into default autopilot mode, but we want to pivot to be intentional about how we act. We do that through mindfulness practice by becoming aware of our bodies and the mental and emotional states we’re occupying.”

Rich Fernandez


CEO, Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI) & Co-founder, Wisdom Labs

What helped the Culture Amp team while #WorkingThroughIt?

 Book: [The Power of Now](#)
Author: [Eckhart Tolle](#)

Key takeaway: [Be here now](#)

Recommended by Peter Haasz,
Strategic Advisor

 App: [Waking Up](#)
Host: [Sam Harris](#)

Key takeaway: [Bite-sized teaching of mindfulness](#)

Recommended by Brad Lande-Shannon,
Senior VP Brand & Marketing

How to create boundaries as a leader

Nina Simone once said, “You use up everything you got trying to give everyone else what they want.” Throughout our conversations with leaders, there was one common theme: boundaries. Of course, problems need to be solved and decisions need to be made, but what’s most important is ensuring that leaders feel well-equipped, well-rested, and well-informed enough to take action.

4 questions to ask yourself when leading through uncertainty

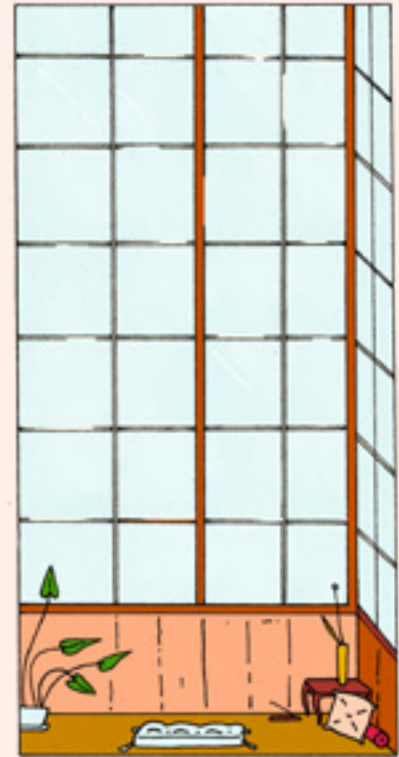
Meredith Haberfeld, Founder and CEO of [ThinkHuman](#), shares her top reflection questions for leading a team during hard times. Read, reflect, and respond to ensure that you’ve looked inward before you lead forward.

1. What are the assumptions, actions, or dynamics that are draining or filling you?
2. Who are the people on your team who can help you think that through?
3. What are the routines that you need to thrive?
4. What do you need to deprioritize to keep the boat afloat?


INSIGHT

“Real leadership starts with giving ourselves permission to have our own humanity – to have compassion for ourselves when things aren’t tied up in a bow and looking good.”

Meredith Haberfeld
Founder and CEO of [ThinkHuman](#)




What helped the Culture Amp team while #WorkingThroughIt?

 Podcast: [Unlocking Us podcast](#)
Host: [Brene Brown](#)

Key takeaway: [Inspiring stories of human limit](#)

Recommended by Iryna Halloway,
Marketing Project Manager

 Book: [Good Habits, Bad Habits](#)
Author: [Wendy Wood](#)

Key takeaway: [Understanding bad habits makes behavior change fun](#)

Recommended by Josh Berman,
Culture Enablement Lead

Navigating difficult times with empathy

In crisis, uncertainty can very quickly become the new normal. In this part, we've compiled a list of ways you can support employees, HR, and colleagues through layoffs, political trauma, and social justice movements.

6 ways to support employees through difficult situations

Politics & race

1. Understand the difference between ally and accomplice – there is one and it's important to recognize which you can show up as.
Article: [“Don't be an ally, be an accomplice”](#)
2. Recognize your place in the conversation. CEOs can be leaders, they can also be listeners. **Video:** [From the heart of the c-suite with Didier Elzinga \(CEO, Culture Amp\) and Alicia Jessip \(Inclusion and Diversity Manager at TEKsystems\)](#)
3. Focus on boosting the psychological safety of the people in your team. Be prepared to carry the conversation before you start it.
Article: [“How to manage your team in times of political trauma”](#)

Layoffs

1. Understand the emotional and psychological impact that layoffs and major transitions will have. **Article:** [“Dealing with grief in the workplace: why bother?”](#)
2. Secure a partner (we worked with LinkedIn) to host a workshop for alumni on how to make the most of their LinkedIn profile, update their resume, or prep for an interview. **Video:** [“How We Work: Reckoning with career uncertainty in unpredictable times”](#)
3. Encourage senior-level employees to set time aside for brainstorming. Have them reach into their networks to see who is hiring and make introductions. **Article:** [“Humans helping humans through crisis”](#)




INSIGHT

“You don't feel inclusion and equity at the company level, you experience it at the team level. If you don't feel the daily interaction with your team is one of respect, equity, and fairness then you're not going to think anything of the company-wide statement.”


Michelle Kim
Co-Founder and CEO at Awaken

What helped the Culture Amp team while #WorkingThroughIt?

 Book: [The Memo](#)
Author: [Minda Harts](#)

Key takeaway: [Lift others up when you can](#)

Recommended by Sahra Kaboli-Nejad,
Senior People Scientist

 Book: [Yes to Life](#)
Author: [Viktor Frankl](#)

Key takeaway: [Finding meaning is key](#)

Recommended by Aubrey Blanche,
Director of Equitable Design & Impact

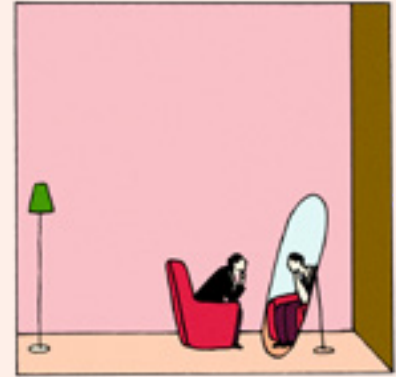
Facing turmoil with emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence can be a guiding light in the face of uncertainty. It helps you read the room and ask thoughtful questions to learn how someone is really doing. EQ is needs to be developed and practiced, so in this part, we share a framework to help you do just that.

5 exercises to develop your emotional intelligence

1. **Self-reflect.** Recognize your own emotions and identify what's causing them. Take note of which situations lead to certain emotional responses.
2. **Self-regulate.** Consider how your emotional expressions affect others. Practice finding the appropriate ways and times to express your feelings instead of simply reacting.
3. **Build intrinsic motivation.** Identify the tasks or challenges that satisfy or fulfill you regardless of any external motivators.
4. **Practice empathy.** Put yourself in the shoes of each person you interact with to understand how they feel. Then respond thoughtfully with that insight in mind.
5. **Improve social skills.** Let active listening, nonverbal communication, and problem-solving skills be your guide in all of your interactions.

This framework has been adapted from Daniel Goleman's "Emotional Intelligence – Why It Can Matter More Than IQ".




INSIGHT

“Self-empathy has a huge input from emotional intelligence. It allows us to confront and overcome challenges and ultimately become better collaborators, partners, and problem-solvers with those around us.”


Michael Ventura
Founder & CEO Sub Rosa,
Author of Applied Empathy

What helped the Culture Amp team while #WorkingThroughIt?

 Podcast [On Being](#)
Host: Krista Tippett

Key takeaway: **In crisis, actively listen with empathy**

Recommended by Aoife Johnston,
Lead Project Manager

 Book: [When Things Fall Apart](#)
Author: Pema Chödrön

Key takeaway: **Make room for grief, joy, and everything in between**

Recommended by Maggie Coughlin,
Account Executive

Prioritizing communication and connection

If there's one thing that makes crisis bearable, it's navigating it with others by your side. Constant decision-making, meetings, and problem-solving can feel exhausting. But these collaborations are also critical to feeling like you're not alone in your stress, confusion, or frustrations – especially in those moments of pride when you surmount an obstacle together. In this section, we share communication tools to help you build deeper connections with your team – to learn how to communicate better, more often, and more effectively.

Check-in questions to build connection

Every face-to-face meeting or digital interaction is an opportunity to build connection with your team. Try one of these connection prompts at the beginning of your next meeting.

1. What's the last thing that made you laugh?
2. What's something I can do to support you today?
3. Is anything making it particularly hard for you to be present right now? (feel free to share or not)
4. What's your guilty pleasure show of the moment?
5. What song are you listening to on repeat?
6. If you were a dessert, what would you be and why?
7. What's one practice that has helped keep you centered?



INSIGHT

"When you have the three keys to connection – sense of physical contact, vulnerability, and playfulness – if you have one exercise or activity you can do with your team that involves aspects of all three of them I have found that to be the quickest and deepest way to get a group to feel bonded and connected."

Jenny Sauer-Klein
Founder and Executive Director,
The Culture Conference

What helped the Culture Amp team while #WorkingThroughIt?

 Book: [Emmanuel's Book](#)
Authors: [Pat Rodegast](#) & [Judith Stantont](#)

Key takeaway: [We're all interconnected](#)

Recommended by [Alica Forneret](#),
Content Writer

Managing performance during crisis

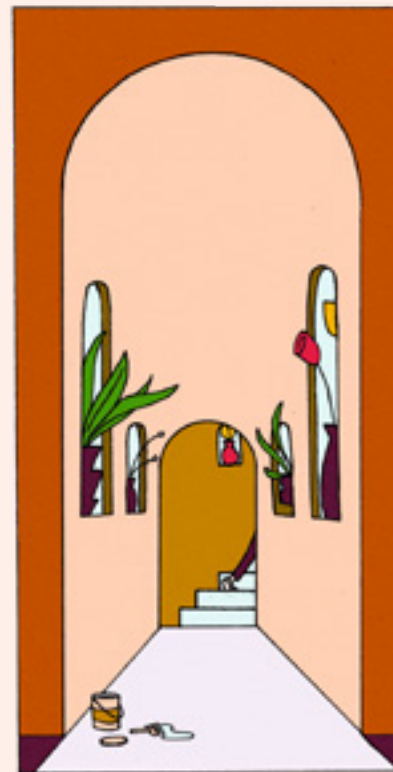
Performance can take a hit when everyone's focus is on surviving instead of thriving. Performance metrics and measures can drastically change when business priorities shift, so it's important to check-in with your employees to better understand where their motivations lie and how you can help them do their best despite the circumstances.

Resetting questions

As priorities shift, managers and leaders can use these questions to help get a clearer focus on key goals, communicate them to your team, and measure success.

1. What's the main problem we're trying to solve?
2. What do we want to accomplish this week? This month?
3. What's an experiment we can try?
4. How are our skills most useful to the current environment?
5. What can we de-prioritize for now?
6. What are the things we can control?
7. What short-term solution can help set us up for long-term success?

These questions have been adapted from [LifeLabs Learning](#).



What helped the Culture Amp team while #WorkingThroughIt?

Book: [Year of Yes](#)
Author: [Shonda Rhimes](#)

Key takeaway: **Be a doer not a dreamer**

Recommended by [Tenesha Craig](#), Recruiter

INSIGHT

“My mantra is ‘impact over intensity.’ With so many competing demands for our time and energy, it’s impossible to keep up the breakneck pace.”

Casey Cole
Senior Advisor, Coaching & Performance at W2O

Turning uncertainty into new opportunity

Life-altering events often speed up the process of change. While much is unknown about the path forward, we all play an instrumental role in forging this path and can use our learnings as a guide. After a crisis is a perfect time to identify new and better approaches. Uncertainty creates an opportunity to work together to come up with creative solutions and evolve the world of work.

Survey response questions

Simply listening and engaging in a conversation is a hugely important way to support your employees during crisis. Use these survey questions to start a dialogue with your entire workforce.

1. My manager is checking in with me regularly during _____
2. We are kept well-informed about updates to my company's _____ policy and approach
3. I have the flexibility in my work schedule to enable me to look after family/dependants should I need to
4. The leaders at my company have demonstrated that employee health and wellbeing are a top priority
5. My company has treated people from all backgrounds fairly during _____
6. I know where to raise concerns or queries I have in relation to _____
7. If I raised a concern about my company's response to _____ I feel it would be listened to
8. What has been good about our company's response to _____ ?
9. What else could our company do to better support employees during _____ ?

These questions have been adapted from Culture Amp's emergency response survey template.




INSIGHT

"As a leader, now is the time to look around your organization for the people you don't normally call on. You'll be amazed by all the hidden talent and ideas within your organization – and what they can do when given permission to try."

Cameron Welter
Principal at Kotter

What helped the Culture Amp team while #WorkingThroughIt?

 Book: [The Power of Moments](#)
Authors: Chip & Dan Heath

Key takeaway: [Set milestones to elicit moments of pride](#)

Recommended by Eduardo Siu,
Lead Account Executive

#WorkingThroughIt

This toolkit is part of WORKING THROUGH IT, a collective, seven-part journey through crisis.

Explore the [digital series](#) for podcasts, videos and resources, and join our community as we continue learning, together.