
The Incredible Brightness of Leading



Dimis Michaelides

*****@***dimis.org

Consultant, Author, Trainer -
Performa Consulting, Cyprus

[LinkedIn](#) [Twitter](#)

COVID-19, a microscopic piece of genetic material, is testing our leadership.

Competence matters. In the midst of our crisis today we turn to the leadership of experts – epidemiologists, researchers, pharmacologists, doctors, health professionals, food producers, food distributors, refuse collectors, public utilities. We turn to political leaders, company leaders, community leaders, volunteers, family and so many more.

Character matters. Whether our leaders are considerate or brutal, honest or duplicitous, co-operative or combative, altruistic or narcissistic is very important.

Trust matters, and it matters more than ever, and trust is at its highest when leadership combines *high competence* with *good character*.

Speed matters. COVID-19 spreads fast because it multiplies with normal human interaction. Controlling its outcomes calls for fast decisions not planning bureaus. This does not mean action without thinking, it means fast thinking **and** fast action. Moving ahead imperfectly is better than perfectly stalling, good leaders have already understood this.

Versatility matters. Leaders should be both authoritative and empowering. There are moments for barking out orders and moments of sharing opinions, moments where micro-management is crucial and moments where it is best to hand over full control. Adaptability is surely a mark of good leadership.

Co-operation matters. Even the most rugged individualists accept that the challenge of the day can only be confronted by working with other people, other organisations, other communities, other countries, sharing know-how and solutions. A spirit of compassion and collaboration goes much further than one of competition and confrontation. Good leaders profoundly understand this and act giving credence to virtue, or *ἀρετή* as described by Plato in ancient Athens.

Vision matters. In a crisis, it takes foresight to factor in the day after and prepare for that, too. Creating and communicating an image of a future we wish to achieve together is vital. The big decisions must consider the costs as well as the benefits of a course of action. Good leaders

passionately inspire people to responsibly take on the hardships that will make the vision come true.

Innovation matters. Technology is know-how, innovation is about inventing new know-how or making current know-how deliver new value. Good leaders in times of coronavirus are already putting available technology to new and better uses and re-designing technologies to address the challenges of the day.

Creativity matters. Creativity, as most CEOs said in a 2010 study by IBM, is the most important leadership skill. Not only is it important to create a vision and to activate innovation. It is everyone's best friend in times of accelerating change. And in crisis too. Good leaders will not just rely on their own creativity, but enable the creativity of others to flourish and be realised with new innovations, new mindsets and new cultures.

We matter too, you and I. Our own personal leadership skills are tested as we take on new responsibilities and make decisions that affect ourselves and others in situations that are new for everybody.

A good leader takes people to places those people have never been to before. A great leader takes people to places neither they nor she has ever been to before. She is navigating the unknown and inspiring others to follow.

You may ask yourself: In what ways are **you** co-operating with others in the heyday of the coronavirus? What is **your** vision through and beyond COVID-19? What new technology are **you** using, how many creative ideas do **you** have for leading your future? And are you **making them happen**?

Dimis Michaelides is a keynote speaker, consultant, author and trainer on leadership creativity and innovation – see www.dimis.org or contact dimis@dimis.org

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