

# LIBERATION DURING LOCKDOWN: CREATING A CULTURE OF COMPETENCE AND CONFIDENCE

A White Paper by Krish Dhanam & Shelley Kurian

## INTRODUCTION

The current state of global upheaval and the difficulty that extrinsic mandates have forced on all businesses have created both a simultaneous demand for new strategies as well as an immediate vacuum of old principles that have had to be abandoned. Amidst this chaos is the constant barrage of new nomenclature that is more defeating than promising. It is no wonder that many have decided to use the “wait and see” approach. At the start of the pandemic, Skylife Success utilized a simple formula of “WIN” to create a methodology that would allow adjustment and achievement. **Wisdom** being the need of the day, **Innovation** being the need of the hour and **Networking** being the need of the minute were the three components that were established as imperatives for the new culture that most entities would now have to create. To this base is needed the pillars upon which the new organization can build. These pillars were chosen just like an investigative journalist would choose a new story. The holy grail of journalistic integrity when writing a new story always has the **five W's and the H**: who, what, when, where, why, and how. These questions are offered as the challenges of a changing culture with emphasis upon the foundational desire to **WIN**.

## I. REVIEW THE WHY

During these changing times, did your mission, vision & purpose remain the same? When you explored the adjustment to a transforming culture and all the parameters associated with the need and mandate to work remotely, did you review the “why” behind your organization’s mission?

In *How to Swim with the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*, Harvey Mackay says,

**“Knowing your customer means knowing what your customer really wants. Maybe it is your product, but maybe there’s something else, too: recognition, respect, reliability, concern, service, a feeling of self-importance, friendship, help—things all of us care more about as human beings than we care about malls or envelopes.”**

As you review your “why” during these times, here are some objectives that you can focus on at the foundational level:

- Are your internal and external customers communicated to with a greater frequency to match the intent of your mission and vision?
- While you can quantify expectation, you must also qualify inspection. By inspecting what you expect, you will continue to be focused on the “why” of your business.
- The “why” is always formulaic. If you know the “why” in all transactions and encounters with both your internal and external customers, you will always be solution-focused and not problem-oriented.
- The concept of over-communication is to realize that when you review the “why” of your business purpose, you will quickly understand that your internal customers (those that occupied workspace with you) and your external customers (those that you were designed and built to serve) are both away. Your commitment to communicate with your internal customers and create touch points and value moments is the same as that you would do for your external customers. For your employees and associates to believe they belong, they have to realize that their absence is just a different approach to doing business.
- Another key ingredient in reviewing the “why” is refusing to accept nomenclature like “new normal.” “Normal” makes it seem like the only thing we are changing is where we report for work. Our goal should be to adopt “old excellence in a new and improved way.”
- Why you exist and why you do what you do has to be at the forefront and repeated until ingrained.

**A new “why” is simply reiterating that ordinary people are worried about the curve and extraordinary people want to be ahead of the curve. Focus more on the “why” behind your business and not the restrictions and regulations that disrupt it. The goal is to not react to laws and ordinances and not become uncomfortable with the unforeseen; instead, look at the “why” and negotiate that which you can.**

## II. RECOGNIZE THE WHAT

Winston Churchill was called at the darkest time in British History to rally the troops and give them hope for the task that lay ahead. A lot needed to be done to overcome the sinking morale of battle-beleaguered troops who were not sure of the might of the enemy. The evidence all around them was of an advancing force that would decimate their hopes, overcome their way of life and subject them to a new way of existing. The enemy that the workers of today face is the same as anything that was unpredictable in the past.

**"United wishes and good will cannot overcome brute facts," Churchill wrote in his War Memoirs. "Truth is incontrovertible. Panic may resent it. Ignorance may deride it. Malice may distort it. But there it is."**

Those words seem most appropriate at this time when we are dealing with an unknown and an unforeseen obstacle in a virus. The evidence of its origin, the data of its spread and the asymptomatic nature of its existence are all akin to what those British troops may have felt after the fall of France. But Churchill recognized "what" was needed.

- He isolated the fact that platitudes and moments of speculation would not overcome brute facts. The facts as we know it are that the new economies of scale may warrant a great part of your workforce operating remotely.
- The distractions in the lives of those that are employed and tasked were hitherto segmented and modular in that they were forced to deal with them before arriving to work and after leaving for home. Now, we have gone to interruptions being seamless in that work, family, digital meetings, remote working, project deadlines and process excellence are being delivered and received in a seamless twenty-four-hour supply chain.
- If people do not understand that "what" they are doing as personal output becomes another's input, one end of the chain is affected. On the other end of the chain are human beings feeling like robots on a twenty-four-hour supply chain where their personal, family and business lives are one continuous session of demand.
- It is the job of those who are piloting the ship and those that have agreed to go on this voyage to ensure that the truth of "what" we do and the belief in "why" we do it are incontrovertible. As one philosopher put it, "truth by nature is exclusive."

Remember the saying that earthquakes and hurricanes get all the publicity, but termites do more damage than both of them put together. It is time to get microscopic about “what” we do and allow the environment to adjust.

### III. REESTABLISH THE HOW

In their article “From Bad to Great - The Path to Scaling up to Excellence,” Huggy Rao and Robert Sutton offer extremely valuable insights on the road to “how.” They particularly emphasize the concept of “Plumbing before Poetry.” Using a specific case study on a company called Alameda Health and the impact that leadership turnover had on business, Rao and Sutton suggest getting back to basics as a solution that facilitates successful change.

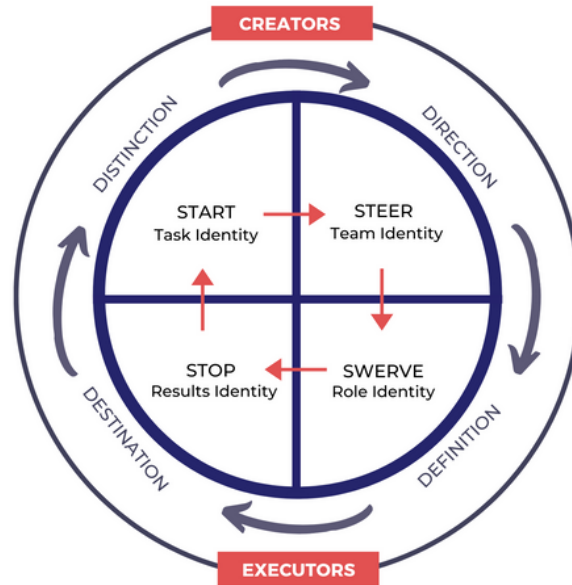
Looking at the current crisis during this lockdown, the goal should be to move from telescopic desires to microscopic design. The “how” has to be re-established with new simplicity. The illustration given from Alameda Health was to form groups that can re-establish some basic “hows” and begin from the ground up by keeping the main thing the main thing at all times. Look at all your processes and ask yourself how many of them can be scaled back, eliminated or merged with other processes to be more efficient and effective. The illustration is cohesive when we realize that the poetry of our message may give us an optical illusion if we focus on image. The plumbing, however, keeps us grounded in reality and sometimes provides the litmus test for whether our “how” is effective or counter-productive.

- The “why” of your organization may not have changed; but while the overall vision and mission of your organization may remain the same, this pandemic forces us to change the “how”
- The role we are here to fulfill may not have changed (the “why”) but the way we go about fulfilling our roles need to change (the “how”)
- To this end we need to be fluid in our basic “how” and flexible enough to learn another’s “how”
- Since innovation is the need of the hour, the goal should be to create opportunities for new and improved ways to execute tasks. The time of response in virtual settings is already cut down and people are able to simultaneously observe the whole picture.

- Even though our individual roles are modular, the collective eco-system is more transparent.

In the Purpose & Productivity podcast by Skylife Success, we explored the roles of Creators and Executors and how the flexibility between our roles as creator and executor allowed us to navigate new tasks and improve old ones.

FIG 1.2  
CREATORS &  
EXECUTORS



The roles and effectiveness of Creators and Executors within your own environment will need to be maximized and a more fluid cycle of workflow will need to be deployed. The connection between Creators and Executors will need to move from a linear, hands-off approach to a circular, hands-on one, wherein both the originators of the ideas and the implementers of those ideas will need to understand a little more of the other's roles. In a virtual training environment, we at Skylife have to ensure that those that write curriculum also know how to explain and teach it and those that are primarily the vocal component of the organization's deliverables also understood the development protocols.

Personnel allocated to the qualitative standards of the organization and those associated with the quantitative components need to be in more constant engagement as the environment is rapidly changing and the luxury of time is evaporating. As depicted in Fig 1:1:

- The constant flow of information begins with depicting how the new process/project needs to start. Here, the identity of the task is implemented.
- The next step is to steer the information and requirements as they pertain to the team responsible for the effort, as well as the resources those teams will need to effectively accomplish the effort.

- Utilizing a simple metaphor of driving a car gives you the ability to look back at all times, engage with what you are doing, look forward as you explore and stop when you either accomplish the task or need to review and renew it.
- Every endeavor requires fluidity and a global lockdown has brought innovation to the forefront in terms of necessity more than invention. To this end, having inside-champions in place as part of the team's identity will allow you to detour where needed.
- Once the definition of what else is needed and the destination is within sight, a constant and thorough evaluation of the results must be explored via the benchmarks set.
- Having multiple touch points inter-departmentally and intra-departmentally will allow evaluation to be ongoing and adjustments to facilitate a smoother flow of ideas.

#### IV. REVAMP THE WHEN

“The most successful entrepreneurs not only have courage and imagination; they also have a sense of urgency. They're not willing to wait. They have a burning desire to get something done.”

Malcolm Gladwell

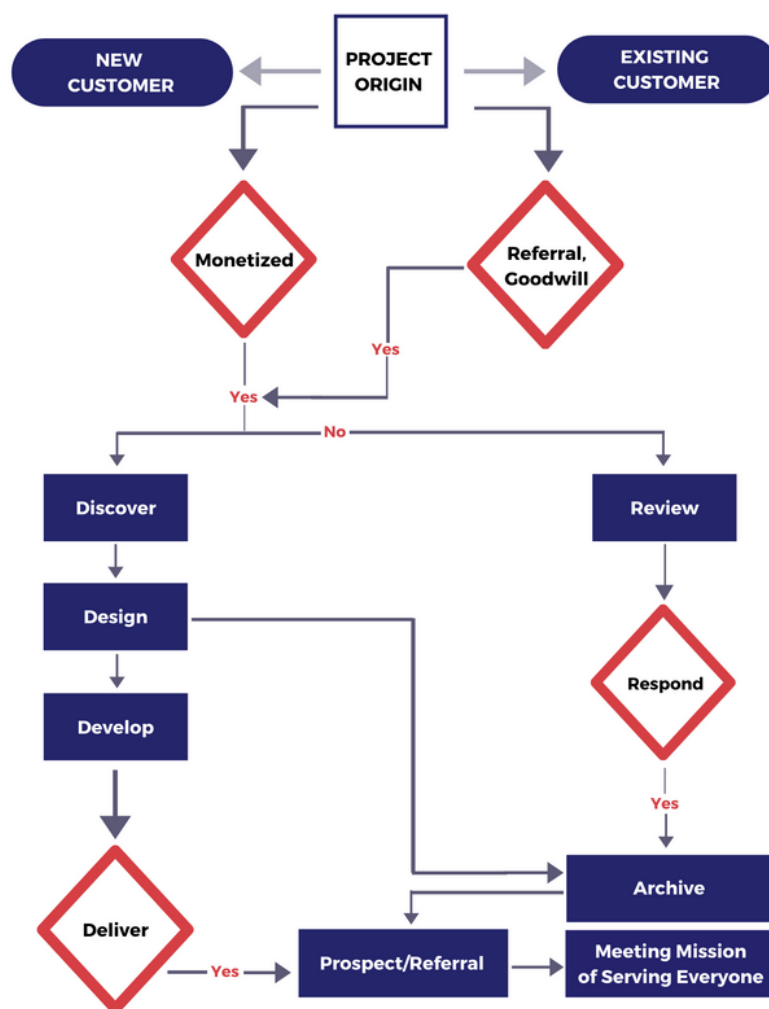
Sybil Stanton, author of *The 25-Hour Woman*, talked about discipline not being a burden that revealed imperatives, but rather a companion that rewarded you with incentives. The purpose of defining and developing a winning mindset during the forced lockdown is to liberate ourselves with an urgency to execute with greater frequency.

New examples of corporate governance and culture transformation are beginning to dot the training and consulting landscape. The examples that are being offered are less than ninety days old which means during these difficult and often confusing times, many organizations are revamping their “when.” The time to deploy is compressed and the gap between conception of new ideas and delivery of finished outcomes has been shortened.

At Skylife Success, we looked at our segmented roles as creators and executors and drew a roadmap that overlapped primary and tertiary roles. While not contaminating areas of expertise, we worked on the “when” by adding dimensions to our own work that was previously done by others.

This shortened delivery times and allowed our output to have a well-defined result, so that the recipient of the work had more guidance. The goal of this effort was to reduce the need for two or more attempts of feedback so that the finished offering to the external customer was more immediate & effective.

FIG 1.2  
THE PRIORITY OF  
WORKFLOW



## V. REDEFINE THE WHO

In the previous schematic, we saw that the audience positioning changed. Because of the need for digital speed and increased virtual visibility, the “who” is expanded. The baseline distinction of what can be monetized and what can be cultivated for future revenue is now something that can be contemplated simultaneously. The issue is not just “who” we can serve, but “who else” fulfills the parameters of a potential client. Because of the nature of physical interaction in the past with extensive onsite consultations, in-person demonstrations, exhaustive travel budgets and client meetings, the once-wide gap between prospect and client has now narrowed.

Re-engineer the use of existing physical infrastructure during this time and offer them to non-profits; by this, we mean your training rooms, recording spaces, and conference facilities. This extended operational dimension will be living out your mission and vision internally and externally. The salient points to consider in this phase are:

- Who is your audience?
- Who can you now reach that you weren't able to reach before?
- The goal is to continue to be experts to those that rely on you and become explorers to those that can now access you
- A model that creates lasting memories and increased opportunity is to provide a Walmart transaction with Nordstrom's service; never the other way around
- In this step of redefining the who, the price of the transaction should never determine the value of the relationship

## VI. REVISIT THE WHERE

The physical has now changed to the virtual. The scope of offering demands a new way in which deliverables are made and warrants a greater degree of flexibility in method, message, messenger and medium. The main goal here is to constantly look at your reputation and engineer new avenues of affiliation, so that you can continue to be known for what you do. Almost everything that was done in person has been attempted virtually, from dance competitions and magic shows to keynote speeches and board meetings. The reaction of the moment is due to fear, but the long-term adjustment will stay because of familiarity and flexibility. If the value proposition remains the same but the cost of deliverables is considerably lowered, then industries that are engaged in the service sector will have to increase frequency to make and meet the same numeric expectations.

- Your “where” must include digital and electronic messaging in text, audio and visual platforms.
- Expertise for some of these may require online tutorials if the effort is designed to be rudimentary and informative.
- It may also require specific training and development internally for new portfolios of engagement.
- Consistency is imperative in the “where” as it pertains to the branding of your offering.



## OUR CONCLUSION

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- The number of touch-points that you traditionally make with the external customers will have to double.
- Make sure all your deliverables have the same consistent creativity and the impressions you create in cyberspace are frequent and similar.
- Multiple message motifs just to be visible will create confusion in the minds of the consumer.
- Understand that your competition is getting trained and your customers are getting knowledgeable since everybody has additional time to investigate their wants and needs.

To be the best in brand and brightest in breed, you have to review the why, recognize the what, re-establish the how, revamp the when, re-define the who and re-visit the where. These principles, when utilized, will create a new culture transformation continuum and allow you to experience true liberation during this lockdown.

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