

## Tune in to be able to turn outwards

The pandemic has taken the covers off an issue that has long affected leaders and the people they lead: human needs and loss.

### Key idea

‘How are you feeling?’ is usually the simplest of questions to ask of someone. But for many in the state of the world around us, it’s also one of the hardest to answer. The daily news cycle and the ever-present danger of Covid are exacting a heavy toll on mental health and the economy of severity and duration not experienced globally since WWII. People are so emotionally overwhelmed that formulating a response to an innocent query can trigger an **amygdala response** that blocks coherence and spontaneity.

The situation emphasises more than ever the need for business leaders to make a positive difference in the lives of those around them. In applying this idea, I draw on the research and advice of **McKinsey & Co.**

### Applying the idea

Studies show compassionate leaders engender more loyalty and engagement in their teams in expected business conditions. In a prolonged crisis, this is amplified many times over. By tuning in to their own fears and anxieties, leaders can better turn outwards and help their staff and colleagues grapple with their reactions.

This doesn’t come naturally to most leaders, but learning to demonstrate these four qualities helps a good deal.

- ✓ Strengthening **self-awareness** to heighten your understanding of what’s going on inside you. As a leader, especially if you have a bias towards control, you risk cutting yourself off your own and others’ feelings and emotional needs. It’s crucial to create time and personal space for connecting with self and improving self-awareness.
- ✓ Demonstrating **empathy** to tap into the emotions of others. Acknowledge their pain and how the other person feels – validate them. Show gratitude that the person opened up. Show interest and be encouraging. Be present for them. Listen deeply. And share how you feel.



- ✓ Acting with **compassion** to show individuals and groups that you genuinely care. Show kindness to others by offering well-being days and extra caregiver time out of the workweek. Advocate for others. Reassess work priorities. Adjust mutual expectations. Recognise their struggles and their achievements. Consider the words and facial expressions you use – what do you want others to feel when they hear and see you?

- ✓ Finally, by allowing yourself to be **vulnerable** by lowering your guard and facing what’s unfolding, you open yourself to others’ empathy and compassion. This will help you maintain your emotional stability and build a

close support network. Sharing your own deep fears and feeling cultivates your authenticity.

### More on this topic from this McKinsey & Co series

- ✓ [Tuning in, turning outward: Cultivating compassionate leadership in a crisis](#)
- ✓ [Organising via a network of teams](#)
- ✓ [Displaying deliberate calm and bounded optimism](#)
- ✓ [Making decisions amid uncertainty](#)
- ✓ [Communicating effectively](#)