LR3 Provide Direction Transcript

This is video three in the leading remote in a crisis module, where you can engage everyone around a common purpose with positivity, solutions focus and systemic perspective. In this video we look at how you provide direction as needed.

Welcome back to the videos looking at leading remotely, and in a crisis. So, this video is all about how do we think about providing direction. And if you think about it when we're heading toward a destination, if this star is representing our destination: When we head to a destination people tend to want that certainty and predictability and they assume that if that's where you want to go you just head straight in that direction. That's where you're going, you're always heading towards that. And you keep on going that way, rather like if you're driving on a flat road, a straight road across a flat plain. Like a motorway like this.

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However, our destinations in the life tend to be more like roads winding their way up the mountain side. And they're changing direction, all the time.

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Also as you curve round and round and round and you climb up this steep slope. And you're heading towards your, your… the top of the mountain. so you can see the top of the mountain, you can see your destination. And you can see the road. It’s still mapped out and you have a map on a piece of paper that can show you the future direction as well. So it is still reasonably predictable despite the fact you're constantly turning and changing directions.

However, during a crisis, and in really complex situations and very often in life we just don't have any kind of predictable road to follow. Not even a winding road up a mountainside. It's far more like, during a crisis, crossing… being on a yacht and crossing an ocean. You know your destination. And there is simply no clear map to get there there's just sea, water, waves. And that's about it.

Years ago I sailed on a 36 foot yacht from Australia to New Zealand. And when we started out, we had a flattish sea, we had a wind somewhere behind us. And it was fairly easy to sail. We could set direction and put the sails up and just keep going. We were keeping in a very consistent direction and so consistent, in fact, that we could even tie the wheel and just get on with other stuff because we were cruising. It wasn't a race. And this is business as usual. It was predictable and certain, and it felt good and we could see we were making progress.

However, we then hit a stormy headwind. And we had 30 knot winds and massive waves with a strong current pushing us off track. And that meant we couldn't carry on doing the same things that we did before. We could not point the boat straight for our destination, because that's straight into the wind, and because of physics and the way the wind works across a sail, the sail has no power when you point into the wind. We cannot sail, and even close to the wind. Too close the wind and we lose power. Straight into the wind, there is no power. The waves are… sorry. The sails are flapping wildly. it's enormously noisy. And we need to acknowledge the situation. We need to notice these changing conditions. We no longer have the same sea conditions. We no longer have the same wind conditions. And we have to assess these conditions based on the evidence that we see, our knowledge and past experience. And with this new information and new insights. And we need to take swift action based on this immediate situation, because to delay could be catastrophic.

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So we need to take down the excess sails before the wind catches too much in them and it pulls us over on our side. Pointing directly into the wind, as I said, the sales have lost all power. They’re flapping wildly. It's dangerous. The ropes are flapping. The noise is horrendous. The boom is knocking backwards and forwards, and that could not one of us overboard. And the boat is thrown all over the place at the mercy of the waves. And it's… feels completely out of control, and it feels totally scary.

However, once we've set the small sail. And then we head the boat a little bit away from the wind. That means the sails can get a bit of power in them. It's not too big a sail so we're not pulled over – it’s a small enough sail. The noise and the bouncing stops. The situation feels calmer.

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We feel in control. The boat is making headway through the water. And that means that we can navigate these monumentous waves. The crests are showing higher than the mast when we're in the troughs. And yet, we now are actually making some progress. And it is still scary, but because we're feeling more in control, we can manage this. We know where we're going and importantly we know how we can do it, because we know we have the tools and the knowledge and experience for sailing.

And then we need to keep monitoring. We have to keep the boat at the angle to the sails, and then we go so far but the... to continue contin…. If we kept on going in this one direction, we would get too far away from our desired destination, the star. So that means at some point we have to turn. We have to change direction and go the opposite way across the wind so we still have power in our sails but we're not getting so far away from our desired direction. So in… and in sailing terminology, we call this tacking. So to go into the wind, we have to tack - that means constantly change direction, and each, each time we're getting slightly further towards our destination, and then before we get too far off that angle we have to change, change direction again.

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And we just… it's a total experimentation. if we come too close to the wind we lose all our power and we can't carry on. So we need a little… to experiment with being enough off the wind to have power to keep moving forward, and be in control. And we need to reach a point where we decide this is where we want to turn around. And there's no fixed point. We can't simply say you go for x minutes and then you change direction or you let the rope out so much to, to allow the amount of wind in the sail. You have to experiment. You test a bit. You let a bit more out. If it gets too much, you pull it back in again. If it's not enough, you let it out a bit more. So all of this is trial and error, and it's, it's, it requires constant monitoring. there's no set in stone way of doing it.

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And there's no fixed point where we change direction. It’s just a case of when, when it feels about right. And to go too far is going to get us off course too much but it's not the end of the world if we go a little bit too far. It just means we have to take a little bit longer to get back on track.

This however is where we need to communicate to make sure everyone understands what's going on, because if there are people on the boat who don't know about sailing, in, this just doesn't feel right. First, we were heading straight for a direction. that they can understand. But now we're first, we're going one way, and then we're going the other. And then we go another direction back again. and again we change direction. And it just feels… We don't know what we're doing. It’s a complete U turn every now and then. And, and it doesn't make sense to them until we communicate that all of these U turns are keeping us steady on our desired course and it makes sure that we're not heading too far off course. Because we can't see a map planned out. We can't see the path laid out before us like a road. We’re making our own path through uncharted waters, literally. So, this is, this is what we need to communicate to people. That on the face of it what we're doing looks very uncertain. It looks very chopping and changing. It's not constant in any shape or form. But the consistency is there in the decision making, in in our... how we're going about what we're doing and it's not obvious until you've explained to them, how… what that process is.

 And then, if you involve everyone and let them play a part. Having a role, it means they can focus on the tasks that they can do. And again, that gives them a little bit extra predictability and some sense of being in control because there's something that they are doing to help us stay in control. And it reduces that sense of uncertainty and feeling out of control.

And that's because it's absolutely vital to acknowledge our fears, our emotions, and manage the mindsets. Remember, I was totally afraid for that first day that we sailed in strong winds and high seas, because the boat, just, you know, it was totally scary. One minute we’re in the trough, the next we’re on a wave. The waves are crashing through the surface of the boat. My feet are under water and on the side of the boat while I'm standing in the cockpit. The boat’s totally on one side. It was totally scary. Until I reframed that fear. I was like “well this is a bit like being on a roller coaster. It’s quite exciting.” And I found evidence, certain, verifiable evidence, that proved to me, that actually it gave me confidence. The boat is capable to, to withstand the waves because it has so far. We have the knowledge, we have the tools, we have the strengths and capabilities to sail the boat, and the skipper is really experienced. And all of this really gave me confidence and I told myself this is exciting. This is the adventure that I was looking for and… when I chose to join the trip. We're going to New Zealand. We're all very certain on that destination. we know we can do it. And we are each responsible for making it happen. And keeping us on course because we each took turns at the wheel while the others was sleeping.

So this is how we can try and provide some consistency even though on the face of it what we're doing looks very reactionary. And helping people understand that consistency of how we're getting to a destination, and knowing that destination and having that certain belief that we can do it, will really help everybody pull through together, through any crisis.

Leaders often talk about having a roadmap to implement the strategy and convert it into plans of how we'll achieve our goals and get to our destination. So I'll invite you to think “how is our language constraining the way that we think about how we get a consistent message across that people can believe in?” One event that I did was completely derailed when there was a section that I’d intended five minutes just to reiterate the purpose and goal that team have been setting for the last two days. And yet this little section took over an hour, because the boss could not acknowledge any goal. And I did… at the time I did not really get what is the problem. But actually what it was, she could not see that entire map of how to get there. Maybe she could see one or two steps but beyond that, it was a blank. And so she couldn't allow that goal to be set because she couldn't set the roadmap. There was no destination beyond those two steps. She. There was this gap.

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So, for her, that meant she couldn't even allow the goal to be set. It couldn’t give her that destination. So let go of the language of creating a roadmap for your plans because it implies that could be a specific fixed route. And as I said, for most of these situations, there isn't even that winding road going up the mountain for which there is still a map.

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And it could work in business as usual. Things are more predictable so you can see more of the waypoints along the way. You can see the stepping stones.

in a crisis, or when things are really uncertain, I’ll invite you - let go of it, because there are no specific way points when we cross an ocean, and in a crisis in really complex situations. We can't give those fixed plans and it is far more like when we are sailing across an open sea. And as we've been talking about. You have your boat, and perhaps in an organisation you're more like a large flotilla of boats because each of you, your departments can't be treated all of the same. But you're all heading towards the one destination. And in the way, there is no clear fixed path to get there. And there is simply your reasoned plan, the process on which you can you can make decisions. And it's dynamic so that you can respond appropriately, based on the available information and the immediate context. So that makes your path based on your core values, your principles and the strengths that you bring to the party and making sure everybody knows what these are. You also have your expertise and your knowledge, and again, having some transparency and sharing that knowledge so that everyone feels confident that we have that knowledge and expertise.

And then, we're looking outside for information and that's constantly being updated. So if we share how we're making decisions, instead of saying that that we're going to have fixed way points at certain times ahead. It will help to inspire confidence and contribute to a sense of your message being consistent, because the core basis of your decision making is constant and consistent, rather than having a consistent time point and distance ahead as your consistency.

Because your decision making is not just plucking a number from the sky. So I said, we're looking outside for information and we have to accept that in all complex situations, especially in a crisis, you will always have incomplete information. But you collect what available information there is. You update previous information and you assess that information based on your knowledge and expertise. We then need to anticipate what might happen. We're looking over the horizon as leaders, and we need to consider options.

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And of those, we need to prioritise and remember your priorities could well change depending on the context, as the context changes, and based on the updated information. And we may need to share what those priorities are, and why they are priorities, with our people to help build their confidence and see the core consistency in your message.

Then, we need to decide and act. And action is better than having inaction.

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So remember on the boat, action, having low sails, small sales and heading away from the wind gave us that sense of control. and that is why… whereas when we were not acting at all, when we had just the sails heading into the wind, it was all bouncing around, terribly scary, and we felt at mercy of sails and very helpless. So inaction contributes to a sense of helplessness. Any action then is better than inaction. and you need to monitor and tweak as you're going, so that you can change and respond to the situation and not get too far off your destination and equally not sail too close to the wind either, that, then you, you lose, lose your, your power

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And consistency. So talking always about the consistency of your core direction in your destination. The consistency of your values and reminding people about that. And recognising your immediate actions may change in order to respond to the dynamic situation. And, and that we're experimenting, just in the way that that there is no set plan of exactly how you set a sail. When you're sailing into the wind it's all about experimenting and getting the feel so you recognise when might be the optimum set of the sail. So everything is experimenting. we're learning new ways of doing things. That means, as a leader you might need to give permission, that things may not go as anticipated. And don't regard this entirely as failing - but it's learning. We're all learning how to manage in this situation. Every experiment tells you something. your hypothesis could be correct. Or if you don't get the outcome you want it simply tells you, there is something in your hypothesis that is not correct. And usually, there is something in the assumptions that is not correct. This is how it works in science, this is how it can work in our day to day life.

16:09

So bringing in that scientific method. You’ve got an idea. It’s your hypothesis. You experiment. You test it. Does it work? yes, brilliant do more of it. If it doesn't work? Well… and what aspect of it might contribute to that? Tweak as necessary. Experiment again with different settings and move on. but don't waste too much time or resource on it. If it's really not working, look at something else or draw on what's worked elsewhere. Can we try that here instead?

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So that's how we start to create cultural learning through experimentation and recognising

It’s okay because every outcome learn tells us something. An outcome that tells us what works well is brilliant. An outcome that tells us what is not working well is also brilliant because we know not to do that in future. It can also indicate that the situation has changed and we have incomplete information, and that some assumptions were wrong.

The other thing to think about in your communication is you need to make sure that it's very timely. People need to keep hearing from you, you need swift and frequent information. People need to keep hearing from you to: one feel that you're looking out for them; and two, this is really important. If you don't fill the vacuum, people will fill it for themselves. And they'll fill it with half-truths, news, fake news often from the internet, conspiracy theories, what their colleague next door thinks about it. And this all shapes how they will respond to the situation. And if you as a leader want them to respond constructively, to pull together, to work to your strengths in alignment with your values and achieve a really constructive outcome, then it's up to you to make sure that you fill that vacuum. to make sure there is no vacuum. And that's why it's often talked about that in a crisis, Leadership is all about communicate, communicate, communicate . Give people consistent messages. Even if everything is very context dependent, it might appear you're constantly changing direction, and you need to create that confidence that actually, there is some consistency here that they can understand. And this process here for using a metaphor of how we how we communicate about reaching our destination across an ocean, maybe a way that you could do that.

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So what I'd love to invite you to do is after this video, brainstorm for yourself or discuss with your colleagues: How do you help people not to expect all the answers. How do you help people to understand what's happening, to feel confident? and how do you provide that direction and communicate in a way that helps them feel that there is a consistent message despite the fact that very often, you will have to completely change direction in the… in the meantime in order to, to respond constructively to changing and uncertain situations. And because of the fact that you have … incomplete information at any one time. So, then, you may not feel that you're ready to communicate because you don't yet have all the answers and you know that people want the answers. So, think about what can you do to shape your messages so that you help people understand these are the answers for now. And that we're in a context that is constantly changing, and that we will update what we're doing in, at some point as well. So think about how could you use this style of thinking about how you can provide consistency for how do you get to your destination? When we know that we're constantly having to change and deal with uncertain information and incomplete information. Where you're constantly having to update things, and or possibly completely change what you're doing, in order to just keep going in these uncertain and changing circumstances. So I'll invite you to have a think about, that have a discussion, or brainstorm and then come back to the next video where we'll be looking at how do you as a leader, be a beacon of hope and confidence.