



TURNING THE TIDE IN 2022

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The background of the slide is a photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there is a field of tall, golden-brown grass. A dirt path or road runs through the field, leading towards the horizon. On the left side of the path, there is a large, leafy tree. In the distance, there are more trees and a line of power lines. The sky is filled with dark, heavy, grey clouds, suggesting an approaching storm. The overall mood is dramatic and somber.

The Calm Before the Storm

Before March of 2020, we were going about our business ... in every sense. We went to the office every day, had meetings, went to conferences, traveled internationally to meet new stakeholders, started new programs and initiatives, entered into new partnerships, brought everyone together for strategic planning and most importantly, planned it all out in every detail. We had the ability to do all those things, including confidently planning months or even years in advance, without even realizing it was an ability we could (and shortly would) lose. But then the storm came crashing in.



A Tidal Wave of Change

COVID-19 was an unprecedented global experience, impacting every corner of the world at once. And with it came unprecedented responses setting off a tidal wave of change that rendered the known and comfortable ways of working, interacting, and getting things done obsolete. This is not to say that the known and comfortable ways were efficient or ideal – just that they were familiar.

We have now had to navigate these rough seas for two years. And before we could find steady ground after the pandemic's tsunami wave of change swept so much away, further waves came crashing through our organizations. Once again, we were knocked off our feet, struggling to keep the boat on course and upright, while keeping everyone onboard.

The challenges have been overwhelming at times. But more often than not, it's the extended duration of these challenges that have become nearly unbearable.

The background of the top half of the page is a photograph of a large, powerful ocean wave crashing. The water is a deep blue, and the white foam of the breaking wave is prominent. The sky above the wave is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. A dark grey, semi-transparent banner is overlaid on the bottom left of this image, containing the title 'Four Waves' in white text.

Four Waves

From our research, we have identified four waves that continue to crash onto the organizational ships on which we travel, threatening to wash many into the shoals. These waves are consecutive and unrelenting – breaking over each other, adding energy and sheer force to the point they feel insurmountable. That’s why it has never been more important to make adjustments. If we don’t adjust course quickly, we could see many ships, particularly those in the nonprofit sector, washed ashore or set off course entirely.

Organizations and leaders have been amazingly resilient these last two years. They have changed course on a dime and been innovative beyond anyone’s imagination. And as we move forward into the future, we know we are facing a once-in-a-generation experience in human history for which we are creating a new map and paving a new path. Leaders are gathering their best resources and most imaginative minds to confront and

conquer because that's what we do. That's how we survive – that's how we've always survived – with resiliency, resourcefulness, the right attitude, and hard work.

Whether it's smaller or larger course corrections, it's important for leaders to make them today to avoid “lost at sea” outcomes. By adjusting our course, we can ride the waves (however small or large) as they come.

Wave 1: Exhaustion

It's no secret – staff are depleted. Leaders are exhausted. People are walking out the door in record numbers. The term “burnout” has become a far too acceptable and widely used self-diagnosis. We simply have no more to give ... and we see it in the record numbers of employees leaving.

It is clearly a time of reprioritization. And most leaders have been responsive and even gotten creative. They have offered mental health counseling services and mental health time to take off. But they have realized that Zoom happy hours and other attempts at virtual social connections are no longer cutting it. One HR executive told us: “None of my usual tricks work anymore.”

Many leaders express concern about how to address an exhausted workforce without a clear way forward, but they're doing their best. One CEO mentioned that she told her executives to “take one thing, one goal, off their plates.” Another organization has quarterly learning weeks when there are no internal meetings scheduled.

Wave 2: Damaged Cultures

With so many competing priorities and a world that has become

increasingly complex, leaders have been overwhelmed with knowing what to do and when to do it. And the impacts can be seen in organizational cultures that are not everything they could be.

Cultures under stress will struggle to maintain trust, adaptability, and engagement. These are the types of cultures that leave organizations even more vulnerable to the onslaught of waves still crashing in. Employees are yearning for something more – a paycheck is no longer enough. In addition, organizations need to encourage and even create change resilient workforces and cultures.

And many organizational cultures have not caught up to the new reality that leaning into change resilient cultures is the path to thriving and nailing mission and vision.

Yet, change resilient cultures are needed more than ever right now. With so much change rolling down the hill and with the challenge to bring on new staff to fill vacancies, there has been an increased focus on positive, fulfilling employee engagement and a strong, healthy mission and vision for the organization. That is, a priority on change resilient culture.

Wave 3: The Post-Pandemic Workplace

Beyond the workforce and culture is the emerging new workplace. Leaders are struggling to develop policies that make sense for once again working face-to-face and in a hybrid environment, contributing to impact and results, and inspiring workers to say yes. The continued uncertainty contributes to the drain on energy, motivation, and positivity – circling back to exhaustion.

As leaders work through the logistics of their new work environments, they

are also implementing new ways to move forward in other areas, such as decolonization, racial justice, locally developed initiatives, and climate change, among others. Many employees are passionate about these issues, voicing their concerns to their leaders and organizations, especially the urgent need to address and rectify imbalances in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

However, organizational changes take time and trial and error, requiring patience and understanding from all involved. Some leaders have shared that they feel as if they are winding their way through a minefield, with conflicting voices shouting warnings and advice about where to step. While the need to shift from a Western-centric power structure to one that is dependent on local development is not disputable, the “how” is fraught with discord and confusion.

Wave 4: Distracted Leaders

With shifting, unclear areas of focus and diluted priorities, do you think we have distracted leaders? You bet! The issues are urgent and have strong, vocal advocates at every level in the global development community. Without one clear direction though, leaders struggle to provide guardrails to keep the staff focused. Further, concern of talent leaving in search of realigning their careers becomes another shock to the already frayed leader and organization. Results loop back around to exhaustion, frustration, and diluted priorities.



Getting Lost at Sea - How Four Waves Become One Big Wave

With these waves crashing continuously into organizations, many leaders are finding themselves lost at sea. They find that they are:

- ▶ Deploying outdated tools to confront new problems.
- ▶ Investing too few resources, including time, in discovery, discussion, dialogue, and decisions.
- ▶ Distracted, with diluted priorities.
- ▶ Neglecting to manage the organizational culture.
- ▶ Missing the opportunity to help middle managers (the pillars of all organizations) flourish, so the organization will also flourish.

As organizations deal with numerous “once-in-a-generation” changes at the same time, leaders are struggling to juggle priorities and stay on top of things. With these enormous responsibilities resting on their shoulders, it is no wonder life-threatening health issues are materializing in leaders. Something needs to change. The tide needs to finally turn.



Turning the Tide in 2022

Taking control of the ship and steering away from the shoals is never easy. It requires focus, time, resources, and commitment. For some, it requires a shift in leadership prowess and saying yes to being uncomfortable.

The key ingredient to turning the tide in 2022 is slowing down the process – all the processes – and creating space for listening, dialogue, sharing ideas, building the “future perfect,” and making course corrections.

Resetting your course means addressing staff and leadership exhaustion and organizational culture issues, using innovation and creativity to resolve workplace scenarios, understanding the shifting power dynamics, and addressing future challenges head-on.

What can you do now? Take the following actions to start finding your balance again:

1 Practice Change Resiliency ... Now and in the Future

If we've learned anything throughout the pandemic and resulting impacts, it's that change is happening all around us, and the only way to move with it is to develop change resilient teams and organizations. With resilience, the team starts to understand that with change comes not just challenges, but opportunities for growth and self-learning. Instill practices that support resilience during times of stress and change, such as mindfulness, gratitude, appreciation, and open collaboration.

According to our insights paper, *Through the Magnifying Glass – Nine Predictions for the Global*

Development Sector in 2022, this will be another year of constant, grinding change. Perhaps change and uncertainty is the "new normal" – for those continuously searching for what that term means. But with reprioritization and the implementation of a resilient team culture, we not only can learn to better adapt, but can also lead our teams confidently into the future.

If this is your situation, you may want to try:

- ▶ Beginning, or continuing, the conversation with your team about being a change resilient organization and what that looks like.
- ▶ Conducting ongoing trainings and education opportunities around brain science to learn how we react during times of





stress and change.

- ▶ Identifying three observable behaviors that would help the team be more change resilient.
- ▶ Reframing, reframing, reframing. Help your team shift the current mindset from victim (why is this happening to me) to one of survivor (we survived this, we can survive anything). Make this mindset a part of the cultural norm.
- ▶ Modeling resiliency and optimism in all that you do. Leaders must model the attitude and behavior they want from their teams. No excuses.

2 Recognize Mid-level Managers

Mid-level managers are the unsung heroes of your organization. They know the business better than anyone else. They can ensure that the desired strategy and culture either truly thrive or become 'check-

the-box' exercises to mediocrity. Support them, as they lead in the new current reality.

Keeping all levels of employees engaged and fulfilled increases retention and helps to permeate a positive culture into the organization. As such, retraining, reskilling, and an overall depth of perception into their needs are becoming new priorities. (See *Through the Magnifying Glass – Nine Predictions for the Global Development Sector in 2022*)

Develop your managers to lead in this new environment and then shower them with appreciation and gratitude.

If this is your situation, you may want to try:

- ▶ Asking them what systems are getting in their way. Then, do something about it.

- ▶ Training and coaching them in creating and maintaining high performing remote and in-person teams, including using coaching skills to manage.
- ▶ Refocusing them on growing their staff to be high performers, not high-task producers.
- ▶ Establishing peer groups and having them facilitated by an outside coach to crowdsource solutions.
- ▶ Communicating with them through open dialogues and discussions. Focus on what they need to be successful.
- ▶ Recognizing performance. Reward and express gratitude for outstanding performance. Small daily acts of positivity go a long way in maintaining a culture of gratitude and acknowledgment.

3 Take Back Control

Take back control ... but *only* of what you can truly control. So much of our anxiety and worry stems from trying to manage that which is outside of our control. Instead, be pragmatic. What is truly in your control? What is in your team's control? What specifically can you do to make a change in those areas (*only* in those areas)?

If this is your situation, you may want to try:

- ▶ Focusing only on what is in your control and influence, and learn to let go of the rest.
- ▶ Refraining from appearing as though you are blaming, judging, or throwing up your proverbial hands. Leaders bring the weather. If the weather does not suit you, take action.





- ▶ Maintaining focus and avoiding the next shiny object syndrome.
- ▶ Shifting tools. Big tech is not necessarily your friend, nor that of your staff. It pulls energy and focus for low creativity and innovation. Get off email and get your staff onto tools, such as Trello and Asana to focus more on collaboration.
- ▶ Providing certainty and control to others. Talk about what is in their control and the organization's.
- ▶ Delegating without micromanaging. Provide your team with as much control of their own work as possible. Be explicit about that as a goal.

4 Own the Culture

Just as a sailor guides the sails to get where she wants to go, executives guide the culture. When anyone detracts from the ship to

reach the desired shore, even the smallest bit, leaders must step in and take action. Remember, leaders model the behavior that they want others to follow.

If this is your situation, you may want to try:

- ▶ Having quarterly check-ins with staff and executives on assessing how the organization is doing living up to its culture goals.
- ▶ Immediately addressing instances where individual managers or leaders fail to meet cultural norms.
- ▶ With the entire staff, creating a vision of what the organization would look like when it lives into its culture. Map out the observable behaviors that would get you there.
- ▶ Communicating your vision for the culture at every opportunity.

5 Revisit the Leadership Basics

When we get back to basics, we can get back to the interpersonal impacts of our leadership. We can get back to remembering why we do what we do, with increased focus on the organization's mission and vision. It's time to remember the leadership attributes that got you where you are today.

If this is your situation, you may want to try:

- ▶ Practicing kindness with toughness.
- ▶ Asking, listening, really hearing, and responding (without justifying, excusing, or blaming).
- ▶ Building trust.
- ▶ Harvesting your feedback-friendly environment until

people ask you to stop, and then keep asking.

- ▶ Expressing appreciation and gratitude.
- ▶ Loving your staff.
- ▶ Holding yourself and others accountable.
- ▶ Being transparent, honest, and authentic.
- ▶ Monitoring and adjusting – yourself, your team, the results.
- ▶ Increasing your capacity to be uncomfortable.

6 Treat Outside Eyes as Your Friends

One of our primary 2022 predictions, as set forth in *Through the Magnifying Glass – Nine Predictions for the Global Development Sector in 2022*, is “Collaboration Eases





Fragmentation.” Essentially, our time and attention are being divided, and then divided again, fragmenting our responses. And the antidote is focusing on active collaboration to stay on track with what is truly most important to the organization at that time.

Einstein said, “a problem cannot be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.”

If this is your situation, you may want to try:

- ▶ Bringing in outside experts to help you see what you cannot, and then listen.
- ▶ Joining or creating a small mastermind group to help crowdsource ideas and gain new perspectives.

7 Guide the Way in New Ways

As the ecosystem gets more complicated and complex, the role of the CEO does, as well. This is a truth that requires rethinking the primary job of the CEO.

“With the realization that inequities will continue to surface, as we are not going back to the old ways of working, there will be an increased focus on relationships, and in particular, mentorship.”
Through the Magnifying Glass – Nine Predictions for the Global Development Sector in 2022

It’s time to shift the focus from getting things done to being a human-centered system – and equipping yourself to guide the way.

If this is your situation, you may want to try:

- ▶ Partnering with an executive coach or mentor to see what you are not seeing.
- ▶ Assessing your feedback-rich environment frequently, and thanking everyone for their contributions.
- ▶ Asking trusted friends and colleagues what you may be missing in leading in these times and suggestions that they may have for you.
- ▶ Making mindfulness practice your friend.





CEOs Rising to the Challenge

In 2022, CEOs must navigate through a constantly changing environment, while keeping their eyes on the horizon. This is not new. What may be more urgent than ever though is that CEOs, and their executive teams, must reset the maps, look for new landmarks, and set compass points for a new journey. Vision, culture, behaviors, teamwork, accountability, and purpose must remain their guiding lights through the storms. Waiting for better weather and merely drifting with the tides and swells is not an option. Too much is at stake.

A recent Deloitte study found four main themes for the CEO job: leading talent, setting strategy, championing culture, and vision. And ... some (un) common roles emerged, indicating all that we've been discussing is at the forefront of everyone's minds:

- ▶ Chief Morale Officer.
- ▶ Chief Culture Builder.
- ▶ Chief Strategist.
- ▶ Chief Clarity Officer.

For now, let's keep riding the waves. It's okay if we get knocked down once in a while, as long as we get right back up and learn how to own the next one! No one is alone in this, and together, we can help each other succeed. One day, we will see that these challenges brought out the best of our talents, experiences, and skills. Onward!



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