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Recovering from the Emotional Aftermath of the Election **By Ann Golden Eglé, MCC**

This year has presented business owners, leaders and stakeholders with unprecedented challenges at every turn. From people we know and love becoming ill and dying from COVID to pandemic business closures to civil unrest to homeschooling to the ugliness of national and local elections, 2020 has taken its toll on us all.

This heavy and often deeply emotional toll exists within you as a leader and every member of your team. A *Harvard Business Review (HBR)* August 7, 2020, survey found that the mental health of almost 42 percent of business participants had declined since the COVID outbreak began.

Additionally, a 2018 American Psychological Association's [Stress in America](#) survey showed that more than 60 percent of participants called "today's political climate a significant source of stress." Things have gotten only nastier since then.

Recent months of nonstop political negativity and intensity have barraged you through your TV, radio, print publications and social media, as well as your colleagues and friends. Individuals on your teams may be divided. Some will be elated with the election results while it may take weeks or months for others to emotionally recover.

These stressors have also taken their toll on relationships and people have been on edge. Everyone has the right to express their opinions, yet this year strong criticism and anger have been expressed more loudly, openly and freely than at any time in the past. Conspiracy theories, false assumptions and half-truths have become the norm. Coworkers, friends and family members may not look at one another in the same way moving forward. Some relationships may never fully recover.

As we navigate various transitions over the coming months and years, leaders are likely to see employees struggle with anxiety, depression and burnout.

The time is now, not a few months from now when a new year begins, to ignite the healing process. It all begins with you, the leader. Now is the time for business leaders to show their true colors.

Where do you begin to support yourself and your team in healing? The good news is that you already have many of the tools you will need, the same tools that made you a highly effective leader in the first place. Here are four of my top tips:

Be vulnerable. Though everyone knows the many challenges 2020 has presented, ignoring them is a mistake. It is not wise to pretend they have not happened and instead focus solely upon plans and projections. Talk first about the toll 2020, or specifically, this election may have had on you or your family. Others will share more openly once their leader has been vulnerable. People need to feel heard, appreciated and valued. As a leader, you will know which of these 'vulnerable' conversations to have in a group or private setting. Spend more time listening and asking questions than talking.

Build a culture of connection through check-ins. Intentionally checking in with each of your direct reports on a regular basis is more critical now than ever. That was an important but often underutilized motivational tool in pre-pandemic days. Now, with so many people working from home, it can be even harder to notice the signs that someone is struggling. In the *HBR* study with Qualtrics and SAP, nearly 40 percent of global employees said that no one at their company had asked them if they were doing OK. Those respondents were 38 percent more likely than others to say that their mental health had declined since the outbreak. Taking even a few minutes to check-in and encouraging others to do the same strengthens your company culture.

Encourage news and social media breaks. Encourage your team to take a break from their phones and the barrage of negativity of this past year. Challenge them to find new sources of entertainment, new pursuits and new ways to stretch and learn. One client encourages his team to locate new and close vacation spots for quick two-to-three-day retreats away from normal life — a cabin in the woods, trip to the coast or a mountain ski escape to a never-explored location. A few days away will work wonders for the mind, body and spirit. The key is to slowly move forward, not ruminating continually on the past. Acknowledge the challenges yet begin the process of letting go.

Plan for the future. Whatever the election results (national and local), our worlds will be different this January. As you plan for your business, please also plan for how each member of your team will excel. How can each grow and expand in their position? Or in a new position? What will keep them engaged, creative and thriving? An internet search shows many ways of measuring lost productivity due to COVID and obviously other factors this year. How will you, as their leader, create an environment for your team to flourish in 2021?

My experience in both being a leader and in coaching exceptional leaders over the past 20 years tells me to have complete faith in your ability to lead your team through the next few months of continued chaos. Know what you want and settle for nothing less. If there are individuals on your team who are not willing to move forward with this healing process, you know what to do. You and your team can either live in the heaviness of the past or move toward a brilliant future. Again, I have faith in you to make bold and decisive moves to heal your team.

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