

The Resilience Mindset: 7 Musts if Your Mission Matters



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Across the vibrant and diverse nonprofit sector in the U.S. and internationally, leaders and teams are recognizing that we're not going back. Initial thoughts of returning to a pre-pandemic state are dissipating as we collectively grasp the significant implications of a risk event for which an entire world was unprepared.

As you reflect on what lies ahead, and as you prepare your teams, facilities, programs, and your network of partners and stakeholders for what's next, the NRMC team offers seven areas of focus for consideration. If your mission truly matters, we urge you to reflect on these "musts" as well as the risk of ignoring dramatic changes in your risk landscape or, perhaps worse, pretending that everything will be back to normal in a matter of weeks or months.

Our assessment of what's new, what's paramount, and what's necessary for risk-aware leadership includes the following must-do strategies.

THE RESILIENCE MINDSET

7 Musts if Your Mission Matters



Brace for Turnover

Turnover is a fact of organizational life. If your mission matters, you should be bracing for the inevitable departures that will happen this year and next.



Make Flexibility a Focal Point

It's time to stop tweaking your philosophy on flexibility and start thinking about a policy that puts employee well-being first.



Prioritize People Over Conformity

Expect differences in beliefs and behaviors related to safety in the workplace, and strictly prohibit any shaming or teasing.



Commit to Cross-training

Putting off cross-training will have painful, costly, and chaotic consequences in 2021 and beyond. Resolve to fix this gaping hole in organizational resilience.



Modernize Your Policies

Ask team members to name:

- 3 benefits they value most
- 3 examples of egregious behaviors
- your process for handling reported misconduct



Embark on a Culture Quest

The pandemic has exposed painful chasms between professed values and the lived experience at many organizations. Knowing these fractures should inspire you to embark on a genuine culture quest!



Champion Mental Health

Declining mental health can cause reduced productivity and poor-decision making. Nonprofit leaders must make mental health and well-being a top priority.

Brace for Turnover.

During Risk Assessments, our team is always disappointed to hear the potential departure of crucial staff described as a 'risk.' If you agree with our team that a 'risk' is a possible (not certain) future action, event, or decision with potentially significant impacts (positive AND negative), future staff departures are a stark *reality*, not a *risk*. A genuine risk might be the departure of a large team to form a competing organization or negative publicity surrounding the abrupt, unexplained departure of a beloved leader.

Citing a recent Prudential study of 2,000 workers, Rachel Feintzeig writes that, "Just over a quarter of workers plan to look for a role with a different employer once the threat of the pandemic dissipates." Startling results from the Prudential Survey included the finding that "42% of workers currently working remotely said if their employer didn't make the option permanent, they'd find one that did."

Turnover is a fact of organizational life. If your mission matters, you should be bracing for departures that occur with—or without—the two weeks' notice you naively require in your agency's employee handbook. To get ready to replace your top performers (did you think that underperforming staff would be the first to go?), make sure that:

- Position descriptions are up-to-date and reflect the actual roles and requirements of each position
- Application forms are legally compliant, accessible, and convenient for all job seekers. Each application should be custom-crafted to the role, posted on multiple sources online, engaging and easy to read, and limited to relevant questions. When you can control the style of the posting, make sure fonts are easy to read on-screen, and the listing is legible when printed.

Make Flexibility a Focal Point.

If your management or executive team has been wrestling with scenarios around remote work, keep in mind that while you fiddle, your top performers who prefer remote work are busy applying for challenging, higher-paid roles elsewhere. Stop fooling yourself into thinking that passionate advocates of your mission won't leave the nest for more money, unlimited PTO, more time with loved ones, and a permanent end to rush hour road rage. It's time to stop tweaking your philosophy on flexibility and start thinking about a policy that puts employee well-being first. If you're wondering what your colleagues prefer, ask!

Prioritize People Over Conformity.

In the book *What Philosophy Can Teach You About Being a Better Leader*, the authors write, "A workplace that is fulfilling is one that acknowledges the daily reality of moral dilemmas in organizational life and treats each person as a stakeholder in the resolution of these dilemmas." All too often, an "Executive Team knows best" approach prevails. Leaders develop values statements, policies, and procedures that they hope will cascade down into the psyches and behaviors of team members on the front lines. Yet often, these pronouncements are received with cynical obedience. Every nonprofit is a collection of unique human beings with varying perspectives, wants, and needs. One of the lasting lessons of the global pandemic is that staff teams are mosaics, not monoliths. Rather than presume that a new set of policies will suit your workforce, take the time to find out what each person wants and needs to feel safe, supported, and engaged at work.

Expect that some employees and volunteers may prefer to wear a mask, refrain from shaking hands, and meticulously inspect and clean their work areas each day. Expect differences in beliefs and behaviors related to safety in the workplace, and strictly prohibit any shaming or teasing of colleagues who continue observing practices recommended during the height of the pandemic.

Commit to Cross-Training.

Putting off cross-training will have painful, costly, and chaotic consequences in 2021 and beyond, as pent-up frustrations manifest and your MVP colleagues announce their plans to leave. If your organization hasn't committed to ensuring that a minimum of two team members understands every vital task or role, your mission is on a calamitous course. To fix this gaping hole in organizational resilience:

- Make an inventory of every essential task or role that only one team member is trained or qualified to perform

- Craft a 30-60-day plan to ensure that two or more team members complete training and can step in for absent or unavailable colleagues; consider incentives for teams that train multiple backup team members or complete their cross-training plans within 30 days

Modernize Your Policies.

If your employee handbook includes a lengthy dress code, burdensome provisions related to flextime, or legalese-infused passages explaining how to report unacceptable conduct, it's time to refurbish your policies or rebuild them from the ground up. To test the durability and impression your employment policies make, ask team members to identify three things:

- Three benefits they value the most
- Three examples of egregious behaviors that your agency strictly prohibits
- Your organization's process for receiving, investigating, and closing the loop on misconduct by coworkers, superiors, volunteers, or contractors

Embark on a Culture Quest.

Workplace culture is often described as a shared set of assumptions, values, beliefs and norms, or a customary way of doing things. Yet too often, leaders naively believe that culture is created by publishing idealistic values on a website. The pandemic has exposed fissures in many areas of our world and painful chasms between the professed values and lived experience in too many mission-serving organizations. The silver lining is that knowing these fractures exist should inspire you to embark on a genuine culture quest.

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation gathered a panel of experts for their Kauffman Conversations to discuss reshaping work in a post-pandemic world. One of the panelists, Boston College professor Dr. Juliet Schor, reflected, "I think the dominant view has been that workers have to adapt to the way the corporation set the culture...It's also about those institutions changing and transforming the culture and creating a culture that works for everybody, that respects everybody, that takes care of everybody."

Another panelist, Dr. Kim Hunter Reed, Commissioner of Higher Education, Board of Regents, Louisiana, reminds leaders, "...we need to co-create together, we need to think big about things that matter and really see the kinds of changes that will make sure that more people prosper in America in all of our communities." Resist the urge to return to the old normal and embrace building a new normal with many diverse perspectives!

Champion Mental Health.

Declining mental health can cause reduced productivity and poor decision-making. These negative consequences are something nonprofits can't risk! A recent study by Oracle's Workplace Intelligence division found that "...78% of the 12,000+ people surveyed said that the pandemic had increased their stress, loneliness, burnout, and had hurt their work-life balance." Nonprofit leaders must make mental health and well-being a top priority. To support mental well-being, consider:

- Normalizing candid personal check-ins at meetings. Lead by example by admitting when stress and overwhelm are creeping into your emotions. Offer a personal success story of what worked to stave off these negative feelings.
- Bolstering employee benefits with access to self-care ([Fabulous](#)), meditation ([Headspace](#) or [Calm](#)), and mental health ([Silver Cloud](#)) apps, explore ways to expand your access to mental health telehealth services, and establish an EAP program if you don't already have one.
- Inviting volunteers to form a Health & Wellness committee responsible for delivering a "health minute" at monthly staff meetings (in-person or virtual). Consider topics such as the staff's favorite healthy recipes, 5-minute workout routines, or a daily meditation exercise.

Nonprofit leaders who exercise care and compassion during the transition to the post-pandemic workplace will reap the rewards of loyalty, productivity, and dedication to their mission. One thing is clear from the proliferation of employee engagement surveys in the nonprofit sector: teams are anxious about what's new and what's next for their careers, for themselves, and for their families. It is an extraordinary time in the history of our sector that invites us to reflect, reset, and resume by leading with humanity, patience, and empathy.

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Management Center. Melanie and Whitney welcome your questions and feedback post-pandemic evolution at your nonprofit at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org, Whitney@nonprofitrisk.org, or 703.777.3504.

Additional Reading

- [“Reshaping the future of work for a post-pandemic world,” Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation](#)
- [“How Association Leaders Are Engaging in Self-Care,” Associations Now](#)
- [“Three Keys to a Better Post-Pandemic Culture,” Associations Now](#)
- [“How to pick a mental health app for your workforce,” SpringHealth](#)
- [“As Uncertainty Remains, Anxiety and Stress Reach a Tipping Point at Work,” Oracle Workplace Intelligence](#)
- [“Trust Me, I’m Vaxxed,” Korn Ferry](#)