

Leading through uncertainty

Navigating periods of change and uncertainty in the workplace can be challenging for a multitude of reasons. As a leader who may be going through your own period of uncertainty and set of challenges, it can be difficult to also be there for your team. This is especially tough if everyone in your team is reacting to this environment of uncertainty in different ways and requires different support to get them through this time.

To help you lead your team through this current context, we have created this guide for the purpose of providing you with resources and tips to navigate and support your team, while also looking after yourself.

Your team will most likely be looking to you for guidance, support and reassurance and you may currently be their first point of contact when they have questions like “what might the future changes mean for me?” and “Are we going to be safe in our roles?”. This can be tough when you are not sure of the details/answers yourself.

Your role as a leader through change and/or uncertainty

- **Support your team to feel grounded**

Role model psychological safety within your team. One way to do this is to be as genuine and honest as you can be during team interactions. Like when you don't have clarity on what's coming next, and it makes you feel uneasy. Tell your team just that. This shows them that it's okay to express their discomfort when faced with uncertainty and that it's safe to air concerns in the group. See more here ([LinkedIn Learning Psychological Safety](#)).

- **Co-create stability with your team**

Give your team the confidence that although there might be uncertainty, there are things that you as a team can focus on. Rethinking your ways of working as a team is a great activity – like finding ways to connect better, looking at the team schedule so kaimahi (employees) can better manage boundaries between mahi (work) and home, etc. A great activity to do with your team can be found [here](#) on Te Whare, called the ‘Circles of Control’ – looking at what we can and can't control as a team and set goals together.

- **Focus on wellbeing**

Check out the [“Supporting you through uncertainty”](#) doc for tips and resources on supporting your own wellbeing and your teams' wellbeing. Perhaps try some new activities together that can harness positive wellbeing, build stronger connections and a shared goal?

- **Ask great questions**

Think carefully about what you want your team to feel and be motivated to do during and after any form of change. Ask open-ended pātai (questions) like,

“What do you need right now?”

“What would really help here?”

“What do we know is currently not changing, for our team?”

“Where may there be opportunities for us during this time of uncertainty and/or change?”

- **Be aware of the diversity within your team**

It is important to be mindful that everybody deals with change and uncertainty differently. This will mean they may all be at different stages of the change process or how certain pieces of information may affect them. Everyone responds differently and as a leader, it is important to allow everyone to move through these stages as and when it is right for them to do so. Asking the right pātai questions (as above) will help you to understand what each individual needs to be supported, at that time.

- **Stay up-to-date with information**

Take the time to review any information shared by your local Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and/or Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and keep an eye on wider communication channels (your local pānui/newsletter, Ngā Taipitopito, etc).

- **Think about how you show up**

Consider how you want to show up as a leader. What do you want to be known for? And how do you want to spend your energy through these uncertain times? Model the behaviour you want to see in your team. Check out this [Ted talk](#) by Christoph Von Toggenburg on how you can show up as a leader for yourself and others, in challenging, uncertain times.

- **Get support**

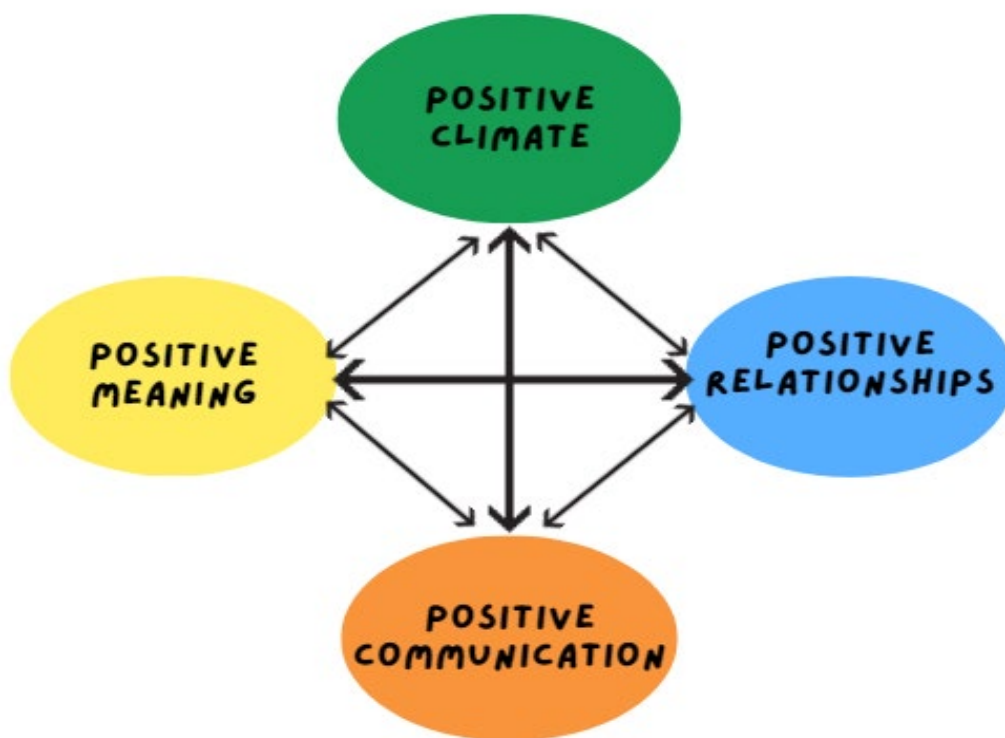
Schedule time with a fellow leader and/or your local People Culture Wellbeing (PCW) representative to debrief and process any new information before sharing with your team, where needed. If you're concerned about how to update your team, or worried that the kōrero (conversation) may be difficult, it's okay to seek advice/support from your leader and/or, your local PCW team or EAP provider.

The Positive Leadership Model

Developed by Professor Kim Cameron (University of Michigan)

The Positive Leadership Model was born in 2004 by Professor Kim Cameron to support leaders with a holistic approach for leading through uncertainty, building a sustainable leadership environment, and creating a replicable system. Positive Leadership is the implementation of multiple positive practices that help individuals and organisations reach their highest potential, flourish at work, experience high levels of energy and effectiveness that are otherwise hard to attain. This is especially helpful when navigating uncertainty and change.

The Positive Leadership Model consists of four areas/strategies



POSITIVE CLIMATE: The emotional culture you are creating, intentionally or not

Be aware of the Negativity Bias

Our brains have evolved to pay attention to the bad, it keeps us safe. We give more weight to things that go wrong than to things that go right.

- Reflect on what you pay the most attention to – the good or the bad?
- This may be (soft) wired into your brain. You can learn to retrain/rewire your brain to focus on the positive with support from EAP/Counsellors, time and dedication.
- What you focus on impacts others (emotional contagion). What are you spreading?

Asset based focus	Deficit based focus
Asks: What is present that we can build on? This is called Gain Framing	Asks: What is missing that we must go find? This is called Loss Framing
What you want	What you don't want
What you have	What you need
What is possible	What you can't do
What you can do	What isn't working
What is working	What's against you
Who is with you	What's holding you back
What is moving you forward	What you stand to lose
What you stand to gain	Your setbacks
Focus on opportunities, possibilities, solutions, improvements, potential	Focus on problems, dangers, issues, complications.
Outcome: May lead to new and unexpected responses and ideas. It is energising.	Outcome: May lead to downward spiral of inaction/stagnation/burnout. It is de-energising.

Positive climates are created through high levels of positive emotions and virtuous behaviours.

Boost positive emotions to calm the threat response, broaden perspective and increase connection. Examples of positive emotions: Gratitude, kindness, awe, excitement, forgiveness, compassion and hope.

Endeavour to find ways to introduce these positive emotions to your team every day. This can be done through...



POSITIVE COMMUNICATION: Communication that conveys affirmation, positivity and openness improves the connection between people

- Be aware of the impact of heightened stress levels on communications (written and verbal) and consider how the individuals in your team like to receive information.
- But how do you communicate clarity and uncertainty when nothing is clear or certain? It's important to avoid an information 'vacuum' (to stop people making things up). Reassurance is paramount.
- People are looking for transparency in communications. They also need to be timely and repetitive (as some won't be receptive to messages when they are stressed).

How do we do this?!

- Use asset vs deficit language
- Ask great questions – be curious, actively listen and use silence
- Ask for suggestions and act on them, advocate for the team
- Get comfortable with providing feedback
- Use story-telling to create emotional connection
- Create a courageous culture – where people can share what they see, wonder and worry about, openly and without hesitation. Share different perspectives, challenge ideas and reveal mistakes.

POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS: Focus is on nurturing high-quality connections. These increase trust, collaboration, knowledge sharing, creativity and learning.

- Create a safe environment, using vulnerability to create trust and check in with others in a way that suits their preferences
- Using full presence – connection is built in micro-moments. When someone is talking, listen with the intention of understanding, not waiting to respond. Limit distractions when speaking with your team and listen for where you agree with the other person.
- Foster high quality connections and build networks. Who do you need to spend more time with? How can you build deeper trust?
- Be a positive energiser by being optimistic where you can, be attentive, reliable and unselfish.

POSITIVE MEANING: Making progress towards goals despite the changing landscape

It requires;

- Clear vision and purpose (tell the “why” story), share what success looks like
- Clarity about performance expectations and deliverables (especially short-term deliverables during uncertain times). Check expectations are realistic, given people’s circumstances
- Provide stretch goals, delegate clearly and follow up
- Manage performance – provide consistent performance feedback and address performance issues directly
- Creation of flow conditions – where people can focus attention, manage distractions and interruptions and get their most important work done

LinkedIn Learning

For additional learning and personal development in change leadership and navigating uncertainty, you can complete the below short courses. Check out the [LinkedIn Learning](#) page on Te Whare to find out how you can access your own profile if you haven't already.

[Leading with stability during times of change and disruption](#) – In this **34-minute** course, learn how to create a sense of stability in your team so they'll thrive in times of disruption. You will receive concrete steps to build a culture of stability that will give employees the confidence to navigate change with clarity and purpose.

[Nano Tips to Thrive in Uncertainty and Embrace Change](#) – In this quick **9-minute** course from the *Nano Tips series*, discover powerful, practical strategies to grow your career by thriving in uncertainty and embracing change through identifying communication preferences, transform anxiety into opportunity and cultivate resilience.

[Managing Organisational Change for Managers](#) – In this **1h 22m** course, learn about the official definition of change management and get clear about your role in the process as a manager/leader. Discover strategies to communicate to different groups, reinforce skills, leverage performance management and ultimately support you to become a change champion.

[Managing Stress for Positive Change](#) – In this **53-minute** course, learn about what you can do as a people leader to reduce employee stress when your organisation and team is experiencing difficult times. Understand what stress really is and how you can create an environment and communication style that helps connect employees to the bigger picture.