



Learning from Leading through Upheaval

Merle Kummer, Principal, Kummer Consulting

On June 23, 2020, a group of biopharma leaders met for a virtual knowledge exchange on how to emerge from this tumultuous time stronger, smarter, and more resilient. We'd like to share some stories from the front lines and critical lessons for the future.

For coming back stronger

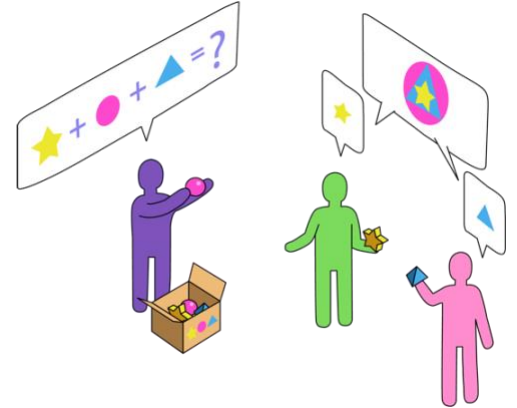
- Build new relationships across organizational boundaries.
- Don't be afraid to take ownership.

For coming back more resilient

- Solicit ideas from outside your own circle.
- Open yourselves to help from all your stakeholders.

For coming back smarter

- Focus on what's most important to accomplish.
- Experiment with new ways to communicate.



Stronger

When you see a need, get active and get creative

Melanie Lin, Senior Director, CMC Project Management, WuXi Biologics

When the pandemic first happened, we watched the news, it was pretty bad - as a team we saw the need and wanted to help. Our team is based in the US, but our company is located in China. We mobilized everyone here to source PPE for our colleagues in China and for Wuhan hospitals. The young people are very resourceful with the internet. We reached out to everyone from the large vendors to personal friends, and together we were able to ship these PPEs to China. When COVID-19 hit the US, we were again scrambling to source PPEs for our clients and our colleagues here, and also trying to get PPEs from China to donate to local hospitals in the US. Because of our office is closed, I ended up using my home as a distribution center. In the crisis, many of us saw the needs, stepped up, took ownership of the problems and actively and creatively found solutions.

Keep 2-way lines of communication open with the whole team

Nerissa Kreher, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Tiburio Therapeutics

Our team was still new when we had to shut down the office. Given we didn't all know each other well, there was room for misinterpretation of an email or a text message. I found something called MRI, Most Respectful Interpretation, so I sent an e-mail to the whole team suggesting that we all practice it. As we continued to work virtually, this evolved into a weekly touchpoint e-mail to address the different things that the team was encountering. I didn't ask permission of my CEO but just decided to start doing it. He didn't tell me to stop and we've all found it helpful.

With the racial situation that we find ourselves in in the United States I recently sent a touchpoint email that was somewhat provocative, about the importance of not being silent. It was very easy for us to be silent because we were virtual, whereas in an office setting it might have come up. I think that is a softer challenge but a critical one for leadership.

More resilient

Think outside the box

Liz Bloss DVM, Co-Founder and Managing Partner, The Bracken Group

We have a client who needed help on regulatory communication for a COVID-19 diagnostic. Because it's so new, there are very few guidances available from the agency, and there wasn't really clear guidance on who exactly we should communicate with and how to go about it. In the norm of regulatory world one would review guidances and see what's available to us, but in this new way of thinking I decided to reach out to our client. We had a brainstorming session to think together how best to approach the dilemma. We decided to contact someone within FDA that normally we might not have. We were pleasantly surprised to see that FDA came back to us rather quickly with some really helpful information. In thinking outside of the box we found a great path forward.

Engage everyone in listening to each other

Head of Clinical Development Oncology at a clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company

When COVID-19 hit, we had just started clinical trials in an oncology indication for very late stage disease. Our protocol mandates hospitalization for 5-7 days. Many patients actually wouldn't have beds allocated to them because the hospitals were dedicating everything towards COVID-19. We discussed this with investigators and most importantly we got some of the key administrators of the hospitals to participate so they could hear why it was important to this patient population. It turned out to be very beneficial: administrators realized the COVID is important, but these patients cannot wait and we were able to make something happen.

Smarter

Notice what doesn't work and do something about it

Aileen Morgan, Head of Program Management, Avanir Therapeutics

We were in the midst of preparing an IND submission when we shut the office, this continued after we went into shelter in place, on top of all the new COVID-related meetings. Our days became so intense that people were back-to-back, all day, every day. People weren't getting a break, and we realized we had to back off. We have now instituted a meeting-free lunch zone and shortened meetings so that they are 5 or 10 minutes shorter than before. It's still a work in progress but we're getting better in terms of how to focus the agenda and the discussion on exactly what we need to accomplish in the time.

Experiment with new technologies but only keep what makes you more effective

Tina Szafoni, Head of Learning Ops, Product Development, Clinical Operations, Genentech

When the directive came to shelter in place, we were in the middle of implementing the "Agile" approach to drug development, which involves frequent in-person meetings with lots of brainstorming and post-it notes on the walls. Suddenly, everyone was in different places. We scrambled to find online technology tools and struggled at first with Zoom to replace meetings and Trello boards to replace flipcharts and sticky notes. Although the learning curve was hard at first, we discovered that the tools quickly enabled us to include more of our colleagues virtually, in multiple parts of the world.