



3 essential EA traits post lockdown

As we remerge from lockdown, businesses are going to continue to be challenged in finding new rhythms. Now more than ever, three traits will prove invaluable for success in your roles says *Mark Carter*

I recall writing a description of someone in my circle years ago when introducing her to a third party. *EA by day, and a different kind of E.A by night: an Extraordinary Angel.*

Okay, granted, I was being biased. That said, I've come to learn that EAs and PAs are assuredly armed with traits somewhat akin to heavenly messengers. They're divine defenders of discretion, seraphim of acceptance, and generally strong, yet empathetic, celestial proponents of civility and respectful discourse.

Well, as we look to effectively ramp up business after challenging periods, your peers require refined angelic gifts in relation to three specific skills.

Problem solving

It's human to see our world as it is, not necessarily

as we'd wish it to be. Problems and solutions co-exist. We can't have one without the other. A potentially self-sabotaging flaw associated with humans is to remain fixated purely on this evidence of 'what is': also known as 'the problem'!

What's more, we believe we've shifted our focus or mindset yet can't fathom why we still feel stressed or under significant duress. Albert Einstein cited if he had an hour to resolve a problem, he'd leverage the first 55 minutes breaking down and understanding the problem, then in the last five he'd fully pivot to solutions.

This accurately implies that the quality of solutions is linked to properly understanding the challenges at hand. If we keep describing things that haven't worked, limitations of resources at hand or external forces that act as roadblocks, our minds remain fixated on problematic thinking.

The angelic gift you'll bring will be to help shift conversations and mindsets towards solution thinking. What's more, you'll also leverage a couple of subtle traits.

You'll use open and leading questions that will help them break down their problems. Then, with effortless skill, you'll continue using this strategy to help flip their internal switch and pry their minds wide open, transforming into a healthier mindset.

The Path of Change

We know on the other side of this lockdown some things will shift permanently. Even in its simplest form, businesses will serendipitously stumble on light bulb moments.

Some things previously thought not possible, or through reluctance or resistance, can actually be done. This may include more remote aspects of roles and projects that are ones you'll have an impact on.

Some doors have been nudged open and will remain so. This means we're all going to have to adapt in some ways. Perhaps even routines and process you're intimately involved with will require a fresh approach.

You will use the same divine skills of active listening and probing questions to help simplify this journey and the path of change.

STAGE 1: Resistance/Resignation

We're creatures of habit. If our world was constantly in a state of extreme flux we'd never find time to relax our minds or consolidate essential aspects of business and life.

Yet habits can become fixed. We love them so much that when faced with change we wish to linger and hold on rather than accept, adapt, act, and move on. At the point of disruptive change our initial contemplation might cling longer than necessary to either resistance or a negative resignation of the challenge at hand.

The longer we resist, the slower and more difficult the change path will be. Carl Jung, a founding father of analytical psychology, said it simply: "What we resist persists!"

Things, including feelings and behaviors, don't just disappear or go away because we pretend they're not there. Having our heads buried deep in the sand will only serve to further sabotage growth or slow us down: personally, and professionally.

STAGE 2: Acceptance

The sooner we move towards acceptance the easier change will be. Options and opportunities will rise like a new horizon coming into view. It's like being treated to your favorite ice cream.

We're so used to peering over a counter, spoilt for choice—we believe our options are always plentiful.

The wondrous arrays of rainbow colors of gelato are all fantastic. Yet among them we still find our favourite: be it chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, or something creative. The day you peer over a counter to find merely one small tub of vanilla is the day you ponder, "What about my other choices? Where's the chocolate?"

We resist or reject the option in front of us. We perhaps negate to see this resistance is still a choice. Even in this scenario there remains a better option. You can accept the ice cream with gratitude and find a way to love vanilla.

Forced business shutdown, cancelled events, closure in travel, isolation, and even a lack of toilet paper have all been vanilla moments of late. Even on the ramp up you can expect a few more. Help those around you find a way to love vanilla.

STAGE 3: Commitments and new actions

Repeat the process of problem-solution thinking to help determine the best, most progressive and innovative course of action at hand. Then be a constant mirror of self-accountability. As a divine being who suspends judgement you already know that no one, not even the Dalai Lama, has enough words or wisdom to tell people what they should think or do.

You do, however, appreciate a continued use of skills in active listening, being fully present, and masterful questioning that enables you to help others navigate a smoother path through change—all while respecting their choices and their commitments.

Be a stalwart, gracious pillar of calm and serenity.

In a typical world you've no doubt already experienced this lesson in the gist of an excerpt from the poem 'If' by Rudyard Kipling:

*'If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs or blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all around doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too!'*

In the past few years the path to senior leadership and roles of significant influence have opened to EAs and PAs. Now, more than ever, the ethereal nature of your positions, along with your ability to influence or make things happen, will prove invaluable.

It's a good time for all to see the blazing paths of possibility or achievement created by your divine light. ☀

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THE EXPERT

Mark Carter is a director, author, international speaker and regular media contributor. He's also custom built a unique academy from experience as a learning and development leader with over 20 years experience in more than 40 countries