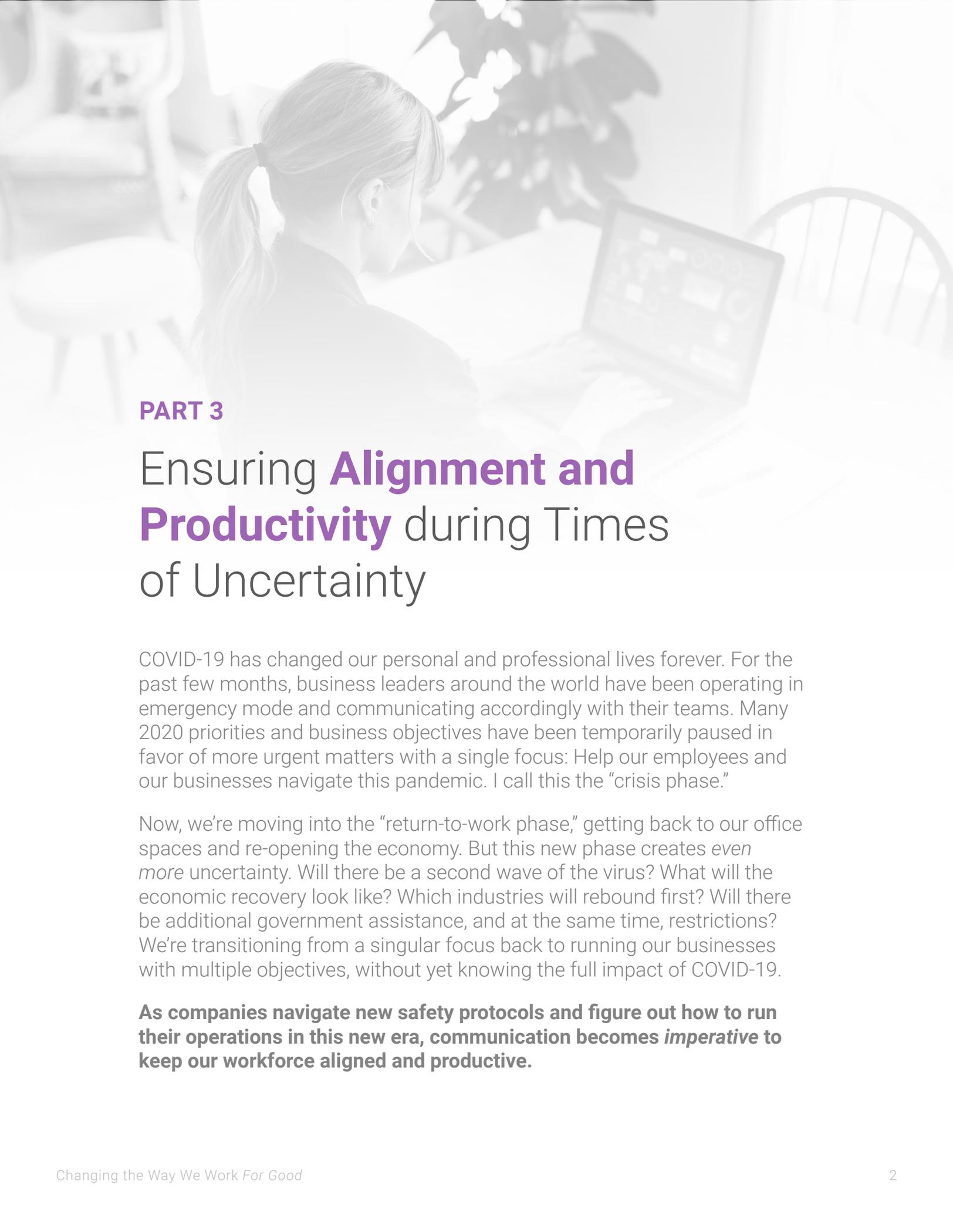


Changing the Way We Work *For Good*

5-Part series that looks to the future of communications in our new work model

By Keith Kitani, CEO of GuideSpark



PART 3

Ensuring **Alignment and Productivity** during Times of Uncertainty

COVID-19 has changed our personal and professional lives forever. For the past few months, business leaders around the world have been operating in emergency mode and communicating accordingly with their teams. Many 2020 priorities and business objectives have been temporarily paused in favor of more urgent matters with a single focus: Help our employees and our businesses navigate this pandemic. I call this the “crisis phase.”

Now, we’re moving into the “return-to-work phase,” getting back to our office spaces and re-opening the economy. But this new phase creates *even more* uncertainty. Will there be a second wave of the virus? What will the economic recovery look like? Which industries will rebound first? Will there be additional government assistance, and at the same time, restrictions? We’re transitioning from a singular focus back to running our businesses with multiple objectives, without yet knowing the full impact of COVID-19.

As companies navigate new safety protocols and figure out how to run their operations in this new era, communication becomes *imperative* to keep our workforce aligned and productive.

Cutting through the Digital Noise

During this transition, we've certainly been granted the opportunity to examine our previous business models and shake things up. For many of us, our companies will look very different exiting this pandemic than they did when it first began. We'll have to get our employees on the same page, explaining both the changes as well as our updated objectives and priorities.

But communicating during this phase will also be more complex. Why?



Uncertainty

The future is uncertain. Our plans will change, and communicating during constant change is hard.



Digital Transformation

Over the past few months, the world went digital and is continuing down that accelerated path. Our communication strategy must adapt to encompass this increasingly digital world.



Information noise

There's an overload of personal, professional, health-related, and financial information being thrown at our employees, so how do we cut through that noise?

We need a communication strategy to handle this complexity – and keep our teams aligned and productive. But an integral part of this communication strategy will also be getting employees comfortable with change itself.

Preparing employees for change

We need to expect ongoing, accelerating change.

Companies will need to help employees prepare for, and eventually embrace, change in order to succeed in the uncertain world ahead. Those businesses that can change and adapt quickly will have a significant competitive advantage, which we've already seen during the past few months.

Part of getting the workforce aligned and productive is communicating what the path to success looks like.

Training our front-line managers and providing them with the tools they need to communicate to their individual employees about what the changes mean to them is fundamental. We should involve those managers in discussions about what new skills may be required of their teams in this new way of doing business.

Taking this one step further, change needs to be part of our ongoing corporate culture, building a change-ready organization and mindset from the ground up. But remember, change is about people, and meeting the needs of today's diverse workforce requires an even more complex strategy.

We'll need to roll out the current strategy, and then make updates as the situation evolves so that employees understand the new playbook.

Sharing updated objectives and priorities, as well as how these things will influence employees' performance goals and day-to-day activities, will help productivity and engagement levels remain constant.

Communicate effectively

This new world of work requires a new communications strategy and approach. Here are some critical components:



Communicate Continuously

Communication is always important, but during times of uncertainty and change, it's absolutely critical. Employees are people; they need to know what's happening on a regular basis to maintain their engagement and productivity levels. As Hubert Joly, Executive Chairman, and former CEO of Best Buy, wrote in a recent [article](#), we should “communicate with (our) employees in ongoing, frequent, transparent, and honest ways, seeking out approaches with a human touch.”



Target and Customize your Communications

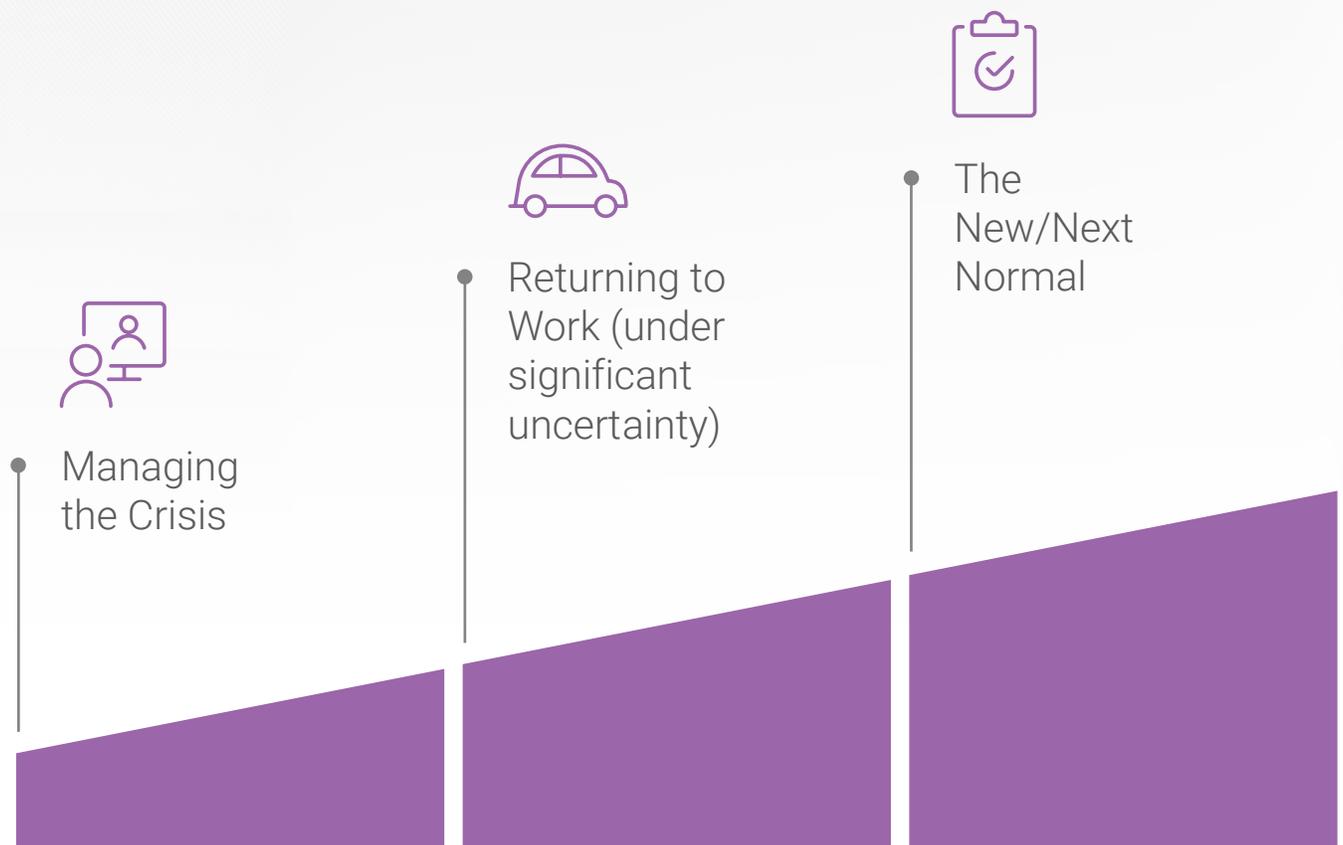
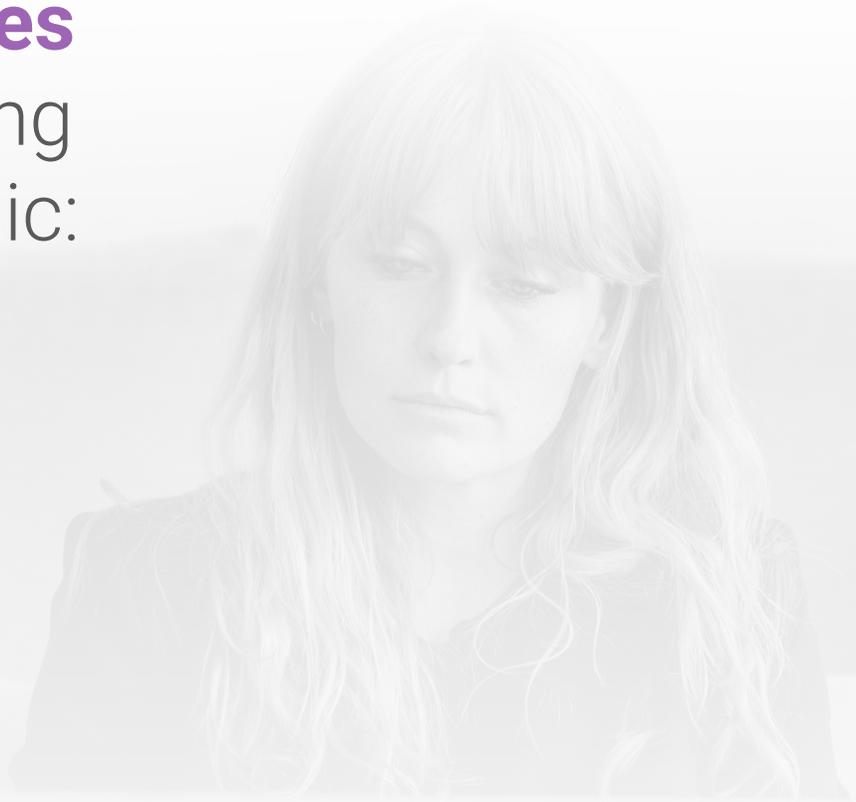
One size does not fit all. Employees are unique, so communication should take an employee-centric view to reach them on their terms, which may include segmenting the messages and varying the channels and media. We need to cut through the increased noise with messaging and content experiences that are meaningful and relevant. And don't forget the softer side of change and communications – tone, style and personalization are also essential to driving the emotional part of change.



Measure Twice

Sydney J. Harris, a syndicated columnist for the Chicago Sun-Times, once wrote that, “information is giving out and communication is getting through.” We won't know if we're getting through unless we measure both the effectiveness of the communication and the sentiment around the initiatives being outlined. Data and insights are just as important as the communication itself.

Three Phases for Navigating the Pandemic:



Keep teams on track **and on task**

Finally, the magnitude and speed of change every industry is experiencing right now requires a new way of keeping our teams on track and on task. While we're in uncharted waters, I believe having a communication strategy that cuts through the digital noise, prepares employees for change, and is orchestrated in continuous, customized, and measurable ways will go a long way in helping our workforce remain aligned and productive during this new normal.

Be sure to catch Part 4 of this series, A Digital World: Rethinking Communications, where Keith Kitani will discuss communication strategies in this new way of working.

