

Lead the VUCA World With a Surgeon's Mindset

VUCA is an acronym for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. Even if you have not heard of it, chances are you are dealing with it. The change in our environment is unprecedented – in its speed, scope, and systemic nature — be it in politics, business, technology, or humanity. Some experts are calling this the Fourth Industrial Revolution. On one hand, this is the best time in history that mankind has ever seen. There is quick connectivity, life spans have increased, and our everyday lives are filled with luxury and comforts. On the other hand, though, jobs are becoming redundant, depression is on the rise, societies and countries are closing up, and the human connection is getting lost. Leaders increasingly report being unable to make sense of such rapid, widespread, and seemingly-contradictory changes.



I believe that today's leaders need to develop a surgeon-mentality in three ways. First, rather than focusing on reducing uncertainty, surgeons learn to actively engage with it. Sure – surgeons do reduce uncertainty as far as possible before getting into the operating theatre by doing a thorough background analysis of the case. But no surgeon can estimate precisely how much time the surgery will last or the exact procedures that may be needed. There are too many variables that evolve within the operating theatre. Similarly, with the constantly-changing and ever-evolving business environment, today's business leaders also need to embrace uncertainty and learn to hone their intuition and quick thinking.

Second, the best surgeons use a variety of leadership behaviors not just one. They are compassionate and empathetic to the patients and their family, democratic while discussing the case with the team during the planning stage, and are extremely authoritarian in the operating theatre. Many of them even have a spiritual and philosophical bent of mind – and that is required when it comes to leading



one's own life after having seen several miraculous recoveries and unexpected deaths. Such agility of behaviors is also needed from business and political leaders.

Finally, I had a chance to observe closely one of the finest gastro-intestinal surgeons when he was treating a member of my family. During his regular rounds to the recovering patients' rooms, he would look deeply into their eyes to assess their physical and emotional well-being. Often times, he would provide Homeopathic or Ayurveda medicines to complement the usual healing process. Patients had an almost god-like trust in him. He once mentioned that his strategy was to have a holistic recovery process. Since the human body is an integrated system, it required him to have a systemic view of the patient's health rather than a narrow focus on the gastro-intestinal issues. One consequence of the interconnected world is exactly that – we need to start seeing all the connections and implications of the strategies we deploy — intended and unintended.

With VUCA, the leadership stakes have gotten higher. The ability to embrace uncertainty, be agile in leadership styles, and create a systemic view are becoming necessary leadership skills.

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/yc2mvjlx>