

How to turn UNCERTAINTY to your advantage

Ever wish you knew exactly what the future will bring, so you could make all the right decisions? Reality is a lot less certain. Uncertainty (in your role, on your team, in the industry) can feel uncomfortable. But, paradoxically, certainty can be worse than uncertainty. Leaders who think they've figured out the future become blind to emerging possibilities and ignore evidence that doesn't fit their predefined narrative. When entire organizations pursue certainty by maintaining the status quo, they become defunct as the market shifts (see: Blockbuster).

So instead of fighting to reduce uncertainty, embrace it on three levels: as a leader, with your team, and across your organization.

Balance your personal response to uncertainty as a leader

Uncertain situations can prompt extreme (and unhelpful) reactions. You may find yourself paralyzed and unable to take action, or you may be tempted to move so quickly that you make rash decisions. To thrive amid uncertainty as a leader, balance opposing character traits—and avoid the extremes.

Avoid extreme!	Keep in balance		Avoid extreme!
Insecure	Humble	Courageous	Hubristic
Fickle	Adaptable	Resolute	Rigid
Cynical	Skeptical	Optimistic	Naive
Inauthentic	Tactful	Honest	Blunt

Use uncertainty to engage your team

Leaders often encourage their teams to simply accept uncertainty. This approach can lead team members to view uncertainty as something to merely tolerate or “get through.”

As a leader, you have the chance to use uncertainty to energize your staff. Consider what motivates your team members, and talk about uncertainty in a way that highlights the opportunities ahead to learn new things, achieve new goals, win new customers, or build new relationships.

Common team member motivations

The explorer	The achiever	The competitor	The socializer
			
Driven by a sense of curiosity and a desire to learn new things	Motivated by a desire to accomplish tasks and progress toward objectives	Driven by the desire to outperform others and win	Motivated by the desire to build and strengthen relationships

Help your organization exploit uncertainty in the market

When you confront uncertainty as an organization, be wary of traditional business thinking. Consider if there is an opportunity to apply tenets of entrepreneurial thinking to help you navigate the situation differently.

The road more travelled

Traditional business thinking

- Assumes the future is predetermined
- Relies on analysis and information gathering
- Attempts to take the most certain, direct path to achieve a specific goal

Taking a detour

Entrepreneurial thinking

- Assumes the future includes many possibilities
- Accepts that much is unknown and can't be foreseen
- Takes an uncertain, non-linear path toward a broad vision

4 principles of entrepreneurial thinking to embed in your organization:

- Start with available resources (not a capital request)
- Take calculated risks
- Commit to experimentation
- Celebrate failure and learn from it