

every
woman
WORKBOOK

BEING YOUR
BEST IN
UNCERTAIN
TIMES



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She stood
in the storm
and when the
wind did not
blow her way,
she adjusted
her sails.”

ELIZABETH EDWARDS †, AUTHOR

About this workbook

At everywoman, we deliver a range of innovative products and resources that unlock the potential and talent of women in business globally. For women just starting out or looking to progress their careers, or build and develop their own enterprises, the everywomanNetwork provides a wealth of personal development resources, advice and inspiration to address the challenges they face at key stages in business. We produce workbooks on topics that matter most to our members and we're constantly listening to your views to give you the tools you need to propel you through your life's work, at a time and place that suits you.

Welcome to our new workbook, *Being your best in uncertain times*.

At the time of this workbook's publication, we're living through one of the most chaotic, unprecedented situations we as global citizens have been faced with. Questions are being asked about the Covid-19 crisis which our political leaders are as yet unable to answer; organisations have been forced to recalibrate operations in order to remain relevant and productive; those individuals lucky enough to remain gainfully employed find themselves having to work in an entirely new way.

Thankfully, the challenges presented by lockdown aren't typical - the uncertainty we're experiencing during this phase is uncharted territory for many. But the global economy has long been characterised by volatility, uncertainty, change and ambiguity (or VUCA, to use a term first coined by military strategists and latterly adopted by business leaders). So, whether you're embarking on this workbook between Zoom calls from your makeshift home office, or from a future, safer distance from the global pandemic, devoting time to learning how to 'be your best' is nothing short of an investment in your future.

In this workbook, we'll take you on a journey with your own relationship with change, exploring how your current mindset deals with uncertainty. You'll uncover the core skills and inner resources you can build and draw on to make sure you not only survive, but thrive in difficult terrain. You'll learn to recognise and manage your reactions, and make whatever mindset alterations you need to be able to move away from those feelings that hold us back - fear, anxiety, insecurity - towards a place where we can recognise and make the most of opportunity and growth potential.

It's possible for all of us to be our best selves, no matter how bumpy life gets. We hope you'll rise to the challenge and we'd love to know how you get on - email us at karenmax@everywoman.com or tweet us @everywomanuk.

Maxine & Karen

and the everywoman team

Facing up to uncertainty

Most of us would agree the world today feels like an uncertain place. It's as though we are living in a beta environment, where everything and anything can change, both politically and economically. At times the pace of change can feel overwhelming. This is why we need to develop agility, resilience and new skills to stay robust through such turbulence.

“

EVERYONE EXPERIENCES TOUGH TIMES; IT IS A MEASURE OF YOUR DETERMINATION AND DEDICATION HOW YOU DEAL WITH THEM AND HOW YOU CAN COME THROUGH THEM.”

LAKSHMI MITTAL, CEO, ARCELORMITTAL ⁱⁱⁱ

Some research suggests the feeling of being overwhelmed is because we are generally so much more aware of world events. We are so connected through rolling news alerts, always-on email communications and social media. These constant updates, combined with unexpected changes, can make us feel life's path is a lot less certain. Our personal and professional operational status is never stationary – it is a constantly evolving process.

News of business success and failure is reported faster than ever, with little time for mental digestion and understanding, which can create a sense of shifting sands in the working environment. For some of us that can feel exciting, for others it can feel daunting. With the right management tools, thinking guides and skills you can adapt to new ways of working in a less certain environment to become a more agile and effective leader and team member.

THE VUCA PHENOMENON

The volatility of the business landscape is so prevalent that many leaders and managers talk about living in a VUCA climate. What is this?

Well, it means Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. It was first used by the US military more than 20 years ago to help describe the difference between traditional and modern warfare. Traditional warfare was mainly fought between two clear opposing sides wearing the uniforms of their country.

Modern warfare is increasingly fought against guerrilla factions with no clearly defined enemy.

VUCA has now been adopted by business leaders to explain how working patterns, expectations and the landscape of commerce itself have all shifted, affecting the challenges businesses and their leaders face.

So, what does it mean for business? It can be broken down as below:

V

VOLATILE

Unexpected things happen and happen fast, businesses have to change course quickly

U

UNCERTAIN

It's hard to predict what will happen, so planning can be difficult

C

COMPLEX

Multiple factors are at play, cause and effect isn't simple, so it's hard to solve problems

A

AMBIGUOUS

Truth is harder to come by; the meaning is hard to pin down and people have different versions of 'the truth', so knowing what to believe can be tricky



EXERCISE

VUCA EXERCISE

Using the above explanation of the VUCA environment, find an example relating to each of these that you have experienced yourself in the past 12 months. If you feel you haven't experienced this in your workplace, list issues that have happened outside of work that have made you feel less certain:

V

VOLATILE

U

UNCERTAIN

C

COMPLEX

A

AMBIGUOUS

How to make the VUCA climate work to your benefit

In an article about VUCA managers in *Forbes*, Professor Bill George of Harvard Business School suggests authentic business leaders need to embrace and translate the volatile business environment to truly succeed. Below is a version of his interaction of how to flip the VUCA climate to your benefit. ^{iv}

Replace volatility with VISION:

Today's business leaders need the ability to see through the chaos to have a clear vision for their organisations.

Replace uncertainty with

UNDERSTANDING: Leaders need in-depth understanding of their organisation's capabilities and strategies to take advantage of rapidly changing circumstances by playing to their strengths while minimising their weaknesses. They must tap into myriad sources covering the full spectrum of viewpoints by engaging directly with their customers and

employees to ensure they are attuned to changes in their markets.

Replace complexity with

COURAGE: Leaders need the courage to step up to these challenges and make audacious decisions that embody risks and often go against the grain.

Replace ambiguity with

ADAPTABILITY: Flexible tactics are required for rapid adaptation to changing external circumstances, without altering strategic course. Leaders need multiple contingency plans while preserving strong balance sheets to cope with unforeseen events.

Digitally driven change can cause career uncertainty

The rise of tech has left casualties in its wake and increased feelings of uncertainty.

Technology makes the world uncertain for businesses by enabling fast change within industry and markets. Digital capability has eliminated some traditional workplace roles. Careers that were once solid can now be removed or evolved into positions people are less

comfortable with.

For example, high streets have been transformed because of online retail and the traditional banking sector is being threatened by small 'fintech' start-ups.

Technology also makes our lives more complex as we have so many channels through which to communicate, connect, consume

and do business.

Much of this streamlining of services makes life easier, but with it comes a new set of issues such as cyber-crime, fraud and data breaches, which can cause business anxiety and added pressure. All of which can leave less time for resetting our brains, increasing the prospect of professional burnout.

EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY AS A POSITIVE CHANGE

Constant change is a business reality as companies try to remain agile. Businesses need to get much better at scanning their environment and adapting faster to challenges to the market, changing consumer behaviour and new technology. Changing strategies and business models means changing structures, and this means change for people's jobs, roles, responsibilities and skills – and it may well mean changes for you.

As recently as the 1990s, structural change in an organisation was an irregular event, something a manager might experience once

every five years or so. Now it's not uncommon for a business to reorganise several times in one year. Even the very way that work is done is changing.

The ability to work and access each other remotely via technology has changed the nature of employment, and many types of work that exist today could not have been imagined even five years ago.

Being more agile, more fluid and more open to change – whether that's you or your business – should be seen as the future. Once you accept that, embracing and rolling with change will become easier.

How this change can manifest itself

- Your best-laid plans will be disrupted by events beyond your control.

- You might be working in a cross-functional virtual team across different

- timezones and with people on different types of employment contract.

- You might be having to get a lot done through influence and collaboration without

- much recourse to hierarchical power.

- You might face uncertainty about your purpose, your career trajectory, your job, your role and your responsibilities.

And all of the above are simply part and parcel of uncertainty in a company environment. Being prepared means being more able to cope and thrive.



*TRAVELLER, THERE IS NO PATH.
THE PATH IS MADE BY WALKING...*

ANTONIO MACHADO, "PROVERBIOS Y CANTARES"
IN CAMPOS DE CASTILLA, 1912



TAKE AWAY

We live in disruptive times. Uncertainty in business is now a fact of life. To be a success it is essential that, far from being cowed by it, you learn how to make it work for you.

Managing anxiety about career uncertainty

Uncertain times affect our behaviour and our levels of anxiety – both consciously and sub-consciously. But if we face up to them, we can all learn how to manage and move on.

— “ —
*IN THE MIDDLE OF
DIFFICULTY
LIES OPPORTUNITY...*”

ALBERT EINSTEIN ^v

From the simple requirement to eat and sleep through to more complex needs for meaning, for control and a sense of achievement, human beings are wired to get their needs and desires met. That’s how we survive and succeed. The problem with uncertain times is that they can get in the way of these needs being met. Our plans get derailed, our priorities get frustrated, our clarity gets muddled. And this can create anxiety. Of course, uncertain times can also create great opportunity but only if we are in the right mindset to seek it.



EXERCISE

Look at these statements and determine which of them describe you or your department in the past 12 months

WHICH OF THESE HAVE APPLIED TO YOU IN THE PAST YEAR?

Difficulty managing workload and priorities

Dealing with restructures and lack of clarity on roles

Difficulty making decisions across complex businesses

Difficulty transforming traditional businesses into digital ones

Resource and budget uncertainty

Dealing with high staff turnover and occupational health issues

WHICH OF THESE HAVE APPLIED TO YOUR DEPARTMENT IN THE LAST YEAR?

Difficulty managing workload and priorities

Dealing with restructures and lack of clarity on roles

Difficulty making decisions across complex businesses

Difficulty transforming traditional businesses into digital ones

Resource and budget uncertainty

Dealing with high staff turnover and occupational health issues



EXERCISE

Using the VUCA Exercise on page 7 from the previous section, re-do this exercise, but against each relevant statement, use the positive VUCA managerial model to suggest ways you could use these challenges as positive triggers for change or conversations within your department or wider company.

1. Difficulty managing workload and priorities

POSITIVE TRIGGER FOR CHANGE: VISION, UNDERSTANDING, COURAGE, ADAPTABILITY

2. Dealing with restructures and lack of clarity on roles

POSITIVE TRIGGER FOR CHANGE: VISION, UNDERSTANDING, COURAGE, ADAPTABILITY

3. Difficulty making decisions across complex businesses

POSITIVE TRIGGER FOR CHANGE: VISION, UNDERSTANDING, COURAGE, ADAPTABILITY

4. Difficulty transforming traditional businesses into digital ones

POSITIVE TRIGGER FOR CHANGE: VISION, UNDERSTANDING, COURAGE, ADAPTABILITY

5. Resource and budget uncertainty

POSITIVE TRIGGER FOR CHANGE: VISION, UNDERSTANDING, COURAGE, ADAPTABILITY

6. Dealing with high staff turnover and occupational health issues

POSITIVE TRIGGER FOR CHANGE: VISION, UNDERSTANDING, COURAGE, ADAPTABILITY

How self-awareness can help manage the impact of career instability and business change

Being self-aware is the first step to managing the negative effects of uncertainty. We need to get to know ourselves – how we feel in our bodies, our feelings and the thoughts that run through our heads. A simple breathing exercise is a good way to start.



EXERCISE

As you read this section become aware of your breathing:

1. Are you breathing from your chest or your stomach?

2. Does your breathing feel heavy or light?

3. Are your shoulders tight and raised or relaxed and dropped?

4. Become aware of your feelings – are you feeling happy, irritable or sad?

Use these answers to help understand your normal operational status in work and at home. This will in turn help you function in a more rounded way during times of business change and adaptation. If you can regularly pause and use this exercise to check in with your sensations, feelings and thoughts you are on the road to being self-aware.

Do you thrive or survive when faced with uncertainty?

We all have different coping mechanisms when faced with uncertain times at work. This test will give you an understanding of your natural responses and help you use challenging situations to your advantage.

On the right are some thoughts and behaviours that suggest uncertainty is getting you down; on the left are thoughts and feelings that suggest you are surviving and thriving amid uncertainty.



EXERCISE

Active survives and even thrives in uncertainty	Passive is overwhelmed by uncertainty
I see uncertainty as an opportunity and stay alert <input type="checkbox"/>	I see uncertainty as a threat and panic easily <input type="checkbox"/>
I am purposeful but can change my plans <input type="checkbox"/>	I get attached to specific outcomes <input type="checkbox"/>
I am open to learning new ways of doing things <input type="checkbox"/>	I cling to the only way I know how to do things <input type="checkbox"/>
I like to think of myself as constantly learning <input type="checkbox"/>	I like to think of myself as an expert <input type="checkbox"/>
I ask for help because together we can solve things <input type="checkbox"/>	I expect to get things right first time <input type="checkbox"/>
I expect to experiment, to fail and try again <input type="checkbox"/>	I must be strong and I don't ask for help when solving difficult problems <input type="checkbox"/>

SHIFTING OUR MINDSET FROM FEAR TO OPPORTUNITY

Shifting our mindset from fear to opportunity is not something you can do easily. There is no silver bullet, but acceptance is a good starting point.

Accepting that we are part of a large, interconnected, unpredictable world and knowing not everything is in our control is the beginning of a change of mindset. Once we accept

this, we can choose our attitude.

Our anxieties about uncertainty will be no less real – we're only human – but we can choose how we respond to them. Stepping from a place of fear to a sense of opportunity is about recognising that growth and development mean having one foot in the unknown.

8-POINT PLAN TO HELP THE TRANSITION FROM FEAR TO OPPORTUNITY

1

Have a vague vision for yourself

In uncertain times, it's often hard to know what you can and will achieve, but having some sense of what makes you happy and what you are working towards is still important. You might have to be flexible about the details, but having a vague vision of yourself in the future where you are happy can be hugely settling.

2

Know your values

Most of us have an inner compass that can help guide us. Think of it like this. If your future grandchild asked on your 80th birthday, "What advice do you have for me in life?", what do you think you would say? This gives you a sense of what's important to you, of values that can guide you even when the path is not clear.

3

Awareness

Awareness means noticing how you are feeling and thinking. Just taking a breath and noticing you are feeling anxious can be enough to shift your mindset. Notice the event or trigger that made you feel that way. It may be something as simple as an email or a 'look' from a colleague. Get curious about what triggered you and see if you can anticipate or avoid those triggers in future.

4

Self-talk

Self-talk is about finding a way to talk to that part of you that is anxious. There is a fearful part of most of us, but also a much wiser, calmer part, too. The calmer part is able to say to the fearful part, "It's OK to be fearful but you are safe right now – stay calm and focus on your options." Self-talk can help you to see the 'truth' when you feel triggered, rather than the story you are telling yourself that makes you stressed. For example, that email, or that look you thought you saw, isn't the end of the world; it's just someone having a bad day.

5

Lists...

Seems a cliché but making a list of what is worrying you has been proven to decrease anxiety, aid restful sleep and even improve exam results. Try making a list of all your worries and then categorise them as below:

- Things I can do something about right now
 - Things that can wait
- Things that are outside of my control and I can do nothing about

6

Get support

Getting support from someone who wants the best for you, who is a good listener and a good coach, is hugely effective. Against your list of issues and worries, write down who might be a good helper on each issue. Lean on friends, coaches, managers, mentors and colleagues. In uncertain times, it doesn't pay to be a solo superhero!

7

Know your boundaries

Set yourself some clear boundaries about sleep, nutrition, health and work-life balance. Find practices that support you, whether it's yoga or walking the dog, and make time for them. Learn to say no to unreasonable demands and make sure you take care of yourself.

8

Give support

The more you help others during uncertain times, the more you help yourself. It's paradoxical, but the sense of satisfaction and community that comes from coaching and supporting others through their uncertainty reduces one's own anxiety.



TAKE AWAY

Remember: uncertainty also means opportunity. Manage yourself, mentally and physically, and make sure you talk to and, where needed, support colleagues and you will be well placed to seize them.

Managing internally

Understanding and evolving your reactions to career and business uncertainty is the starting point to ensuring you can continue with strength and confidence in the workplace.

“

*YOU CAN'T ALWAYS
CONTROL WHAT
GOES ON OUTSIDE,
BUT YOU CAN ALWAYS
CONTROL WHAT
GOES ON INSIDE.”*

WAYNE DYER ^{vi}

As we have seen a volatile world can throw up unexpected feelings and reactions and these can sometimes be projected onto our teams and colleagues. When you've just had your budget slashed or a project shelved that you have been working on for months, it's totally human to, for example, be a little terse if someone asks you a question they should know the answer to or if a meeting gets changed for the third time. However, while it's a normal reaction, it's also something to have an awareness of and to try to get a handle on. Awareness of projected responses is also very useful in recognising unusual behaviour and reactions in both your team and your own direct manager – if you can identify when an erratic reaction is down to a recent anxiety then it can help you manage the situation and your own response in a calm and pragmatic way.



EXERCISE

Answer the questions below to see which of the uncertainty traps you are most likely to fall into...

1. When I feel anxious about uncertainty...

- a)** I start to micro-manage my people
- b)** I try to protect my people from feeling anxious
- c)** I pass this anxiety onto my team
- d)** I look at my to-do list and don't know where to start

2. When things aren't going well

- a)** I want my people to give me more data to reassure me or guide my decision
- b)** I try to protect my people from feeling anxious
- c)** I complain to my team about senior management and the state of the company
- d)** I keep waiting for clarity from someone but it never comes

3. When pressure on the business is mounting

- a)** I feel unhappy and become more demanding about how things get done
- b)** I try to be strong and solve everything for my people – even things they should solve themselves
- c)** I ask my team to retrench and stop collaborating with other parts of the business
- d)** I stop making decisions



EXERCISE

ANSWERS

MOSTLY A

You fall into the 'micro manager' trap

Try...

stepping back from the detail. Give your people goals that leave the 'how' to them - then check in with them regularly but resist the urge to control.

MOSTLY B

You fall into the 'superhero' trap

Try...

saying "I don't know the answer" sometimes. Your people will probably respond well. Ask for coaching from someone you trust. It's not a sign of weakness to use a sounding board.

MOSTLY C

You fall into the 'poor me' trap

Try...

asking yourself if you really are a victim in this situation. Don't take things personally and focus instead on the ways in which you can be helpful to yourself and others.

MOSTLY D

You fall into the 'rabbit in the headlights' trap

Try...

sitting down with a trusted friend or colleague and looking at your to-do list together. Categorise it into things you can control and things you can't - then take some baby steps on the things you can.

FIVE TYPES OF IN-BUSINESS UNCERTAINTY THAT CAN IMPACT ON A TEAM OR DEPARTMENT

1

Strategic uncertainty

What direction are we taking? How do I know what to do?

2

Organisational uncertainty

Who is doing what?
Who is in charge?
What is my role?

3

Resource uncertainty

What budget/resource/
technology will we
have and by when?

4

Time uncertainty

When will things happen
that have an impact
on my work?

5

Career uncertainty

What might happen
to my job or the need
for my skills?

As well as their own anxiety, your team may feel overwhelmed by the emotional responses of others – for example angry customers or impatient internal stakeholders.

Knowing you or your team are under pressure from in-business uncertainty is the first step to understanding the mindset of your co-workers and other departments.

HOW TO SPOT UNCERTAINTY IN YOUR TEAM

Some will go quiet on you, some will vocally complain.

Some will remain cheerful and others will be visibly stressed.

Some will work harder whereas others will feel paralysed and be unproductive.

Introduce reasonable and visible tactics to help manage the situation

Be there

Your attention to and presence with your team, both together and individually, are very important during times of uncertainty.

You may feel there is not much you can do for your team. Perhaps you have no more information than them to help settle their anxiety? There is a huge amount you *can* do.

Introduce regular conversations with the whole team and with each member

individually. Even if it's just 10 minutes to check in and ask how they are doing. Being there can make all the difference because it shows you are sharing the situation.

Listen

Don't underestimate the power of listening and empathising. Paraphrase back to people how you think they are feeling, so they know you understand where they are and that you have listened to them.

Don't try to rescue your team

You will soon fall into the superhero trap if you try to make everything right for your people. Sometimes all you can do is acknowledge that times are uncertain and to sit with them in their anxiety.

Don't be afraid to coach people to find their own ways of dealing with things. Empowerment is the greatest form of support.

HOW TO LEAD AN UNCERTAIN TEAM DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES

As a leader, you need to do just that, so being strong through trying times can feel overwhelming, but needn't be.

“

YOU MAY NOT CONTROL ALL THE EVENTS THAT HAPPEN TO YOU, BUT YOU CAN DECIDE NOT TO BE REDUCED BY THEM.

MAYA ANGELOU ^{vii}

Talk openly about uncertainty

If you complain about uncertainty or blame others for it, you can easily fall into the 'poor me' trap. But this is not the same as talking openly about uncertainty with your team.

Encourage people to learn that 'living with uncertainty' is a skill to be mastered and talking openly about everyone's different responses to it can help. As their manager, you might share some of your own difficulties with uncertainty and the things that get you through it.

Use some of the diagnostic tools in this workbook to have a conversation with your team. Specifically, the VUCA exercises.

Seek input

When you don't know the answers it's sometimes because you don't have enough input. This isn't the same as looking for

perfect data or clarity, but you can seek wide perspectives and views from others. Think outside your usual team, department or company. Who might have a view or a new angle on your problem? In what industry or field might a similar challenge have been faced before? How was it handled?

Use Google. Seek inspiration in everywoman resources! Don't isolate yourself. Always see another side of the story.

Take baby steps even if you don't know what the big steps are

If you are feeling like a rabbit in the headlights and don't know what to do, think about what baby steps you *can* take.

You may not know answers to the big questions, but can you ask some smaller ones? For example; a six-month plan may be a step too far, but what about

a two-week plan? Perhaps there are areas where you can make progress.

Try to box off the uncertainty for your team by highlighting those areas where they can still be useful.

Be as prepared as possible - with multiple routes

Have a plan A, plan B and plan C!

It may not be clear how something will pan out. But you could have a good guess at three likely scenarios. Run a team session on this and get everyone to contribute. Having these three distinct plans means you can be working on readiness for different scenarios, even when you don't know what's around the corner. Plus, it gives your team the chance to feel part of the solution - that in itself is empowering.

Emphasise the importance of support

During uncertain times, teams need to pull together and show mutual support. As a manager, you can make it clear you need people to look out for each other.

You can instigate a team discussion in which you ask them to:

- help each other with problem-solving
- help each other stay positive
- help each other focus on the fundamentals of family, health and work-life balance

You can demonstrate you believe in support by also asking for support yourself. This is not the same as showing weakness.

Choose some practical issues that your team can help out with. They will feel good about helping you and will, in turn, feel better about asking for help themselves.

When uncertainty causes stress

During uncertainty or crisis,

people can feel undue levels of stress and anxiety. As a manager, you have a duty of care – so look for the signs of people not coping.

This might include people who are not sleeping, isolating themselves from others or becoming obviously emotional. Be aware and ask for guidance from your HR team, who can direct you to resources and support.

Management styles needed to navigate both crises and a general undercurrent of uncertainty

There are some differences between managing in a time of crisis and managing in a general undercurrent of uncertainty.

A crisis is usually a shorter period of time and therefore a more active, leading-from-the-front style is required. It is not sustainable to lead in this way during a prolonged period of generalised uncertainty; in a

crisis, however, you might want to consider the following:

Symbolic acts of leadership

Try to be there in an unexpected moment: turn up and help on a night shift, be at the front line of a call centre during a customer complaint frenzy. Such acts of leadership can go a long way to showing your commitment to your team – as well as the company.

You can't be this heroic all the time but some situations call for it.

A crisis team/ crisis room

During a short period of crisis you may want to create a small sub-group of your team to help with communication and supporting others.

You might set up a room and a helpline for example. You may also need to get some emergency resource from your own senior manager during this period.

“

IT IS THE HARD DAYS – THE TIMES THAT CHALLENGE YOU TO YOUR VERY CORE – THAT WILL DETERMINE WHO YOU ARE. YOU WILL BE DEFINED NOT JUST BY WHAT YOU ACHIEVE, BUT BY HOW YOU SURVIVE”

SHERYL SANDBERG ^{viii}

MANAGING UP IN DIFFICULT TIMES

They may be in a separate management tier, but your boss can also struggle when faced with uncertainty. As the old adage has it, it's lonely at the top. Using the below as reference, can you identify your manager's behaviour pattern?

PROBLEM

The Micro Manager

If your manager is falling into the micro manager trap you might notice them requiring more and more information from you to reassure themselves or those more senior.

This information may be hard to provide and add significantly to your workload.

What to do:

You might patiently enquire why information is required and to what timescale. It may also involve explaining when information can be given, when it can't and what the impact will be on other priorities.

PROBLEM

The 'Poor Me' Manager

If your manager is falling into the 'poor me' trap, you might notice them griping about other departments or senior managers and becoming disheartened about the business. You may feel increasingly unsupported by your manager and hopeless about the organisation, with nowhere to turn.

What to do:

You may have a good enough relationship with your manager to call this out. You may feel confident enough to ask them to step up and take more of a lead in helping the team. You may even be able to help them do this – just beware of falling into the superhero trap yourself!

If you feel these are not good options or you have tried to no avail, seek advice from other mentors in the business. Look to your manager's peers, your manager's manager or to your HR business partner in the first instance.

PROBLEM

The Superhero Manager

If your manager is falling into the superhero trap you might notice them isolating themselves, trying to be strong or getting increasingly overworked.

What to do:

Offer a listening ear or volunteer to share the load. You may find you can 'reverse coach' your manager and help them to feel better about being human and asking for help.

PROBLEM

The 'Rabbit in the Headlights' Manager

If your manager is like a rabbit in the headlights when faced with uncertainty, you will be feeling a real lack of clarity. You may be hearing very little from them because they simply don't know what to tell you. Or they may be asking you to do random things without really seeing how they fit into an overall plan.

What to do:

Discuss with your manager how you are feeling and see if you can find some areas in which action (even baby steps) would be useful. Alternatively, pull together with peer colleagues to see if you can find some clarity. Sometimes, when you don't know what to do, you just need to do something. In the absence of guidance, this might mean getting on with what feels right to you and simply letting your manager know what that is.



TAKE AWAY

The most important thing to remember when managing upwards is that your manager is human too. An open, one-to-one conversation about how you are both feeling can often be a turning point.

Managing external relationships

Uncertain times can affect your behaviour towards stakeholders, customers and collaborators. It can feel like no one knows what's really happening, creating dissatisfaction all around, outside and inside the organisation. Here are some survival tips, suggestions of ways to be at your best in times of uncertainty.

Collaboration

When collaborating with others, across silos or organisations, in times of uncertainty it's important to remember some basic principles:

see where they are coming from as well as helping them feel understood by you. Most people have positive intentions, even if you can't always see what they are at first.

Everyone has a back story

Each person in the organisation is affected by this uncertainty and has reasons for their behaviour. Being curious about someone's back story and context is a good place to start any conversation. What's going on in your world? This is a great question to ask someone. It can help you

Don't take things personally

If you are on the wrong end of someone's behaviour, eg a grumpy email or a terse phone call, try not to take it personally. Ask yourself – what is going on in this person's world that would lead them to respond in this way? Get curious about what lies behind something and it can defuse tension.

BE AN EMOTIONAL 'CIRCUIT BREAKER'

Try to manage your own emotional responses so you don't behave badly as a result either of your own anxiety or of being annoyed by someone else. Think twice before you write a grumpy email in response to the grumpy email you have received – don't pass on the bad behaviour. Sleep

on something that has upset or irritated you before you respond. This way you can be the emotional circuit breaker in an anxious, irritable organisation.

Appreciate people

● Always say thank you and appreciate what people do for you. In tough times a simple

thank you can be the best part of someone's day. Be a giver.

● Don't be afraid of leaning on your colleagues or line manager to help you process a bad day or a difficult customer conversation.

● Make sure you don't burn out during these times. Take good care of yourself.



*I CAN LIVE WITH DOUBT AND UNCERTAINTY.
IT'S MUCH MORE INTERESTING...
IN ORDER TO MAKE PROGRESS, WE MUST
LEAVE THE DOOR TO THE UNKNOWN AJAR."*

RICHARD FEYNMAN, AMERICAN THEORETICAL PHYSICIST ^{ix}

Remember to be professional yet authentic when work gets bumpy

It's not an easy balance to strike, but we need to be human as well as professional during uncertainty.

● Being human with collaborators means understanding their back story and treating everyone with respect.

● Being professional means being clear about what you can do, and by when, and sticking to it.

● Being human with your people means listening, acknowledging uncertainty and not being afraid to share something of yourself.

● Being professional means not complaining and stepping up as a leader when it's appropriate.



TAKE AWAY

Try to consider the feelings of people outside your organisation and be careful not to pass on bad behaviour. Always be professional – especially when times are tough.

Your personal action plan



1

How much technology do you use daily? Think about whether this could be increasing feelings of uncertainty and, if so, how you can help reduce your usage (switching off your phone before bed etc)

2

Do you suffer with anxiety at work? Can you identify the trigger and three ways of managing it?

3

Think of a time when you've experienced uncertainty in your team - what did you do well and what could have been done better?

4

Think of a difficult situation that you have faced recently. Using the eight-point plan (p15) how could you have dealt with it differently?

Your 4 questions

Answer the questions below for the workbook to be CPD certified.



Corporate Member

The CPD Certification Service

To apply for your CPD hours, points or units from this resource, click this link and answer the questions.

1 What does VUCA stand for?

- a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous
- b Volatile, Uncertain, Challenging, Ambiguous
- c Volatile, Undermined, Complex, Ambiguous
- d Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Abstract

2 Which of the following are included in the eight-point plan to help transition from fear to opportunity?

- a Determination, power, never giving up
- b Know your values, self-talk and support
- c Know your values, determination, challenge
- d Power, never give up, challenge

3 Which of the following is one type of in-business uncertainty that can impact a team?

- a Personal uncertainty
- b Resource uncertainty
- c Staff uncertainty
- d Passion uncertainty

4 Which of the following should you do when leading an uncertain team?

- a Conduct a team meeting
- b Have one to ones with team members
- c Do weekly brainstorming
- d Emphasise the importance of support

everywoman Experts

everywoman creates resources on topics that matter most to our network members. We draw on member surveys and the latest thinking from the academic and business worlds, as well our own experiences as we navigate our careers. Each workbook offers practical advice, enabling tangible actions for your daily working lives.



MAXINE BENSON, MBE
& KAREN GILL, MBE

Co-founders of everywoman, Karen and Max have spoken to thousands of women about the challenges they face at work. Through their own experiences of starting a business, they uncovered a real need for a network where female entrepreneurs and businesswomen could interact and share experiences. The everywomanNetwork, which launched in 2013, serves as a truly global tool to enable members the world over to realise their ambitions through online membership.

EVERYWOMAN WORKBOOK TEAM

Lucy Ball, everywoman expert

Lysanne Currie, editor

Kate Farrow, head of partnerships

Denise McQuaid, commercial and strategy director

Any topics you'd like to see covered on the everywomanNetwork?

We'd love to hear from you: contact@everywoman.com

Further reading

Articles

Avoiding Decision Paralysis in the Face of Uncertainty Patti Johnson, HBR March 2015

5 Certain Ways to Engage Employees During Uncertain Times, Forbes Feb 2015

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2015/02/16/5-certain-ways-to-engage-employees-during-uncertain-times/#11efbf6a27a3>

Everywoman resources

Your action plan to resilience

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/learning-areas/articles/your-action-plan-resilience>

Five things resilient leaders do in a crisis

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/learning-areas/articles/when-going-gets-tough-5-things-resilient-leaders-do-crisis>

Resilience and agility in a changing world

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/workbooks/resilience-and-agility-changing-world>

Resilience: bouncing back

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/workbooks/resilience-bouncing-back>

Chaos, combat & disruption: How business leaders make it work

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/learning-areas/articles/chaos-combat-disruption-how-business-leaders-make-it-work>

Tackling critical situations

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/workbooks/tackling-critical-situations>

60 minutes wellbeing

<https://www.everywoman.com/my-development/workbooks/60-minutes-wellbeing>

External sources

There is certainty in uncertainty: Brian Schmidt at TEDxCanberra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=om72utemTHw>

Dealing with uncertainty: Caspar Berry at TEDxAcademy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKy26jP7jUc>

Books

Not Knowing: The art of turning uncertainty into opportunity, Steven D'Souza (LID Publishing)

Mindset: Changing the way you think to fulfil your potential, Dr Carol Dweck (Robinson)

Leading Through Uncertainty: Emotional resilience and human connection in a performance-driven world, Jude Jennison (Practical Inspiration Publishing)

Living and Leading Through Uncertainty: Developing leaders' capability for uncertainty, Kathy Bennett (KR Publishing)

Uncertainty: Turning Fear and Doubt into Fuel for Brilliance, Jonathan Fields (Penguin)

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- iii <https://www.inc.com/larry-kim/19-inspiring-billionaire-quotes-about-resilience-in-business-amp-life.html>
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- x <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/143175-i-can-live-with-doubt-and-uncertainty-and-not-knowing>

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