What the Heck Are Your Employees Thinking

And Why You Need to Care

Moving Forward: Understanding the Employee Experience, September 10th and 11th

OrgVitality

The Presenter

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# It's not September 10th

It's March 194th

Characterizing the Pandemic Challenge

- Stress, frustration around each of us

- Global crisis unfortunately, isn't new
  - Learnings from environmental, economic, war, terrorist events

- Yet, a shared global crisis is unique
  - Simultaneous across planet
  - Human-against-nature storyline
  - Can't blame people for cause, but can hold them responsible for response

- Leaders' responses set a tone to be remembered

1 At first, employees feel good about work...
even better than normal

Post 9/11 highlights gains particularly pride, trust in leaders

Leadership Credibility Boost
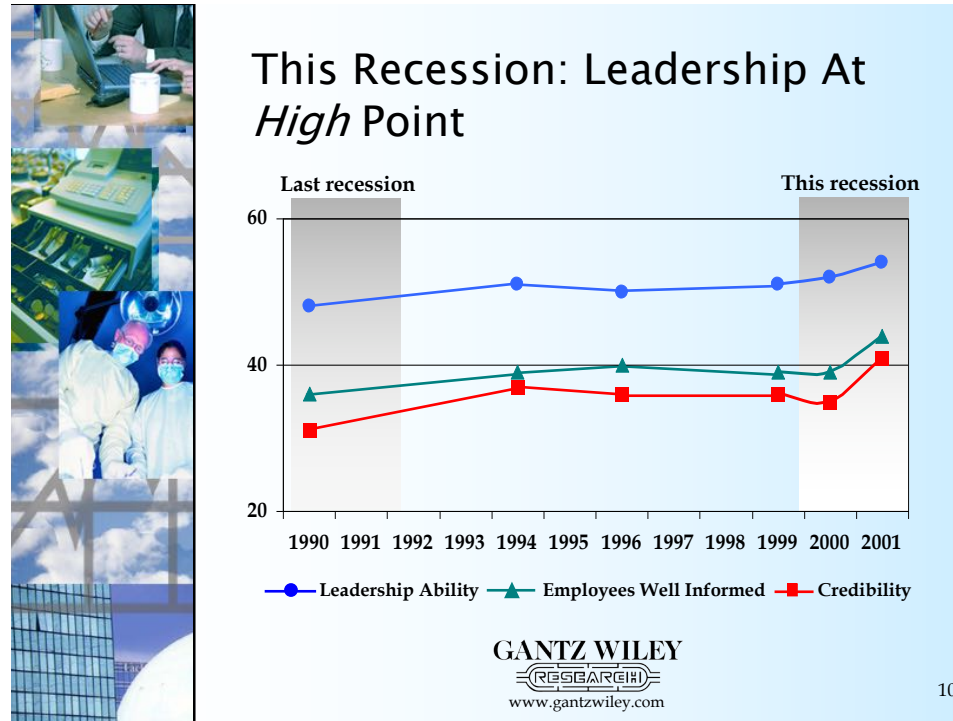
Source: Gantz Wiley Research (2002). "A Page-Turner Year, WorkTrends™: Worker Perspectives On 2001".

Other Leadership Qualities + Pride

Source: Gantz Wiley Research (2002). "A Page-Turner Year, WorkTrends™: Worker Perspectives On 2001".
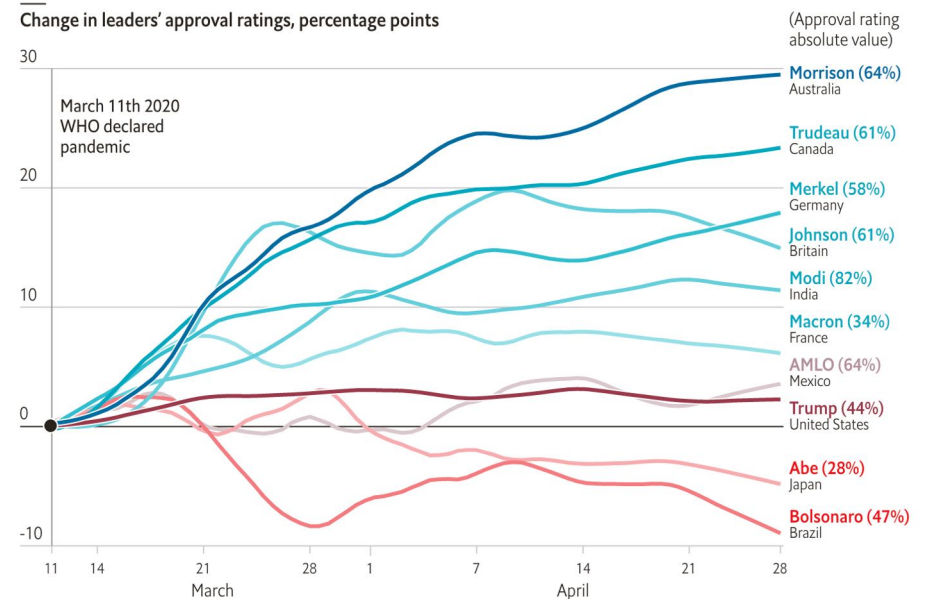
Post 9/11 leadership dynamics echoed today

President Bush's Approval Rating Post 9/11

September 11th, 2001 Attacks

Invasion of Iraq

Capture of Saddam Hussein
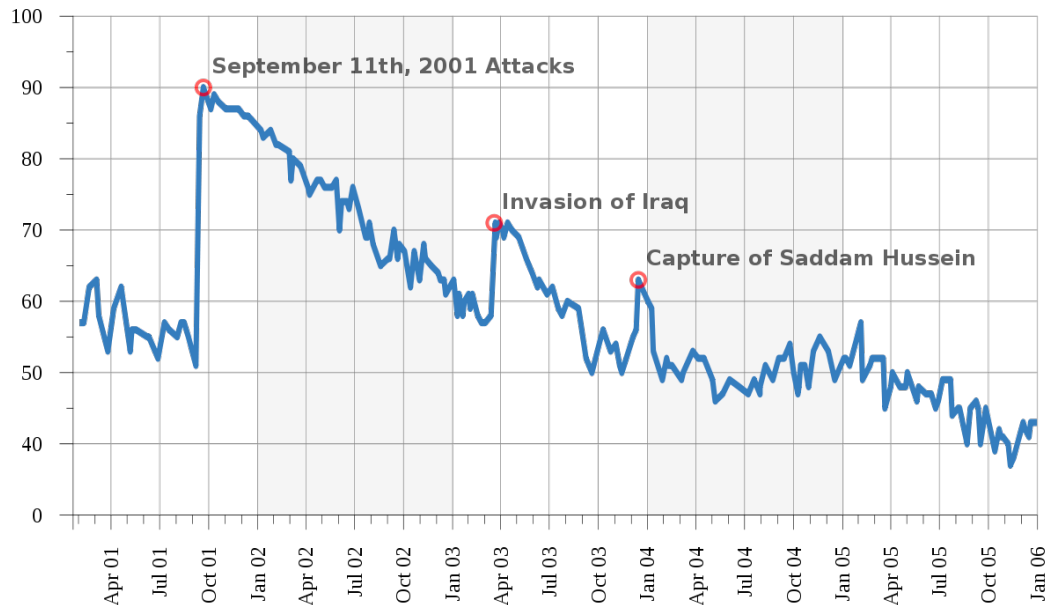
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:George_W_Bush_approval_ratings_with_events.svg

How World Leader Approval Has Shifted Today

→ Approval ratings for many world leaders have risen during the pandemic

Change in leaders' approval ratings, percentage points

(Approval rating absolute value)

March 11th 2020 WHO declared pandemic

Morrison (64%) Australia
Trudeau (61%) Canada
Merkel (58%) Germany
Johnson (61%) Britain
Modi (82%) India
Macron (34%) France
AMLO (64%) Mexico
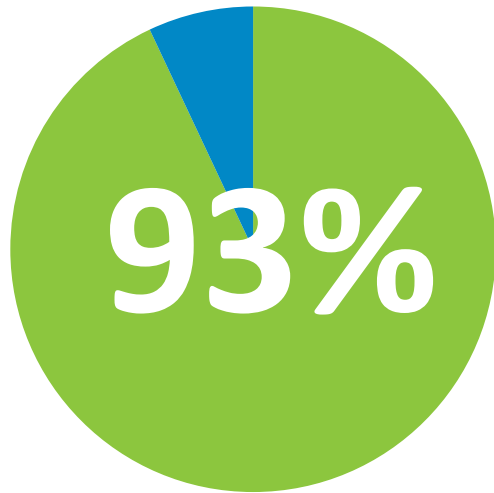Trump (44%) United States
Abe (28%) Japan
Bolsonaro (47%) Brazil
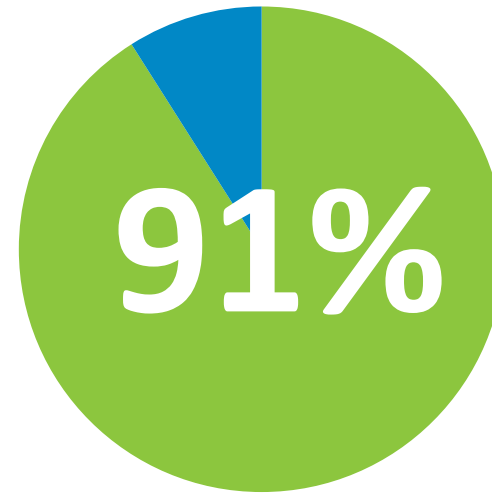
Source: "Following the Leader", *The Economist*, May 2020

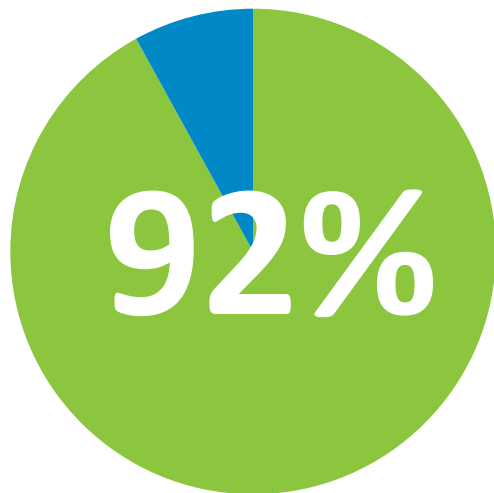See Also: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/world/europe/coronavirus-presidents.html?auth=redirect-apple

High leadership ratings in organizations
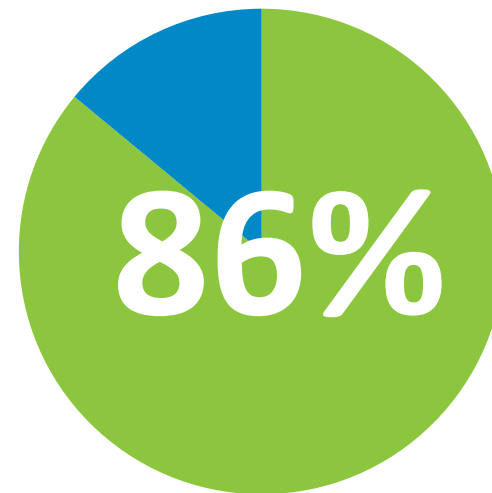
93% Senior leaders *responded quickly*

91% Senior leaders *prioritized* employee/family health & safety

92% Organization's response had been *effective*

86% Senior leader communication *transparent, open*

2 Some "Whys"…
Bonding, Comparisons, Humanized Leaders

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN®

How the Stress of Disaster Brings People Together

Source: Seppala (2012). How the stress of disaster brings people together. *Scientific American,* November 6, 2012. (https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-stress-of-disaster-brings-people-together/)
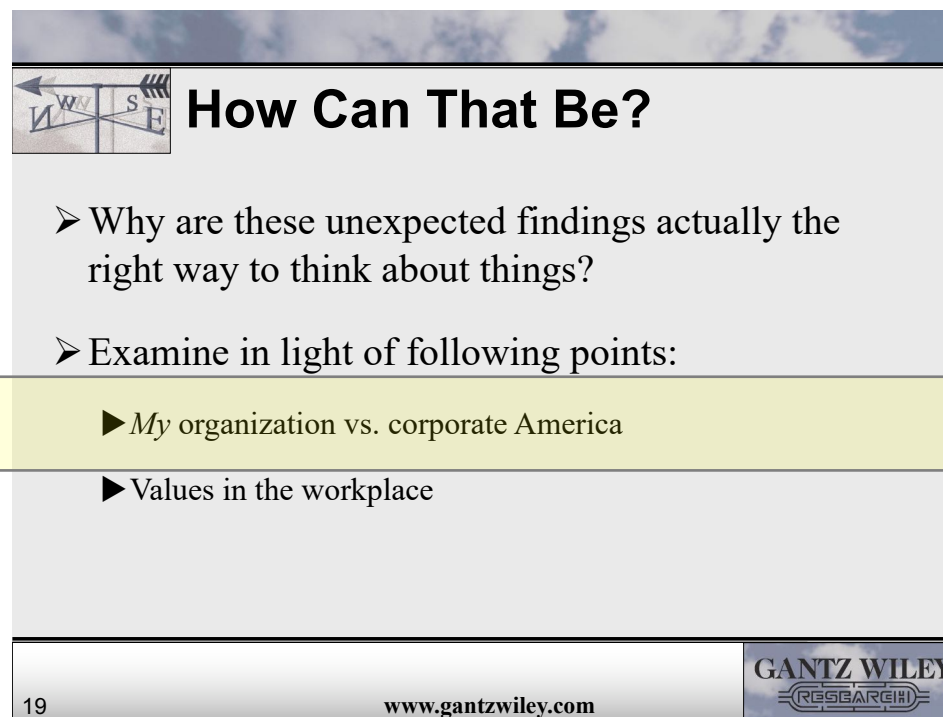
AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST

It Could Be Worse: Selective Evaluation as a Response to Victimization

Source:. Taylor, S. E., Wood, J. V., & Lichtman, R. R. (1983). It could be worse: Selective evaluation as a response to victimization. *American Psychologist*, 38, 1161–71.

Relevance today: "At least I'm employed… at least I'm not sick… at least I'm not dead."

Leadership cred *increased another 2 pts* in 2002, a year of corporate scandals

How Can That Be?

➢ Why are these unexpected findings actually the right way to think about things?

➢ Examine in light of following points:

  ▶ *My* organization vs. corporate America

  ▶ Values in the workplace

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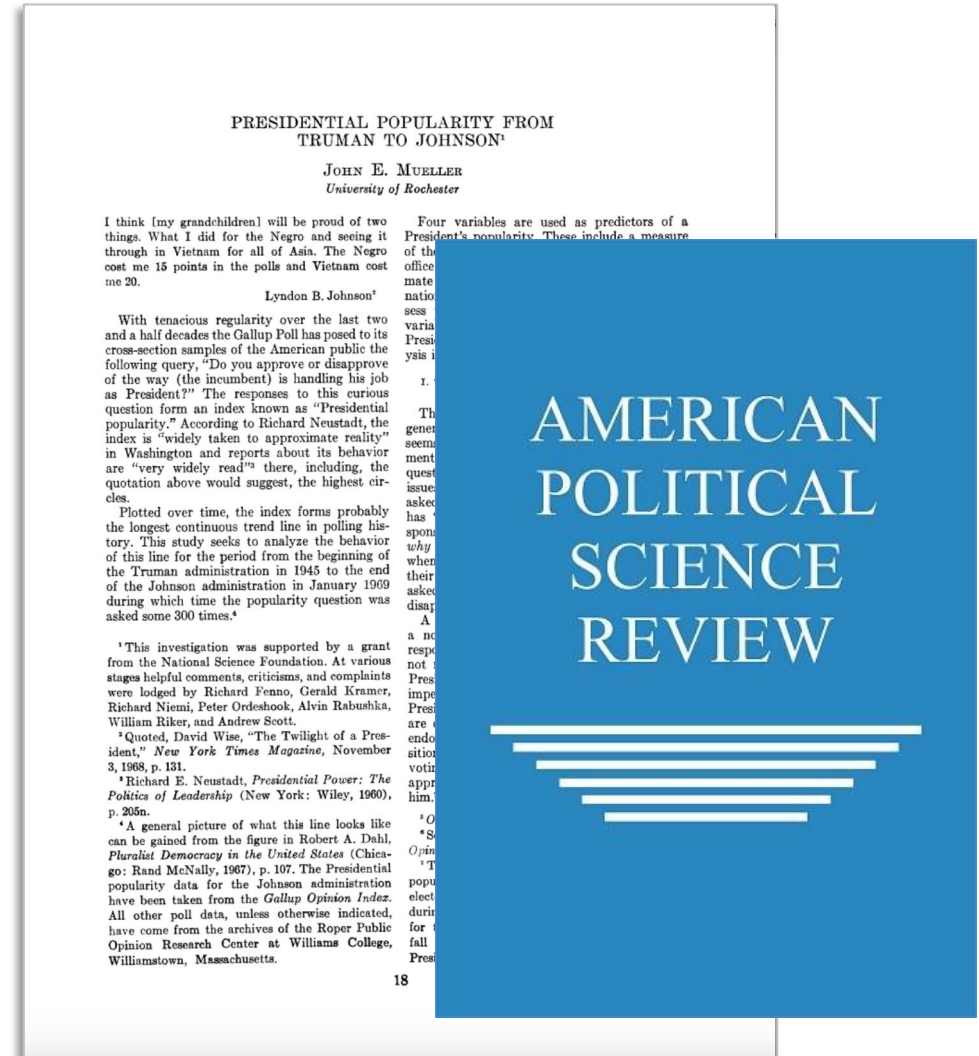Source: Gantz Wiley Research (2003). "A Page-Turner Year, WorkTrends™: Worker Perspectives On 2001".

Additional "Why's"
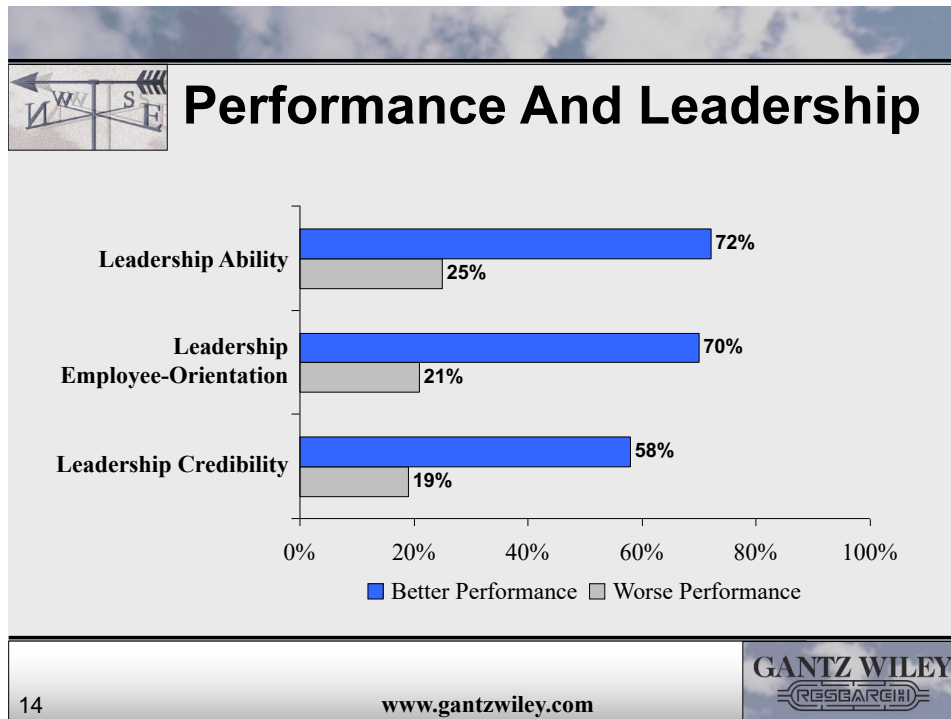
Rally 'Round the Flag Effect

Humanized Leaders

3 Polarization can happen

When tide goes out, you can see who's been swimming naked.
- Warren Buffet

Credibility pivot: perceived org performance

Performance And Leadership

	Better Performance	Worse Performance
Leadership Ability	72%	25%
Leadership Employee-Orientation	70%	21%
Leadership Credibility	58%	19%

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Source: Gantz Wiley Research (2003). "WorkTrends 2003: Unexpected Confidence".

World Happiness Report
Earthquakes, floods, storms, tsunamis, economic crises...
- In high trust society...
  - cooperate to work together, repair, rebuild
  - Surprising increases in happiness in wake of disasters
  - People pleasantly surprised by willingness of neighbors, institutions to help each other
  - Heightened sense of belonging, pride
  - Gains sometimes great enough to compensate for material losses
- Where social fabric not strong...
  - Fear, disappointment, anger add to happiness costs of disaster

Source: https://worldhappiness.report/faq/

Higher survey scores more likely when…

- Crisis is external

- Organization is fundamentally sound

- Leadership is fundamentally sound

- Pre-existing trends moving in right directions

When uncertainty is high, employees more likely to turn to leaders…
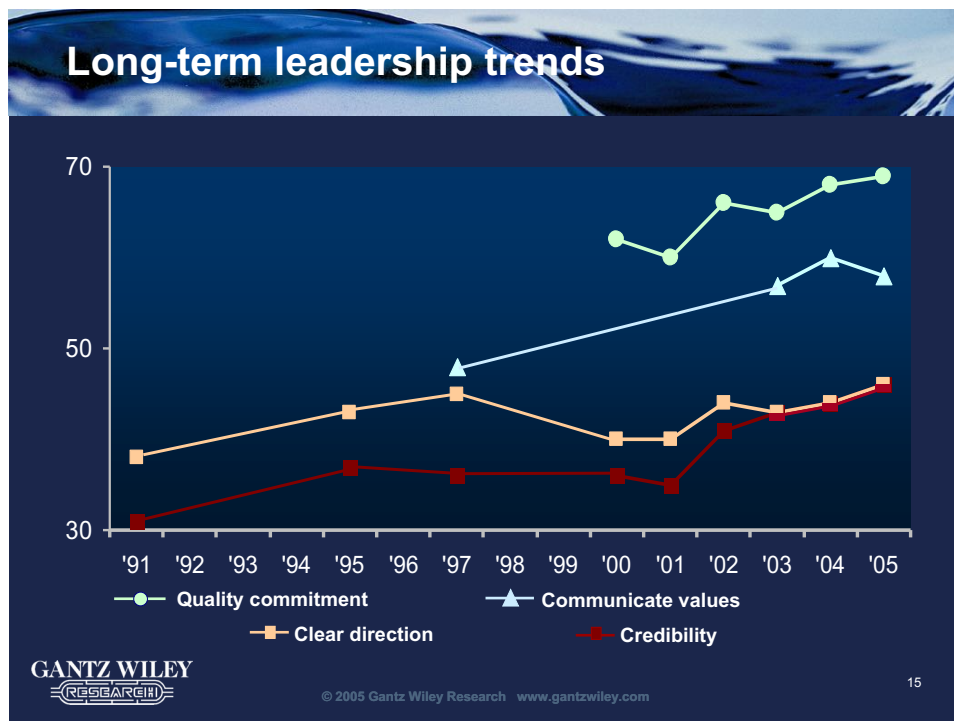*and their behavior has a stronger effect.*

Example source: Waldman, D. A., Ramirez, G. G., House, R. J., & Puranam, P. (2001). Does leadership matter? CEO leadership attributes and profitability under conditions of perceived environmental uncertainty. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(1), 134-143.

Thus: Swings in scores – up or down – do not come out of nowhere

4

Effects Can Last…
But Will Depend on Response

High scores in aggregate can endure

Long-term leadership trends

- Quality commitment
- Communicate values
- Clear direction
- Credibility

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Source: Gantz Wiley Research (2005). "WorkTrends 2005: Measuring the Value of Leadership".

Watchlist in own organization:

- Transition from not blaming leaders for COVID to holding responsible for response
- Frustrations as messages change from "keep safe!" to "get back to work!"
- High scores in aggregate generally endures
- More polarization – most win, but some lose
- Look for pockets of concern

Rally 'Round the Flag Effect and leadership styles

- Two styles have different crisis approaches
  - Dominance: assertive, controlling in messaging
  - Prestige: helpful, humble, sharing of knowledge

- Dominance can be stronger out of the gates

- Prestige often stronger over long-run

- Cannot easily change leaders' styles…
  … but can encourage an echo of non-default approach

Example source: "Why Trump's Popularity Surge Faded So Quickly", *Scientific American*, May 2020

Our leaders

- Have more credibility than ever

- This is a tool to be leveraged for good
  - We didn't ask for it
  - We may not have earned it
  - It may be a loaner

- But how can we make the most of it?

Implications for employee listening

- Employees may be down, but perceptions of leadership are up

- We're all in the same storm, but we aren't all in the same boat

- Find ways to keep in touch, and help leaders stay calibrated

Conference Line-Up

Thursday, September 10th (all times EDT)

- 11:00-11:30   Managing People In 2021 and Beyond
- 11:45-12:45   Creating Impactful Diversity and Inclusion Programs
- 1:00-1:30   Implementing a Mental Health Program in your Organization
- 2:00-2:30   Leveraging Employee Confidence During Economic Downturns
- 2:45-3:15   It's Time for a New Playbook: Leadership Lessons for COVID-19 Recovery
- 3:30-4:00   Delivering Feedback that Inspires and Motivates your Remote Team
- 4:30-5:00   What the Heck Are Your Employees Thinking These Days – And Why You Need to Care

Friday, September 11th (all times EDT)

- 11:00-11:30   Re-Onboarding a Pandemic Workforce
- 12:00-12:45   What? An Agile Performance Management Upgrade? An Employee-Led Hack at PepsiCo
- 1:00-1:30   How to Build the Anti-Racist Organization
- 2:00-2:30   Listening During Times Of Crisis
- 3:00-4:00   Crafting The Executive Message In Today's Survey Results

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- Readiness to Return

- Re-onboarding

- Workplace safety

- Work Processes

- Virtual Teams

- Anti-Racist Survey

- And more

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- Lifecycle
- 180 and 360 assessments
- Internal Customer Experience

AI-Driven Action Tools

- Action Prioritization
- Nudges
- Comment Analysis