



MEMBER ADVISORY



Health and safety leadership in a Covid-19 environment – a reflective resource for CEOs

COVID-19 has placed unprecedented pressure on organisations across the world and here in New Zealand. This pressure forces us, and gives us permission, to think about our work differently – how our work is designed, what our work environments look like and what opportunities and challenges lay in the future. While the external context to doing business has changed dramatically, and the demands on you as a CEO are different, the fundamentals of effective leadership remain the same.

How to use this resource

This resource is designed to help you, as CEO, think about and apply those leadership fundamentals in a COVID-19 environment. It will support you to have an engaged discussion with your executive team, H&S team, Board and key suppliers. It is an imperfect list that endeavours to pull together some collective learnings from Forum CEOs who have continued to operate through the lockdown, and provides questions to help you and your team navigate these extraordinary times.

Leading through crisis

Every organisation will be at a different point in their COVID-19 response and preparedness. Below are some key questions to help focus your efforts around three key phases:

1. Stabilise to start

IMMEDIATE

a. Get COVID-safe

Getting clear on what COVID-safe work means for your business is a critical component of getting back to productive work. In short, COVID-safe work is about applying the principles of good hygiene and social distancing through the flow of work in your business. Whilst the context and realities of your business will be different to others, we'd encourage you to think beyond just what happens "at work". Rather, think about what the hygiene and distancing measures look like:

- **before people get to work** (i.e. planning, rostering, remote inductions, cleaning).
- **when people arrive at work** (i.e. signing-in, health checks, washing facilities, work distancing, site maps).
- **while people are at work** (i.e. approach for deliveries, separation plans and barriers, bathroom management, break management, limited access points).
- **when people are leaving work** (i.e. sign-out, washing, transport protocols, home arrival hygiene).
- **what happens in an emergency** (i.e. emergency plans still work in line with hygiene and distancing, (e.g. assembly points); COVID case plan).

We know of a number of sectors using this type of COVID-safe framework, specifically in construction and retail, with support from the forestry and the electricity sectors. We would specifically like to acknowledge the work of Construction Health and Safety New Zealand and Site Safe.

b. Connect with the key players for your business

As well as the importance of getting COVID-safe, this is a crucial time for you as CEO to connect with the critical people for your business. These are:

- the people you rely on to succeed, and
- the people who rely on you.

Make sure everyone is operating from the same set of information. Forum CEOs have reported that by *mindfully escalating trust* with those critical people, free of pure contractual requirements, there is space and opportunity for timely and innovative responses – being able to offer and receive help that a contract wouldn't have accounted for.

The same applies for how you engage your leadership team and people – *mindful delegation of trust* to our teams will see adaptive solutions emerge. This is more than just a technical challenge – and is as much about building trust and confidence and bringing your people and key partners on board. In this context, practically, as CEO, have you:

- picked up the phone and engaged your critical people directly?
- shared your sense of the context with your people?

“Honesty and understanding has been the most important part of my engagement efforts with my people and contractors. (Understanding) that everyone is suffering, and realising that the suffering can be coming in different ways e.g. partners losing jobs, impact on families etc.”

FORUM CEO, APRIL 2020

“(Being) clear, regular, honest, direct and transparent has been the most important thing in our engagement efforts. Engagement with our people has worked well to date. The challenge will be the next couple weeks as we get weary from remote working.”

FORUM CEO, APRIL 2020

c. Critical fatal risks are still there

A re-start to work will not be normal, and it may not be right first time. It will also occur alongside the material fatal risks that were in your business last month. It's crucial to acknowledge that being COVID-safe doesn't stop the laws of gravity or electricity. In order to get back to work, and stay working, think about:

- how does your COVID-safe risk approach sit alongside your approach to other critical risk controls? Is this an opportunity to get really clear on the controls that make the most difference?
- are you setting up for a slow and managed return to COVID-safe, productive and fatality-free work?
- how will you test, monitor and refine your new work approaches once underway? Who will you engage and enlist in that adaptation and refinement?

2. Pivot to sustain

SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM

As the government commences the pivot from lockdown to a staged re-start to work, we need that re-start to be COVID-safe, fatality free and productive. Making sure we don't ping-pong in-and-out of lockdown demands a strong leadership presence by the CEO, and an organisation prepared for necessary adaptation.

To support your people adapt to the inevitable changes ahead, think about the things you can agree that will provide *consistency, certainty, stability and structure*.

“We are operating an Emergency Operating Centre which will run beyond level 4 and 3. Effectively we are running 2 teams operating 4 days on, 4 days off. We will stick to this for the duration and will debrief where we are and what we have learnt from ourselves and others.”

FORUM CEO, APRIL 2020

3. Adapt to improve

MEDIUM TO LONG TERM

We are likely to be operating in a COVID-impacted environment for the next 18 months at least. During this time we will be working differently – some of those new approaches will hold huge opportunity for a better and more productive “new normal”. Other approaches will be gladly left behind. We need to be deliberate about how we learn, and who we learn from. As CEO consider:

- how will you capture the lessons learnt to help your organisation adapt in future?
- how can you involve your people and contractor chain in capturing those learnings?

“We're already seeing future opportunities for a 'better normal', such as less travel and better use of technology for communication and meetings.”

FORUM CEO, APRIL 2020

“We will need to look at any other new ways that we can use to keep our people safe e.g. can we use drones to observe what is happening on work sites which we can't visit in person?”

FORUM CEO, APRIL 2020

Focusing on *what matters* for a COVID-safe business

The fundamentals of *what matters* for a resilient, safe and productive business remain the same. They haven't changed, but the context and its demands have. So test your COVID-safe response through those fundamental capabilities – *risk, relationships* and *resourcing*.



Risk

Being clear on your critical risk controls and their deployment.

- COVID-safe controls need to be clear, simple and understood by everyone.
- You need to ensure you can learn and adapt from what's working and what's not.
- Your COVID-safe controls should be in line with industry good practice and the Ministry of Health and Public Health.



Relationships

The quality of the connection between you, your people and your contractors.

- Share your view of what the COVID context means for the organisation and your people. This could include the contribution you see your business can make to NZ during this time, but also address important concerns people will have about how COVID-safe your business is, and job security concerns.
- Demonstrate empathy for the people in your supply chain and organisation – listening and understanding those contexts is “leading by example” and has never been more important.
- Engage the essential clients and suppliers on your COVID-safe work approach – their approach is as important as yours – so alignment is critical.



Resourcing

The sufficiency of the people, plant and processes for healthy and safe work.

- Allow for additional time for work to be completed – people won't be able to go straight back to 100% of capacity.
- Think about the size of your teams, to support social distancing, but also ensure resilience in the face of an outbreak.
- Consider a staged re-start to test your COVID-safe work processes.
- Get clear on sufficiency of resources for COVID-safe work, such as necessary PPE, wash stations, tracking technology, cleaning contractors or space/barriers for distancing.



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