



Future Ready Leaders: The Lasting Power of Agile Transformation

*How three leaders harnessed crisis as a catalyst
for change within their organizations—and you can, too.*



By Lisa Sprenkle Jones, Jonathan Hoyt, Maryanne Wanca-Thibault, Christine Greybe

Last year, agility went from business buzzword to absolute necessity, with leaders forced to trust their instincts in order to help their businesses survive and keep employees safe in the face of myriad challenges. But now that things are slowly returning to normal, you're faced with yet another impossible task: striking the perfect balance between standardizing your operations again and pursuing innovation.

The secret to success lies in retaining the flexibility your business gained during the pandemic. Yet as Harvard Business Review puts it, "This spur-of-the-moment agility is fragile. And when the emergency fades, people typically return to traditional command-and-control innovation until the next crisis arises, when they must reinvent agile approaches all over again."²

So, how can you leave the chaos behind without losing what you've learned? Become an agile leader.

Agile leadership is not a single competency, nor a management tool. Instead, it's a core capacity that should fundamentally shift your decisions every day, spreading outwards in a way that impacts your entire organization and develops future agile leaders. And while it requires a commitment to constant growth, research shows the results are well worth the investment.

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Last year, McKinsey & Company published an article demonstrating the undeniable effect an agile transformation has on business outcomes, including:

- 20-30% improvement in financial performance³
- 30-50% improvement in operational performance
- +20-30 points in employee engagement
- +10-30 points in customer satisfaction

How to turn a crisis into a catalyst for change within an organization?

To help you capitalize on and maintain momentum towards agile leadership, DHR International's Future Ready Leaders series asked three top executives to share how they've found success through agility—and their best advice on how you can, too. Here's what they said.

1. Be Comfortable Being Uncomfortable
2. Focus on the Whole Organization, Not Just the C-Suite
3. Take Quick, Decisive Action—Without Fear of Failure

1

Be Comfortable Being Uncomfortable

Agile leaders share a recognition that the pace of change is rapidly accelerating. Today's leaders must navigate complex, volatile, and ambiguous conditions at all times—and can harness an agile mindset to adapt as needed. To do that, CEO of ZAGG Brands Chris Ahern advises that leaders must “be comfortable being uncomfortable.”

CEO of SteelSeries Ehtisham Rabbani echoes this perspective. “John Adams famously said, ‘Every problem is an opportunity in disguise,’” he quotes. “I absolutely believe that. Rapidly identifying and capitalizing on those opportunities in times of change is the definition of competitive advantage.

In every problem, there is an opportunity.

And I think agile leaders lean into that.” For his team, finding new opportunities when faced with pandemic challenges has led to innovative process improvements and SteelSeries’ best year on record.

To navigate change with confidence, leaders must strike a delicate balance between pivoting as circumstances change while maintaining stability and preserving consistency around operational processes.

2

Focus on the Whole Organization, Not Just the C-Suite

Ultimately, it's not enough to get the leadership team on board: agility is an attitude and posture that must be infused at every level for lasting, long-term results. Each individual and team within the organization is either contributing to it or hindering it. Ensure there's a shared vision and purpose throughout the organization everyone can work towards—then embrace a flatter structure that gives everyone a seat at the table.

As Khori Dastoor, General Director of Opera San José, explains, “Once people understand the full picture and they are not siloed in their own department, trying to meet their own individual metric, I find that the agility comes naturally because people are motivated to work for the whole.”

This is a strategy Rabbani uses as well. “The whole company gets together every single week and we share,” he says. “The objective is that nobody feels disconnected from the work that's going on around them and in the company as a whole.”

Part of the difficulty of this exercise is trust—each level of leadership must communicate the vision well and relinquish control, trusting their subordinates to make decisions in order to keep the organization moving quickly. In return, employees trust the organization to equip them to make the right choices.

3

Take Quick, Decisive Action—Without Fear of Failure

Choices are at the core of agile transformation, the foundation upon which it is built. Countless decisions a day, all of varying levels of importance, inform the trajectory of a company. In an agile organization, the rate of decision-making must keep up with constantly evolving global markets. For many leaders, this is a paralyzing thought—and often a reason agile initiatives fail.

Ahern explains, "As a leader, there are going to be a lot of scenarios where you are forced to make a decision when you may not necessarily have all the information you need. The worst thing that I've seen through my career is the inability of someone to make a decision. Your employees are looking for that decision to be made. So, make a decision. And if it's wrong, learn quickly from it, readjust, and move on." To him, failure is just a part of the equation, an opportunity to test more new ideas. It's choosing to do nothing that endangers an organization's success.

For agile leaders, streamlining the decision-making process and empowering employees to make critical choices means gaining the adaptability needed to navigate untested waters. As Dastoor reflects on the past year, she says, "What I have found is that my instincts are better than what I would have thought...

I think that we need to understand that there isn't a rulebook for this moment in time. There isn't a degree or a training manual or certification that's going to equip anyone, and that can be empowering. What I think is best for my business is what we're going to do and we're going to do it with confidence and optimism."

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The Benefits of Agile Leadership

By creating agile transformation within your organization, you can increase productivity, drive innovation, and gain a distinct competitive advantage. And at the same time, the flat structure developed will allow your team to grow in confidence, develop faster, and feel a greater sense of purpose within your organization—organically fostering a new generation of agile leaders. With a cycle of constant evolution and growth in place, you'll get the best of both worlds: instant results and long-term impact.

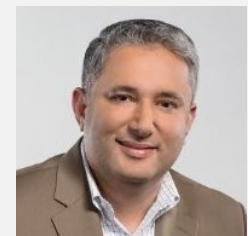
Meet the Speakers



Chris Ahern
CEO, ZAGG Brands



Khori Dastoor
General Director, Opera San José



Ehtisham Rabbani
CEO, SteelSeries

We advise clients on their most important leadership & talent management challenges.

The DHR Leadership Consulting team includes professionals who specialize in Board Evaluation, Executive Assessment, Executive Coaching, High-Potential Identification, Onboarding, Succession Planning, and Team Effectiveness.

We combine unmatched industry expertise with highly sophisticated, data-driven assessment tools to provide actionable results. Rather than create lengthy reports that sit on bookshelves and collect dust, we focus on interpreting the data and helping you make fast and accurate decisions about your talent. At every step of the process, we work as an extension of your team. We help you cut through the clutter, focus on the most important leadership attributes, skills, and behaviors, and gain alignment about what matters most.

Meet the Team



Christine Greybe
President
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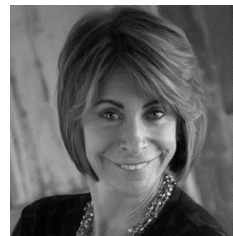
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¹ To agility and beyond: The history—and legacy—of agile development, Peter Varhol, TechBeacon.

² Develop Agility that Outlasts the Pandemic, Darrell K. Rigby, Sarah Elk, and Steve Berez, Harvard Business Review, 15 May 2020.

³ Enterprise agility: Buzz or business impact? McKinsey & Company, 20 March 2020.