Inclusive Leadership Though Resilience and Compassion in COVID-19

By Byron Lee, This transcript is available as a video here <https://bit.ly/SEHWBC19>

These are challenging times. And in times like these as leaders you will be required to make important decisions. Tough decisions. It is also a time for compassion. To recognise the suffering of others, and to do what we can to alleviate that suffering. And we are witnessing amazing acts of compassion across the health and social care system: courageous people stepping up to make a difference.

We also know that to create a truly compassionate system of care we need to ensure that our decisions and acts of compassion are inclusive. That we recognise the diverse needs of the people in need of our care, and those of our colleagues too: caring as an act of solidarity.

We know people are making enormous efforts to save lives. Yet, with the best will in the world, inequities have the habit of surfacing in the most unwelcome of places.

But these things can be remedied.

For example in times of pressure we will naturally place our efforts on doing our best for people we care for based on what we already know: our expert knowledge and experience.

But what happens when something is outside of our knowledge and experience?

Like knowing how to communicate with someone who is profoundly deaf without access to their usual support or providing culturally sensitive end of life care for someone with an unfamiliar faith. It is times like these we need to be doing more not less to ensure we are being inclusive; to engage with and listen to those whose expert knowledge and experience will make a difference. It may even save lives.

But how, you may ask, when we are already under pressure can we be expected to do more?

Well, there are two very simple leadership practices that can help: resilience and compassion.

Two practices that are not only good for being inclusive, but are good for the wellbeing of everyone, including yourself.

Less about doing more. More about doing things well. Here are a few practical tips.

**Being resilient.**

Resilience is about our capacity to positively adapt to life’s challenges, both individually and collectively.

And being adaptable is a key part of being inclusive. So here are 2 practical things you and your organisation can do:

**Be prepared** – Getting through this current pandemic will be significantly helped by being well prepared. We can see this in efforts to ensure we have sufficient intensive care beds for people in need of respiratory support.

Applying the same kind of efforts to ensuring we are well prepared to meet the diverse needs of everyone will have a significant positive impact.

For example being prepared to support the communication needs of someone who is unable to communicate in spoken English, will help to reduce patient anxieties by keeping them informed and reduce the pressure on staff who would have otherwise been ill prepared.

So as a leader ask yourselves 3 simple questions:

* What populations do we serve?
* What specific needs do they have?
* And what can we be doing to be well prepared?

And in asking yourselves these questions remember there will be people in your organisation and in the community who have the expert knowledge and experience to help you. For example across the country health and social care equality, diversity and inclusion leads have been working tirelessly to translate Covid 19 public health messages into multiple languages as well as easy read and BSL and posting video on accessible platforms for all to use. ([link](https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vSfErHtTJmjFftBCXGLEItgnVIbqJjAKQNdrq4VaA-ke7wuaRDKMDiuMMfpHM76By7t9QF5j1FwUUVU/pub) to resources).

**Be Open and Flexible** – ‘one size doesn’t fit all’ and being open and flexible will help us respond to the diverse needs of those we seek to support.

This is not always easy when we are under pressure. But our willingness to listen, understand and change can make all the difference.

One less obvious root to being an open and flexible leader is paying attention to your own wellbeing.

Why? Because people under intense pressure and not coping well tend to react. Listen less. Control more. Finding ways to boost your wellbeing will benefit everyone. Unsurprisingly evidence suggests that people with higher levels of wellbeing are more inclusive. Taking care of yourself is not selfish, it is the opposite.

So regularly ask yourself 3 simple questions:

* What is going to help me feel rested, nourished and refreshed before work?
* What concerns do I have and who is the best person to talk to about them?
* What could I do that might help me support my wellbeing at work?

**Being Compassionate**

When we see people suffering it is natural to feel concern. And compassion is a process that transforms that concern into action. And given that compassion is at the heart of health and social care, a compassionate approach to inclusion feels a very natural way to respond to the needs of everyone.

So as a leader there are several things that can help you be compassionate and inclusive:

* **Be attentive to the needs of everyone**. Paying specific attention to people and groups that have been overlooked in the past.
* **Be mindful of how biases** can affect people’s feelings of concerns for those who are suffering. If necessary be an advocate for those whose voices sometimes go unheard.
* **Be curious and seek to understand** people’s need from a place of humility.
* **Act.** **Compassion is an action not a sentiment.** Action based on truly understanding the needs of others can make all the difference. A simple strategy that can have a big effect.

Finding sustainable ways to lead inclusively during these challenging times will be crucial to the outcome of this pandemic for everyone. And a key message is by expanding your innate leadership capacity for compassion and resilience will support practices that are both supportive of others and nourishing for you too.