

## Marketing Teams Need Humanity-first Leadership—Right Now

By Kendall Ridley

**W**hen the country shut down in March 2020 due to COVID-19, communications and marketing teams everywhere kicked into overdrive. “Overcommunicate” became the mantra, and many teams found themselves working 10- to 12-hour days to enable sales teams, get marketing campaigns out the door, and keep companies’ customers, employees and other key stakeholders informed during a chaotic time.

Two years into the pandemic, this industry’s marketers, communicators and creatives—“marketers” for short—still have needs. Is your leadership style meeting those needs?

I recently interviewed marketers on teams of various sizes about what they need from executive and senior leadership right now. Interviewees asked for anonymity in order to speak freely; roles are accurate, but names have been changed.

Here’s what CEOs and department heads are getting right—and wrong—and how you can better support your marketing teams at this point in the pandemic and beyond.

### Be Flexible—And Stay Flexible

Most of the professionals I interviewed now work a hybrid schedule of two or three days in-office, with the remaining days worked remotely, calling it ideal. “Let me decide the days that make the most sense for me to be in the office or not,” said Michael, a creative manager in his company’s marketing department. “There are days I need energy from others, then there are days when I need to keep my head down all day and get my work done.”

When asked how their CEOs and department heads can be more supportive, marketers who are parents were quick to mention the need for their leaders to be more realistic. Citing the still unpredictable nature or complete absence of reliable childcare, Michael continued, “You’ll get your hours, but it might not happen exactly how you want.” Michael mentioned he often edits videos after his children are in bed for the night.

Marketing manager Brandon said leaders at his company did not acknowledge the upheaval the pandemic caused at home as much as at work:

“There was a distinct lack of compassion for professionals with children, especially single parents.”

Paul, a communications manager, reported how his team has adapted well to relying on technology to stay in touch. “I really hope the mentality that showing your face is the only way to prove you’re working has transitioned itself out of our culture,” he said. With his team still working fully remote, Paul cheered no longer having a commute, noting the “upside” is being around more to watch his daughter grow up and being more available to his family.

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The lesson? Don’t make your staffers have to decide between their careers or being able to care for their children. Schedule and location flexibility remain vital and will likely need to stay in place to attract and retain the best talent.

#### Leadership Tips:

1. Be proactive: Have a conversation with your staffers individually about any scheduling adjustments they may need.
2. Don’t insist on a rigid set of hours when it’s not necessary for the job function.

### Trust Your Team—And Use Their Time Wisely

The professionals I spoke with described still being overwhelmed with meetings throughout the day, which prevent them from doing the actual work that needs to be done.

“The biggest challenge we have is time wasting,” said Paul, the communi-

cations manager. “On video meetings, everyone seems to want to get their opinion in ... That adds tons of wasted time to the meetings, and they take up anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours each day where one could be doing work.”

One communications staffer, Samantha, shared how working in the office is more disruptive to her productivity. CEOs and department heads can help counteract this by making time in the office worth the effort, versus “being in the office just to be there,” as Samantha put it. “What is the point of being in the office if every meeting I have that day is on-screen?”

Several respondents noted their companies monitor or otherwise track their efficiency and productivity. “It was demoralizing and did more harm than good,” according to Brandon, the marketing manager. Your marketing staffers can tell when you don’t trust them. Given the choice between working remotely versus micromanaging and clock-watching by management, the marketers I interviewed chose remote work as the preference. Staffers must still deliver on what is expected of them—that is your evidence they are working.

Your marketing team is silently imploring you—please keep your eye on the big picture and let them decide how to get projects across the finish line.

#### Leadership Tips:

1. Include in meetings only staff members directly related to a project, its workflow or creative assets.
2. Know what needs to be resolved before calling the meeting. Send out an agenda ahead of time so people can prepare accordingly and use a moderator to keep the meeting on track.
3. Allow a defined amount of time for gathering input, particularly if it is of the “what if” variety.
4. Have one day each week where meetings can’t be booked, allowing the opportunity for uninterrupted work.

### Your Indecision Is Expensive

Every communications or marketing project contains an element of risk. Your marketing teams count on CEOs and department heads to help minimize that risk by having a clearly defined vision with specific and measurable goals.

I asked each marketer, "What do your leaders do, perhaps unknowingly, that makes your jobs harder or causes your team anxiety? What could they do to make your jobs easier?" One of the most common responses was the need for CEOs and department heads to eliminate their indecisiveness. Multiple respondents recounted times when leadership lost sight of why their team was working on a particular project, did not decide at the start how success would be defined, or failed to understand how the project's content would be consumed by the audience or end user.

Ambiguity and indecisiveness in this area make your marketing team's jobs harder. Flip-flopping over or the absence of a defined vision for a final product or what will be the metrics for success on a project makes your marketing team spin out. "When you have to

create something that's in the middle of two ideas, it doesn't typically work out well," creative manager Michael shared.

Indecision at the beginning of a project or the lack of defined goals leads to wasted time and money in the forms of rewriting copy, redesigning graphics and marketing collateral, and reshooting and or re-editing videos. Decisive leadership from you from the start helps your marketers develop better concepts, stay on budget and meet deadlines.

**Leadership Tip:** Make a decision on the vision and how success will be measured, then stick to it. Your marketing team will meet the challenge.

### Good Leadership Requires Leading With Humanity

Your company's marketing, communications and creative teams have been holding up the sky for two years, with

many saying their teams communicate more effectively now than at the start of or even prior to the pandemic. Good and compassionate leadership requires taking into consideration outside factors that will impact your staff. "Treat us like we're humans," said Brandon. "We're not business machines."

The world of work has shifted, and your marketing teams are relying on you to adapt to the times. Leadership that is flexible, decisive and decidedly humanity-first will retain the satisfied and productive marketing teams you need to keep your company open for business.



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## AssociationNews

### CRN Announces New Roster of Board, Executive Committee Members & Member Companies

The Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN) has announced the addition of 17 new companies to its membership rolls, along with the election of five executives to its board of directors.

The newly elected and re-elected board members are Mike Finamore of Gemini Pharmaceuticals (second term); James Hyde of Balchem Corporation; Micah Osborne of Stratum Nutrition; Tony Talalay of Brassica Protection Products; and Ruth Winker of Jamieson Wellness. Christine Burdick-Bell of Pharmavite LLC and Mike Yacilla of Herbalife Nutrition have also been appointed to CRN's board of directors to fill vacancies on the board from their respective companies. Jennifer

Holahan from GSK Consumer Healthcare, already a member of CRN's board, joins Burdick-Bell and Yacilla as newly appointed members of the board's executive committee.

"I am excited, as is our chairman, Barry Ritz, to welcome these executives to CRN's board of directors," said CRN President & CEO Steve Mister. "Our board members have the expertise and desire to provide the stewardship that keeps our organization at the forefront of the industry. We look forward to their insights and contributions to our success."

Companies joining CRN voting members are Alvinesa Natural Ingredients, AstaReal, Inc., CS Health, Cronos Group, Ekaterra, FrieslandCampina, Friska,

i-Health, Motif Medical and Vidya Herbs. New associate members are FoodChain ID, Franklin Health Research Center, Health Loq, Global Retailer & Manufacturer Alliance (GRMA), Safe Bridge Regulatory & Life, Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine and Spherix Consulting.

"These companies represent the innovation and growth occurring in the supplement and functional food industry and also here at CRN," said Carl Hyland, CRN's vice president, membership. "We are pleased to welcome them as members and look forward to serving their needs and representing their interests for many years."

For more information, visit [www.crnusa.org](http://www.crnusa.org).



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