



MYTHOS GROUP

BEING AN EFFECTIVE LEADER
DURING TURBULENT TIMES

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLIE KATZ
EDITOR AUTHORITY MAGAZINE



Amit Patel *Of Mythos Group* On Five Things You Need To Be A Highly Effective Leader During Turbulent Times

An Interview with Charlie Katz

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As part of our series about the “Five Things You Need To Be A Highly Effective Leader During Turbulent Times,” we had the pleasure of interviewing Amit Patel.

Amit is the Founder and Managing Director of [Mythos Group](#), a boutique management consulting firm that specializes in: Strategy; Transformation (Digital/ HR/ Organizational); Leadership and Executive Coaching; and Talent Management. Prior to founding Mythos Group, Amit held senior management and executive positions with Scient, PeopleSoft (Oracle), Andersen Consulting (Accenture), and Coopers & Lybrand.

Amit is a thought leader, an innovative strategist, author, and speaker, known for driving global transformation in the U.S., Asia, Australia, Canada, and Europe. He co-authored the [book](#) “Turning Ideas Into Impact: Insights from 16 Silicon Valley Consultants” and regularly [writes](#) articles and white papers to help other business leaders lead. He brings over 20 years of management consulting experience, including several years with the “Big 4.”

Amit is a trusted advisor to C-level executives and senior business leaders. He helps his clients articulate their strategic intent and co-create practical strategies for putting business plans into action. Amit takes pride in his ability to meet his clients where they are, exploit existing talents and technology, identify and develop new capabilities, and remove barriers to enable his clients to achieve their goals efficiently.

Amit approaches his clients with curiosity and challenges existing norms to help envision the art of the possible. He has experience in helping his clients reinvent themselves to take on new challenges, reduce costs by identifying unnecessary practices, eliminating redundancies, and design and implement new organizational/operating models.

Thank you so much for your time! I know that you are a very busy person. Our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your ‘backstory’ and how you got started?

My backstory isn’t a linear progression, but rather one with a few twists and turns. Initially, I was fascinated with accounting, but upon immigrating to the U.S., decided to explore all that computer science had to offer. After graduating from the University of Maryland, I joined a small firm that specialized in developing software for telecommunication companies. After a few years of computer programming, I realized that my interests were in strategic planning and organizational design/development. Subsequently, I worked for a few marquee management consulting firms. As so often happens in the professional services industry, an exciting opportunity to work for a start-up presented itself. The experience of partnering with Venture Capitalists, and collaborating with entrepreneurs, was exhilarating. However, the dot.com implosion in 2003 led me to pursue my dream of becoming an entrepreneur — hence, I founded a boutique management consulting firm focused on strategic planning and transformations.

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lessons or ‘take aways’ you learned from that?

In the early part of my career, I worked for a management consulting firm. I was leading the effort of putting together a client proposal. Since I needed several documents for reference, I booked a conference room so I could spread things out. Time flew by, and I heard a knock on the door. The conference room had been booked by a colleague for a team meeting. I quickly gathered my documents, grabbed my laptop and headed back to my office. It was lunchtime, and I decided to take a break. After lunch, I headed back to my office to continue working on the client proposal. As I was about to re-engage, I realized that I had forgotten my computer mouse in the conference room. So, I headed up to the conference room and knocked on the door, asking, “has anyone seen a mouse in the room?” Much to my surprise, this created quite a commotion. My colleagues thought there may be a live rodent in the room. I realized that I had made a mistake and clarified that I was looking for my computer mouse. Needless to say, it was a funny but awkward moment. The lesson I learned is to be crystal clear in my communications — leave nothing to ambiguity or assumptions. It’s a lesson that I have carried through my career.

None of us can achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story?

My father played an instrumental role in helping me navigate to where I am today. He was a professor and was determined to leave a positive legacy behind. He worked hard and was relentless in his pursuit of excellence. Despite facing numerous challenges in his life, my father remained resilient and upbeat. I learned five key lessons from him that have stayed with me all my life:

1. Have the courage to pursue your dream
2. Realize the power of networking and nurturing relationships
3. Never compromise (your character, integrity, values, and ethos)
4. Be compassionate
5. Don’t underestimate the value of asking “why?”

Extensive [research](#) suggests that “purpose driven businesses” are more successful in many areas. When your company started, what was its vision, what was its purpose?

Mythos Group’s vision is to collaborate with clients in co-creating innovative strategies for transformative growth. We understand that change is inevitable. And, that only by meeting a client’s greatest organizational challenges head-on, can we meet their business objectives. We are passionate about what we do and bring deep subject matter expertise, industry best practices, leading-edge strategic thinking and innovative thought leadership to our relationships with our clients. Passionate, nimble, and focused, our goal is to help corporations create and sustain competitive advantage through organizational transformation and people empowerment. With the right leadership to guide them, pragmatic strategies, and an

understanding that transformation is best done over time, our clients' progress can be smooth, powerful, and productive. This has always been our purpose, and always will remain our purpose.

Thank you for all that. Let's now turn to the main focus of our discussion. Can you share with our readers a story from your own experience about how you lead your team during uncertain or difficult times?

Did you ever consider giving up? Where did you get the motivation to continue through your challenges? What sustains your drive?

No, I never considered giving up. As is the case for many entrepreneurs, I have faced my fair share of challenges. However, the determination to succeed served as my motivation and fueled my resiliency. What sustains me most of all is my work itself — I love what I do. I love the interactions with my clients and helping them address their most complex business challenges with out-of-the-box thinking and solutions.

What would you say is the most critical role of a leader during challenging times?

During challenging and uncertain times, the most critical role of a leader is being a transparent communicator and an empathetic listener. Uncertain times inevitably bring anxiety among employees, who are thirsty for more information. They want to know the current state of things, what's being done to keep a situation from getting worse, and when they can expect everything to get back to normal.

To help alleviate employee stress, a leader has the responsibility of sifting through all of the information, data, and speculation being tossed around, and determining what, when, and how to communicate with the team and the organization. To foster resilience in facing the challenges that lie ahead, leaders need to communicate early and often with a sense of urgency focusing on essential information and embracing brevity. Leaders need to be visibly transparent by sharing what they know when they know it, and acknowledging what they don't.

Equally important is empathetic listening. In a crisis, leaders need to take the time to listen to their employees using their preferred channel, as it lets them know that they are worthy of attention. By listening to employees, leaders are able to make an emotional connection, calm one another and more effectively deal with personal stressors — making it possible to adjust to the constantly changing conditions crises bring.

When the future seems so uncertain, what is the best way to boost morale? What can a leader do to inspire, motivate and engage their team?

According to [Gallup's State of the American Workplace](#) report, less than a third of American workers are engaged at work. Even in normal times, boosting morale and keeping employees engaged is hard — it becomes even harder during uncertain times. Successful employee



engagement does not just happen. It is a conscious strategy that demands a significant investment of energy, time, and resources.

Here are some ways a leader can inspire, motivate and engage their teams:

- Clearly define your vision and the steps you and your employees will be taking to bring it to life. Create a culture of accountability — articulate the roles and responsibilities of the employees.
- Create a meaningful work environment that enables employees to feel useful, worthwhile, and valued. As a leader, you must help your employees understand how their daily work contributes to the organization as a whole. Provide timely feedback so employees know what they are doing well and where they need to improve. When you encourage a two-way feedback loop, your employees feel heard. Celebrate wins and recognize/reward employee contributions.
- Build relationships that create trust, open dialogue and full transparency. Treat your employees with dignity and respect. Take the time to get to know your employees at a personal level, outside of work. Show your employees that you don't view them just as worker bees, but instead as human beings.
- Communicate transparently about what's going on in your and other departments. Give them a chance to give input and suggest ideas. Use a multichannel strategy that includes email, newsletters, web blogs, training sessions, and town hall meetings to deliver your message. Constantly ask your employees for feedback, what's working and what's not. By keeping your finger on the pulse, you can maintain a culture of inclusiveness and contentment.
- Support your employees by giving them the tools to succeed. Don't assume that each individual employee is receiving all the tools, training, and support they need. Check with them personally and find out. Make your employees feel like business partners, as if they're invested in the company.

What is the best way to communicate difficult news to one's team and customers?

Difficult news is always hard to handle, whether you're delivering it or receiving it — it takes an emotional toll on both parties. With that in mind, the best way to communicate such news is in-person, face-to-face. Set the context, be direct and honest, transparent, and be empathetic.

How you deliver the message is just as important as the message itself. Take a moment to reflect on how you would like to receive the message and how you would react to it. Take time to calm your mind. Focus and think about what you want to say. By doing this, your emotions are less likely to get the better of you during the conversation.

As a leader, you should anticipate that the team or customers receiving the bad news will go through a series of emotional stages (Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's Change Curve) progressing through blaming others, blaming self, uncertainty, acceptance, problem-solving and moving on.

Understanding this helps leaders predict how the team or customer is likely to react. A leader can ease the transition by using appropriate communication styles and, where applicable, offering potential solutions.

How can a leader make plans when the future is so unpredictable?

The future is always unpredictable; it's like the weather over which organizations and leaders have no control. The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated that even the best-laid plans can be easily disrupted by the unknown. Leaders can plan for an unpredictable future by maintaining a positive mindset and being adaptive. Rather than being reactionary and responding to the informational "white noise" out there, leaders need to proactively alter their course and chart a new one.

The great challenge for managing amid uncertainty is that the potential outcomes are much more numerous than is typically expected. By leveraging dynamic strategic and scenario planning, leaders can develop contingency plans (Plan A, Plan B, Plan C, etc.) to address the best- or worst-case business scenarios. This enables leaders to gain clarity about what they will not do and what initiatives they will pursue, and the ability to pivot as needed. Leaders who thrive in an unpredictable environment focus on understanding the potential future of evolving trends (business and technology) and coalescing their business strategies around innovation and adaptation.

Is there a "number one principle" that can help guide a company through the ups and downs of turbulent times?

Staying authentic — not losing sight of your "north star" and living your core values. During turbulent times, communication is the glue that holds everything together — your team, organization and clients. The communication needs to be clear, concise, transparent, and delivered frequently to the targeted audience using a multichannel communication strategy.

By acknowledging the crisis, and tying your approach in addressing the current challenges and the ones that lie ahead to your organization's values, you instill a positive mindset with your team and clients. As a leader, don't stop there — "walk the talk."

Can you share 3 or 4 of the most common mistakes you have seen other businesses make during difficult times? What should one keep in mind to avoid that?

1. Failing to Focus on Employee Well-Being — During difficult times, an organization has an important role to play in the emotional and physical well-being of its employees. More often than not, organizations are so focused on resolving the crisis that they neglect to take care of their most valuable asset — their employees. Instead, they should realize that by taking care of employees first, they actually take better care of the business too.

2. **Knee Jerk Reactions** — At times, to swiftly address a crisis, companies become reactive rather than being objective. By not fully understanding the root cause of the issue, obtaining and analyzing all of the available data, failing to conduct appropriate research using internal and external expertise, the company puts itself in an unattainable position. The better course of action is to slow down, take some time at the beginning of the crisis to understand the situation as completely as possible — and then act.
3. **Lack of Communication** — As mentioned previously, communication is the glue that holds an organization together during difficult times. By being silent, leaders add to the anxiety and stress of their employees. Inevitably, silence creates a vacuum in which rumors are spun and misinformation fueled, making everything worse. Just acknowledging the crisis and the fact that you'll be in touch with more information soon can go a long way in reducing anxiousness.
4. **Overlooking Success and Recognition** — During difficult times, organizations cut back on spending to conserve working capital. In doing so, they fail to see the bigger picture. A simple kudos to acknowledge a positive contribution made, like taking an employee or team for an inexpensive lunch, has a profound effect in improving morale, igniting positive emotions, increasing productivity and fueling loyalty.

Generating new business, increasing your profits, or at least maintaining your financial stability can be challenging during good times, even more so during turbulent times. Can you share some of the strategies you use to keep forging ahead and not lose growth traction during a difficult economy?

Change is inevitable. The most important thing you can do is adapt to the changing landscape by understanding the evolving business and emerging technology trends to refine your priorities. To get traction during a difficult economy, have meaningful and relevant conversations with your existing and potential clients. Having a generic conversation or sending a generic email stating “I have your back” falls flat.

Ask your clients what their biggest challenges are — be an active listener if you understand the issues they are facing, it better positions you to know what services may best address their business needs. For example, let's say a retail client mentions that their in-store business is down, and they are considering other avenues to increase sales. Your experience with digital transformation gives you unique insights to share about how the client could benefit from developing a strong online presence.

It is imperative to build stronger relationships during a crisis. Adopt a mindset of relentlessly focusing on making your clients happy. Acknowledge the difficult economy and explore ways in which you could make their lives easier by alleviating stressors. In doing so, you'll foster strong client relationships that last well after the difficult economy resolves.



In a downturned economy, you must assess your service offerings and refine them as needed. Find new services that bolster your value to your client — make sure your client understands and sees it. Improving your company’s visibility (marketing, presenting at conferences, publishing articles, etc.) and expanding your existing network also helps in creating traction that fuels growth

Lastly, get creative with pricing. For example, offer bundled services at a lower total price.

Here is the primary question of our discussion. Based on your experience and success, what are the five most important things a business leader should do to lead effectively during uncertain and turbulent times? Please share a story or an example for each.

1 . Positive Mindset — Oftentimes, leaders struggle with finding the right path to navigate through a crisis. It would be easy for leaders to be negative. However, the reality is this is precisely when leaders need to take on the challenges head-on. To pull through and emerge stronger in the post-turbulent times requires leaders to be resilient, think positively, and have a positive mindset.

Mindsets contain both intellectual and emotional elements that affect our perceptions, interpretations, and actions. They guide what we think and how we feel about people and things. From a leadership perspective, a positive mindset is foundational for success — nothing can be achieved unless you believe it can.

By serving as credible and influential role models and propagating a sense of possibility from which their behaviors and actions follow, leaders can influence the behaviors and mindsets of their employees. For example, consider Steve Jobs, whose out-of-the-box experiences such as traveling to India to pursue spiritual enlightenment and auditing a class on calligraphy, helped to form a mindset that led to some of the greatest product innovations of the last half-century.

2. Put Optimism Into Action — Optimism is simply defined as being positively hopeful and having confidence in the future success of events. Optimism and positivity are both fundamental factors of resiliency and success. Optimism isn’t about sweeping pessimism and negativity under the rug.

In the midst of uncertainty, it’s understandable to feel anxious or depressed, and struggle to find the silver lining. When the path ahead is unclear and fluid, employees turn to their leaders for comfort — to get clarity about the crisis, address their fears and gain a grounded vision of a better future — an opportunity to learn new things and pivot.

By being calm and optimistic, effective leaders can demonstrate their abilities to confidently and positively meet any challenge, even when constrained by uncertainty about when and how the crisis will end. Leaders need to carefully balance confidence and hope with realism. It’s essential to keep a flexible frame of mind, expect changes, and be ready to adjust as needed.



No one wants to follow a pessimist, but they don't want to blindly follow an unrealistic optimist either.

3. Adopt A Meaningful Purpose Everyone Can Get Behind — Purpose cultivates engaged employees. When leaders are centered on an authentic purpose, employees feel that their work has meaning, as well as a sense of togetherness. [Research](#) shows that employees who feel a greater sense of connection are far more likely to ride out times of volatility and be there to help companies recover and grow when stability returns.

During turbulent times, it becomes imperative to engage your employees — which requires an understanding of what helps them thrive and drive their work ethic and performance. While creating a shared meaningful purpose to address how they want to tackle the crisis, leaders should incorporate team members into the process in some fashion. This will create greater buy-in as the employees will see themselves as being part of the solution.

In the words of McChrystal, shared purpose, along with deep trust, “gives teams the ability to reconfigure and do the right thing, and also, to know *what* the right thing is.” In complex situations, when teams are fused by a shared meaningful purpose, they feel they are a part of something bigger than themselves, they become more adaptive, and feel more interested, motivated and inspired.

4. Transparency — Leadership transparency plays a pivotal role in leading an organization through uncertain times. How transparently leaders communicate with their employees, shareholders, customers, and the communities they serve will have a direct impact on how they and their organization are perceived.

Any crisis provides an opportunity for the veracity and accuracy of the information shared to be diluted. From a leadership perspective, it becomes imperative to drown out this “white noise” and distill meaning from chaos. Leaders need to proactively provide accurate and timely information regarding what is happening, what the impact is, how the organization is handling it, and offer clear guidance on what is expected from their employees.

As a leader, you must communicate authentically rather than appearing to be scripted. Trust is never more important than in a crisis. If a leader has made an error in the form of a miscommunication or a poor decision, s/he needs to acknowledge it, articulate what is being done to fix it — and move past it. To lead more effectively and build loyalty, leaders need to focus on the facts, maintain transparency, stay true to their values and beliefs, and keep their promises.

5. Build Trust With Empathy — Turbulent times require leaders to respond under extreme time pressure. The most powerful and direct way for leaders to build trust is to show up in a highly visible manner and take charge — “walk the talk.” This demonstrates accountability and sends the message that nothing is more important than resolving this particular crisis. To successfully



navigate a crisis, leaders must continue to build trust both internally (within their organization) and externally (with the clients and communities they serve).

Economic and business fluidity generates significant emotional stress on everyone. The goal of empathy is not to solve problems or even offer comfort. What employees want from their leaders is to be heard and understood without being judged. By reaching out to their employees with warmth and authenticity, you can reinforce that you genuinely care for them not only as an employee, but more importantly as a human being — with an appreciation for their hardships, and a genuine concern for their health and well-being.

By practicing empathy, leaders can gain insights into an employee's perspective, unveil the root cause of anxiety among employees, increase trust, and develop meaningful collaboration — which can spark innovation that increases employee engagement and company productivity. The more attention you put toward your employees' well-being, the greater the respect and trust they will have for you as a leader. Simply put, empathy affects a leader's ability to adapt, build trust, and achieve results.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

One of my favorite quotes is from Walt Disney: “If you can dream it, you can achieve it.” It reminds me to think big, and not get bogged down by little things. I incorporate this in my work by being more visionary.

How can our readers further follow your work?

You can learn more about me and what my firm does on my [website](#) or [LinkedIn](#). You can also read my articles and white papers by visiting this [resource](#) page.



About Mythos Group

Mythos Group is a management consulting firm. We partner with senior executives to solve complex issues across all industries and business functions.

From Fortune 500 companies to start-ups we collaborate with clients in formulating innovative strategies to design and implement impactful transformative business solutions.

Our home page is www.mythosgroupinc.com.

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