# When We Don't Know What To Do, We Do Nothing: 5 Ways to Move from Panic to Purpose

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When we don’t know what to do, we do nothing. Which is doing something.

We wait and see. We resist and deny.

We minimize both the situation we are facing and our role in stepping up to the leadership required in moments like these: moments of fear and uncertainty, moments of ambiguity and disequilibrium.

While it’s common to hear complaints about “what they are doing,” this speaks loudly to our overreliance on authority.  We want “them” to fix it, to hurry up, to calm us, to get it right the first time, to know.  And while those longings are to be expected, together we are in the unprecedented terrain of the largest ever global experiment in public health. We are in for a bumpy ride.

With fears and uncertainty rising, what emerges is the perfect storm for inaction just when we all need to keep calm and stay connected to what matters: each other, the communities we love and have worked hard to build, and businesses that survive and thrive and model the gritty work of leadership.

Who better than all of us in the community of practice that is LinkedIn to take up this work? We who are building businesses that meet myriad needs in the world, sustaining organizations at the heart of communities large and small, helping consumers find their way in the face of bewildering frontiers.

We are having to rethink many of our innate rituals: shaking hands when we meet, gathering for sports events and concerts, breaking bread together, relying on all the structures that contain daily life: schools and office space, trains and planes, coffee shops and well-stocked shelves. But this moment requires rapid adaptation.

**We do not resist change. We resist loss.**

And together we are facing unprecedented loss right now.

As creatures of habit, we’ve built things as they are because they work for us. We have our sense of world order and as that order gets disrupted, we may attempt to recreate that order rather than hit pause, slow down and think strategically.

If you find yourself doing nothing or madly scurrying to maintain the status quo, here are 5 acts of leadership available to each and every one of us right now:

1)   **Don’t wait on others to convene key conversations or to deliver “the plan.”** Instead, be a key voice in driving the difficult conversations at the heart of making sound decisions. This includes conversations with your own family and friends.  Those most at risk—the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions—are wrestling with fear right now.  Helping them to change their behaviors and habits now—before they may be ready—is key.  As I’ve spoken with older folks, I’ve heard a refrain: “When there are cases here, then I will stay home.” When is now**.** We are working to preserve the lives of our parents and grandparents, the lives of those with powerful institutional knowledge, those who have charted the course so far.  This is collective work, and that requires collective engagement.

2)   **Connect to purpose**.  Universities are moving classes online, flights are cancelled, major convenings are being postponed.  These are all attempts to control this pandemic and are in service to purpose: our collective health and well-being. Ask yourself: what purpose do I need to connect to at this moment? Who are our customers and what do they need? How can we help them get ahead of their own fears and disorientation? How can we renegotiate some of their expectations—not out of panic but out of purpose?

3)   **Hold steady and take the long view.**  All of us are in a fraught moment and actors in a massive global experiment.  There is no manual. We will make mistakes and need to make many mid-course corrections. We will have to learn as we go. Having compassion for the pressures on authority figures and on one another is vital.

4)   **Look out for others. Leadership is we work, not me work.**  Those living paycheck to paycheck—the majority of the global population and the heartbeat of organizational life and infrastructure—will need support.  Keeping an eye on the most fragile among us as we build policies and practices is essential. Donating to local food banks and organizations with deep knowledge of how to feed the many is another way to help. So is avoiding the impulse to gather more than your fair share.  We have enough toilet paper when everyone buys enough for themselves and leaves enough for others. Hoarding creates shortages.  The key: living in a place not of scarcity but of abundance.

5)   **Go outside.** Beyond the ways we often gather and unwind—through restaurants and gyms, worship services and concerts—are trees and trails, the blue sky and the stars.  In the weeks ahead, we will have time to pause, reflect, and connect to the wider world around us. A deep breath of fresh air may be just what we all need right about now.

**There’s a world of possibility between panic and denial**.

**Let’s live in that world**.