WHENEVER YOU SEE A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS, SOMEONE ONCE MADE A COURAGEOUS DECISION.

PETER F. DRUCKER
Well friends, the team at Southwest Michigan First has been talking about leading during disruption for the last couple of years in our one-on-one meetings with you and cohort programs. Yet we have to admit, this level of disruption wasn’t what anyone expected. In a shockingly short time frame, it seems like almost everything changed. But there is one thing that didn’t change, and that is the need for dynamic, confident, empowered, creative and courageous leaders in our business and communities. As leaders, we are faced with preserving as many companies, local organizations and jobs as possible, all while wearing multiple hats and navigating impossible dilemmas.

There is a great quote by Patrick Lencioni that really resonates right now: “No organization is going to emerge from this crisis unchanged—I don’t mean financially. During a time like this, Southwest Michigan will either get better as a result of what we choose to do as teams and leaders, or we’ll be diminished for what we fail to do. Will we get better or worse?” We call this leading at an inflexion point.

With so much information flying around and changing daily, it is easy to get overwhelmed and go into survival mode. We wish so deeply that we could create a guidebook that would solve all the problems and answer all the questions. Believe us, we tried really hard to do just that. The truth is, like many of you, we are doing our best to navigate territory that feels unfamiliar and foreign for us all. Finding our way to the future will not be a linear, step-by-step process that we can map out perfectly. Unfortunately, wish as we might, it simply does not work that way. We will be surprised. We will make mistakes. We will have to side-step, pivot and change direction many times. Our hope throughout it all is that we can be your travel companions along the way. We crafted this guidebook with you and Southwest Michigan in mind. It’s meant to serve as an encouraging word, a thought partner and a call to action. Use the pieces that are most helpful to you, your team and our region.

We care about you, and we are rooting for you!

Ron Kitchens
chief executive officer & senior partner
Dashboard

As a leader of others, it can feel like there are too many plates to keep spinning and too many priorities competing for your brain power to stay on top of it all. You have to think strategically and practice people acumen all while implementing innovation for a future still unknown. This guide is meant to help you stay calm, organized and focused through it all. Here is what you will find inside:

**YOUR SERVICES. It’s Time to Reimagine and Realign.**
Discover essential steps and stakeholder engagement strategies that lead to relevant service development and delivery in response to your community’s top priorities. p. 6

**YOUR TEAM. It’s Time to Re-Onboard.**
Consider how to move past challenges as you “get the band back together again,” from safe working spaces to updated HR policies to team workplans that are aligned and aimed at success. p. 13

**YOUR BOTTOM LINE. It’s Time to Rebuild.**
Define what makes cents (pun, intended!) for your organizational sustainability, mapping out key questions for budget forecasting, scenario planning and contributor engagement. p. 19

**YOUR PEOPLE. It’s Time to Revitalize.**
Keep your people front and center with a special focus on employee well-being, empathic leadership and teams that trust. p. 10

**YOUR BRAND. It’s Time to Refresh.**
Wrap your mind around your messaging, including how to maximize your marketing and communications plans plus show up in new ways on social media. p. 16

**YOUR LEADERSHIP. It’s Time to Reinvest.**
Hear and embrace this call back to the core principle that you cannot pour from an empty cup, with suggestions on cultivating the mindset and behaviors of a rockstar leader. p. 22
Get closer than ever to your customers. So close, in fact, that you tell them what they need well before they realize it themselves.

STEVE JOBS
Information is everywhere, but right now actionable insight can be surprisingly hard to come by. What does the present moment mean for your community? Your service offerings? Your business model? It’s time to gather insights you can act on directly from the men and women you have the privilege to serve. Organize a listening tour (virtual, of course!) to learn what your stakeholders are experiencing and to deepen your understanding of their needs, wants and desires for your work. Be the one who listens best—they’ll remember once we’re on the other side and you’ll earn your stripes as an essential community partner.
Your Services | Key Strategies + Questions

Keep Your Ear to the Ground.

Check in with your key stakeholders (clients, target audience, partners, board members, etc.) and catalogue actionable insights.

• What are their perceptions of your organization right now? What are they saying directly? What are you sensing?

• How has this period affected their engagement with your organization?

• In what ways have their needs and wants changed? What immediate needs must be addressed in the near-term? How will their longer-term concerns reshape your work?

Laugh Together, Cry Together.

Delve into financial concerns, then get to the story behind the story. Evaluate stakeholder sentiment to meet your stakeholders where they truly are.

• How is morale amongst your stakeholders? What are they saying directly? What are you sensing?

• In what ways will stakeholders be able to build momentum in the community? Where may they need support?

• What can you do to strengthen connections with and between stakeholders?

Mind the Gap(s)... and Fill Them.

Assess the landscape of offerings available to various stakeholder groups in your community. Look for gaps in service.

• What are others in the community—including any competitors—doing well?

• What opportunities do you see to fill a gap or out-execute a peer organization?

• Where can you take inspiration from peers and players in other markets?
Your Services | Key Strategies + Questions

If Not Us, Then Who?

Rally your team around this central question. Then put your design hat on and start to reimagine your services.

- Which services will you provide directly? What groups will you convene to help others collaborate? What projects will you leave for others to tackle?

- How will you realign your teams to deliver new services with the highest quality of execution and level of stakeholder engagement?

Get Your Team In Gear.

Bring your team along on the journey. Create urgency and clarity in equal measure. Remind yourself that trust is king; foster it at every turn.

- What will you do to provide your team with opportunities to voice questions or concerns? Where will you encourage dialogue and where will you insist on immediate steps in the new direction?

- What is your planned approach for addressing confusion and emotion as they sneak into the mix? (Pro tip: Expect both and address them with grace.)

If Trust Is King, Then Communication Is The Crown.

Reduce confusion and cast vision through clear, direct and honest communication with all of your stakeholders, both internal and external.

- What changes to company priorities, strategies, customer needs and staffing have occurred?

- How will you share information? How much information will you share? When and how frequently? With whom?

- Who is responsible for executing your communication plan so no one is caught off guard by changes?
“At the end of the day people won’t remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel.”

MAYA ANGELOU
IT’S TIME TO REVITALIZE.

Change of the kind we are living through can energize, deplete, challenge, inspire and everything in between. Take time to check in with your people. How are they weathering the storm? Ask questions to demonstrate you care, hear their stories and listen with both your head and your heart. And here is the most important part: actually respond to their needs. We cannot emphasize this part enough, so we’ll say it again for the people in the back. Actually. Respond. To. Their. Needs. How you treat your people today is one of the most critical investments you can make in your future.
**TAKE THE PULSE AND SCAN YOUR “PEOPLE LANDSCAPE.”**

Never underestimate the importance and power of empathic leadership. Stay tuned in to the human element at play.

- How are your people doing? …but how are they really doing? How do you know?
- Where do you see signs of excitement or energy? Where is there evidence of struggle that could be rooted in personal loss, grief, trauma or other dynamics inherent to the human component of crisis?
- Which trusted team members can help to keep the pulse on staff well-being? How will you respond to what you are hearing?

**PUT EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING FRONT AND CENTER…**

Your people are your greatest asset. As you make quick decisions for the sake of your strategic plan, consider ways that you can also support your staff along the way.

- What behavioral expectations have you set for your team during this time? How can you cast a vision that is both supportive and also inspires people to show up as the best versions of themselves?
- What services can you offer your team to support their physical, mental and emotional well-being?
- In what ways are you ensuring that job transitions and layoffs are handled with care and humanity?

**…AND TRUST-BUILDING AT THE TOP OF YOUR PRIORITY LIST.**

Team trust equals more engagement, creativity and productivity. Your investment in this area is not extra; it is essential.

- In what ways has the crisis brought your employees together? In what ways have team members been driven apart?
- What decisions or processes during the crisis have strengthened team trust? What may have had a negative impact on team trust?
- What tools can you use to bring clarity and facilitate team-building, trust-building and psychological safety moving forward?
Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress and working together is success.

HENRY FORD
Weeks away from the office, sheltering-in-place and Zooming through the day make the moment of reentry a critical one—and an important time to set the tone you want to see for the rest of the year. Together with your leadership team, it’s time to lead a full-organizational re-onboarding. See the opportunity for what it is: a time to reestablish standards of excellence while celebrating commitment and positive contributions to the team. Take the guesswork out of the physical requirements of job safety and invest energy in organizational culture.
PUBLISH YOUR COMEBACK PLAN.

With feedback from your employees, create a clear, concise plan for returning to the office. Modify and adjust as additional guidelines are released.

- What will you do to ensure office sanitization and to uphold social distancing practices? How will you handle meetings when you return to the office?
- What Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) will be required of your employees and clients and when?
- How will you communicate your comeback plan and the reasoning behind it with your teams? How will you respond to concerns?

BRING YOUR HR POLICY INTO THE NEW WORLD ORDER.

Review your current HR practices and revise or incorporate policies needed to support new ways of doing business.

- How are you communicating your work-from-home plans or policies with your teams? What plans are you making to adapt to potential future shelter-in-place directives?
- Whose input do you need in order to establish clear expectations and plans for team members with childcare issues or health conditions that may affect their ability to return to the office?
- How can you best mitigate cyber risk and data privacy breaches when working remotely?

DEFINE SUCCESS AND “WINS” FOR YOUR TEAMS.

Build out 30-, 60- and 90-day work plans with clear performance goals, deliverables and deadlines.

- What are the top organizational priorities? How will you measure, monitor and formally review progress and performance so you can stay accountable and pivot quickly when needed?
- What has changed in your culture? What tools or teams can you put in place to ensure cultural cohesion going forward?
- What learning, training or reskilling will be necessary for your team to be successful, especially if their priorities or roles have changed?
“Life is like riding a bicycle, to keep your balance, you must keep moving.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN
Old ways of doing business feel just that: old, outdated and out of step with new realities. Marketing, messaging and brand positioning are no exception. It’s time to do a deep dive on your marketing and communications efforts to ensure you stay relevant this season and beyond. As you decide on your approach, refresh your look and feel to meet the moment—and don’t forget to update your metrics along the way. In these times of uncertainty, people need outcomes to validate their work. And remember, if you don’t tell your story, someone else will.
EMBRACE A BEGINNER’S MINDSET.

Revisit your brand strategy and marketing. Evaluate past approaches in light of changes in your community and your organization’s work.

- What quick updates you can execute this week? Which projects require greater organizational bandwidth or planning time? Make a list and check it twice.

- Which internal stakeholders outside of your marketing/communications team need to weigh in on messaging and brand positioning?

LASER IN ON OUTCOMES.

Establish key messaging that clarifies your purpose and anchors your brand around meaningful outcomes.

- What messaging from “before” still resonates? What needs to change?

- What outcomes are you most committed to driving? How can you continue to reinforce these desired outcomes in your messaging?

- What adjustments do you need to make to your organizational goals and metrics so they align with your new organizational priorities, budget and action plan?

UP YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA GAME.

Keep standards high while embracing scrappy sophistication and a fail-fast experimentation model. Invest in your team’s capacity to utilize new media and to bring story to life digitally via video, podcasts or visual storytelling.

- Whose social media presence do you admire? What can you do to emulate the best of their work? How do you want to make your mark?

- What platforms are you committed to and where might you want to drive new engagement online? What resources are available to you to get up to speed quickly?
Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now.

ALAN LAKEIN
Cash is king. And while money may not buy you happiness, it does give you the means to keep your mission in motion. When it comes to your finances, ignorance is the enemy. So get your head on straight, slide up to your budget and get cozy with the idea that the numbers are there to guide you, whatever they may reveal. Remember, you’re making moves for the long haul. Always let your conscience—and organizational sustainability—be your guide.
HOW MANY PENNIES SHOULD YOU PINCH?

Do a good ol’ budget forecast based on the current scenario. Then run different scenarios—a 15%, 30% or 50% reduction in revenue. Plan for how you will cut costs to match each scenario.

• Where will revenues decline? Who is going to slow pay you?
• What is your confidence level in each budget area? What is at risk?
• What assumptions are driving your modeling? Who do you need to engage to broaden your perspective?
• Where could your team save money? Ask each person for 3-5 places to save.

KEEP YOUR PEOPLE CLOSE.

Develop a plan to reach out to your major contributors/clients. This is a time to be proactive and initiate conversation. Keep the conversation pointed towards the future and focused on financial health.

• What changes to company priorities, strategies and staffing have occurred because of the crisis?
• Who needs to be made aware? How will you share the news and address questions?
• How has this period affected your contributor/client engagement and relationships with your organization?

TO 2021, AND BEYOND.

Forecasting cannot stop at the immediate fiscal year. Add some more columns in Excel and crystal ball your way to models for 2021 and beyond.

• What will the impact be in the next 12-18 months? What assumptions are built into your projections?
• What are your long-term solutions for fundraising, generating revenue or expense slashing based on your assumptions?
• Are there new programs, products or services that you can offer in the next 12-18 months that increase your bottom line?
In the end, it is important to remember that we cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are.

MAX DE PREE
It would be tempting to skim this section and move on to other things you think matter more. But wait—this part is essential. Let’s get intentional about your well-being. Yes, we are giving you permission to pause and take care of yourself. Because self-care isn’t selfish. It is a necessary practice that builds your bandwidth and your ability to show up in powerful ways. Your leadership matters today more than ever. Effective leadership of others begins with exemplary leadership of self. Reinvest in your leadership so you can maintain your stamina and continue to exercise decisive, compassionate leadership over the long haul.
YOUR LEADERSHIP | KEY STRATEGIES + QUESTIONS

BE WELL TO LEAD WELL.

Just like a car can’t run without gas, your leadership won’t roll at full speed without the appropriate fuel. Double down on your commitments to physical and mental well-being to keep your motor running.

• What acts of recovery or rejuvenation will you commit to doing daily/weekly to sustain your energy?
• When will you sleep, eat, exercise and rest?
• How are you really doing? What trusted person can you have honest, confidential and growth-oriented conversations with about your business and your own state of mind?

PRESENCE IS EVERYTHING.

Get intentional about how you are showing up. The way you conduct yourself during this time will set both the tone and the pace. Choose wisely. Your team will follow suit.

• What mindsets will you choose to shape your leadership during this time? Examples include “deliberate calm” or “bounded optimism.”
• Check yourself: are you looking ahead or reacting to yesterday’s problems?
• What are you leaving in your wake? Take note of the impact you are having on others and recalibrate with input from trusted partners.

TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK.

No one leads alone. Lean on your natural talents and also be critically aware of where you need support. Surround yourself with strategic partners who make you stronger.

• In what ways do you currently lead effectively through crisis? In what areas could you strengthen your skillset around change management and change leadership?
• Who are the trusted advisors you can call on to give you sound advice, share best practices, constructively challenge your assumptions and give you a burst of encouragement when needed?
IT’S TIME FOR RENAISSANCE.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

This moment has tested our teams and our leadership like no other moment in our lives. We are challenged to do more with less, to innovate daily, to think outside of every box—even the ones we’ve built—and to project calm and confidence all the while. It can be lonely at the top, which is why Southwest Michigan First is committed to being here with you every step of the way. We believe in you, we are here for you and we know that if we continue to work together and share our learning as a community that we will emerge from this stronger than ever before.

We encourage you to stay connected. Reach out before you think you need to—we need you to be awesome and we are here to help. Even in the midst of this wild moment, we’re always good for a laugh, too. Take us up on it. We look forward to working with you as we innovate our way out of this crisis together and begin the next great chapter of life.
ABOUT SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST

THE GREATEST FORCE FOR CHANGE IS A JOB.

At Southwest Michigan First, we believe the greatest force for change is a job. While economic situations and their required strategies may change with the times, our focus remains dedicated to this very mission. And the numbers confirm our efforts: Since 1999, we have worked with over 375 companies to create almost 49,000 jobs throughout the seven-county region of Southwest Michigan. Our unique approach to economic development is internationally recognized for its innovation and our team’s insight is sought after from like-minded groups around the globe.

You know us as a privately-funded and publicly-focused economic development catalyst committed to business investment and community growth, alignment of government and education, acceleration of our vibrant urban core, leadership development and novel communication strategies. But, you also know us as more than that—friends. Yes, our agency recognizes that for our region’s existing companies and community to succeed, we must bring together leaders like you and cultivate strong relationships among business, industry, government, education, nonprofit and faith-based organizations. How can we strengthen this bond with you? Look on the following pages for our service offerings and how they may tie to your needs.

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HOW SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST CAN HELP

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST CAN HELP YOU MAKE THE MOST OUT OF YOUR INVESTMENT.
Are you ready to grow your business? Do you want to boost your competitiveness? Then let’s do it together in Southwest Michigan! Our offerings in this service area are designed to put your and your team first.

CONSULTING | WE CAN PROBLEM SOLVE YOUR CHALLENGES
We are living in challenging times, which means that great leaders are needed like never before. Are you prepared as a leader? Is your team united, strong and high-functioning? Can you handle any challenges that may come your way? Our team can help you gain tools to better understand where you and your organization are on the change journey and strategies to guide your team through to the other side of the fog.

ATTRACTION | IT’S HOW WE MARKET OUR COMMUNITY
When looking for that next geographical location for your company, our hope is that you pick a location that feels like home and where someone takes the time to get to know you. We believe we have that spot waiting for you right here! Our team stands ready to unveil the all the benefits of our place, community partners, incentives, workforce, suppliers, infrastructure, and more.

SITE SELECTION | LET US FIND YOUR NEXT LOCATION
Whether you need a site on which to build a new facility, an existing structure to tailor to your needs or a short-term solution, we can help you analyze all of your choices and maximize your investment. Get ready to find your new digs.

RETENTION | WE WANT YOU TO GROW HERE
If you’re already doing business from a Southwest Michigan location, then you know that you are in one of best communities on the planet. We know that your day is fully committed to “your business,” so take advantage of “our business.” Lean on us to build new relationships with potential suppliers, partners and collaborators and to get you access to the people and companies that can strengthen your business.
HOW SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST CAN HELP

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST INVITES YOU TO BUILD OUR COMMUNITY WITH US.
Everyone wants to live in a community like ours. So, let’s build it even better together! Community-driven, we accelerate company growth, government and educational alignment, and our vibrant core communities to keep our region globally competitive and in first place.

SMALL BUSINESS | SMALL BUSINESS IS THE HEART OF OUR ECONOMY
Southwest Michigan First is here to help your small business with our personalized assistance. Explore grants, dive into entrepreneurial resources, maneuver obstacles to your business and understand relief programs available to Michigan businesses as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak with us by your side.

ADVOCACY WITH ELECTED & APPOINTED OFFICIALS | CAUSE & EFFECT MATTERS
We aim to promote positive economic growth in our communities by working closely with local, state and national government leaders. Through our efforts and relationship-building, we aim to help elected and appointed leaders understand how policy decisions will affect our economy’s ability to grow.

TALENT | ACCELERATE YOUR WORKFORCE
Southwest Michigan is the place where both careers and lifestyles collide to offer people their best futures. Known far and wide for an intense work ethic and Midwestern values, our workforce doesn’t happen by accident. To ensure you have the skills that you need now, our team bridges the gap between business and those who are developing your next team members—K-12 school systems, career and technical education, higher education and workforce development agencies.

CATALYST UNIVERSITIY | UNSTOPPABLE LEADERSHIP CAN’T BE BEAT
As the largest leadership conference in the state of Michigan, Catalyst University hosts world-renowned faculty and gathers leaders of all kinds to celebrate great leadership, take positive forward-moving action, build teams, share ideas and learn lessons that will carry into life—long after the experience is over.
HIGH SCHOOL CATALYST | PREPARING TOMORROW’S LEADERS TODAY
High School Catalyst is a premier leadership conference that aims to equip high school students with tools to navigate the next phase of life, connect them to their peers and community and inspire them to live out their unique leadership story.

LEADERSHIP KALAMAZOO | CREATING COMMUNITY
For the past 25 years, Leadership Kalamazoo has been the community leadership development resource for the Kalamazoo Region, providing a unique opportunity for a diverse group of current and emerging community leaders to learn and work together in ever-changing environments and to succeed in the community that sits at the core of our diverse region.

FIRST 50 | MAKE YOUR PERFECT MATCH COUNT
First 50 was intentionally designed for busy professionals and features accelerated learning sessions and flexible scheduling with mentors. The program’s mentorship approach allows emerging leaders to minimize the time spent out of the workplace while simultaneously maximizing their personal leadership development.

CONSULTING | TIP INFLEXION POINTS YOUR WAY
Let our Certified Strengths coaches, leadership trainers and expert facilitators create an atmosphere where you and your team can grow personally. Tailored sessions can help you discover your personal responses and reactions to stress, setbacks, change and more to maximize your leadership potential and create your competitive advantage.
HOW SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST CAN HELP

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST WANTS YOU TO GET INVOLVED WITH US.

We are stronger together. But you already knew that. Here are ways that you can jump on board to partner with us and others just like you who love Southwest Michigan.

COUNCIL OF 100 | IT’S HOW WE ROLL
Everything we do at Southwest Michigan First is centered around creating jobs and—by extension—a thriving community in which citizens have the opportunity to live vibrantly and companies are empowered to succeed and grow. Through their contribution and partnership, members of our Council of 100 are our greatest partners in achieving this mission. Your membership get you up close and personal access to leaders who want the best for our community.

CHAMBER | THE TIES THAT BIND
The Southwest Michigan First Chamber exists to connect businesses of all sizes—small, medium and large—in our region. By creating opportunities for businesses to come together, our local communities and economy will grow stronger through the heightened creation of jobs and innovation.

EVENTS | GET READY TO FILL YOUR CALENDAR
Nothing beats building a community by hanging out together. Our team always has an exciting line-up of educational and advocacy events up our sleeve designed to accelerate leaders and organizations in Southwest Michigan. We can do it live—and we can do it virtual—so, get ready to shake and mix things up on relevant, timely and creative topics.

FIRST & 42 | READ IT AND SMILE
Delivered to subscriber’s inboxes on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, FIRST & 42: The Kalamazoo Region’s Digital Daily offers fun, free and real (definitely not fake) news put together by the team at Southwest Michigan First. Subscribe and advertise at firstand42.media.
Keeping you informed

Real-time information

We know that connection is vital during this time. Connect with us personally or online through social media to stay up to date on the latest and greatest. Get information you can trust and encouragement from a stellar network of economic developers from across the country.

Connect with us

Web | southwestmichiganfirst.com
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LinkedIn | Southwest Michigan First
Instagram | @swmfirst
Facebook | @southwestmichiganfirst