

The

ROCKSPIRIAN

April 2020

Volume 4, Number 40

REFINING ROCKSPIRE

As the Covid-19 pandemic seems to be dominating every aspect of our lives, is this a good time to be refining the direction we are pursuing at *Rockspire*? Many of the things we are putting in place or have planned, while not designed for a pandemic, do consider many “what-if” questions.

For instance, with our “*living laboratory*” concept, we’ve planned for:

1. Sourcing food, water, shelter, health, and community, *locally*.
2. Social networking and support that revolves around nearby, well-known, family, friends and neighbors.
3. Not having to crowd people into tight spaces or close interactions, as in the city.
4. Balancing home sites and roads that connect easily to support systems and population centers if needed, and at the same time maintaining a healthy distance.
5. Promoting clean environments and a direct connection with nature.
6. Limiting dependencies on delivered goods and services to survive.
7. Focusing health care on preventive measures, embracing tele-friendly, professionally trained individuals as part of the community network.
8. Creating helipad-ready rapid response to an acute medical condition.
9. Sheltering options designed for the needs and abilities of the individual and the community.
10. Generating renewable energy sources coupled with eco-friendly appliances and mechanical systems.

What are some things we are learning now that we should be considering going forward?

1. Creating a reliable communication network is critical.
2. Creating a stable environment can be a refuge from unplanned outcomes.
3. Boundaries and distancing give only short-term protection in our mobile, global society.
4. We’re all in this together. Our actions at Rockspire should not create problems or ignore the plight of others. Our actions should endeavor to improve conditions for all.

Although Rockspire is not able to prevent future crises, we feel it is our responsibility to do what we can. The following op-ed piece in *The Wall Street Journal* talks about leadership during these trying times. We want to do our part to learn from current events to refine and improve Rockspire. We look forward to hearing your thoughts.



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The Wall Street Journal op-ed, April 6, 2020:

Covid-19 was a Leadership Test. It Came Back Negative. by Sam Walker.
(author, *The Captain Class: The Hidden Force That Creates the World's Greatest Teams* (2018))

One lesson from the coronavirus is that we need leaders who prevent crises more than we need managers who scramble to handle them.

On some glorious day in the future, when the Covid-19 pandemic has been controlled and contained, it will be time to hand out trophies.

The recipients may include scores of medical professionals, business executives, school administrators, shopkeepers and yoga instructors all over the world who acted decisively to prevent the virus from spreading; often at considerable personal cost and well before the people they protected thought it was necessary.

I look forward to that. Dark stories need heroes, too. But if the worst disease outbreak in modern history only teaches us one lesson, let it be this: The global response to this pandemic will never be anything more than a case study in crisis management. It has already failed the fundamental tests of leadership.

Leadership is what prevents a pandemic.

Managers, as a species, embrace a lower degree of difficulty. They operate best in situations where the threats are specific, the goal is clear, and the stakes are plainly obvious. In a crisis like this one, managers thrive by making smart, incremental decisions under pressure.

Great leaders are capable managers, too—the difference is how they approach the tranquil periods. No matter what their role, or how many direct reports they have, or how well things seem to be going, they continue to work relentlessly and resist complacency. They peer around corners to anticipate the next unprecedented challenge, good or bad, and aren't afraid to push their teams to prepare for these extreme scenarios.

If extraordinary leaders had carried the day, this pandemic wouldn't produce any heroes. It simply never would have happened.

Last year, before this virus began to spread, I learned about a parable that's well-known in public-health circles. It goes something like this:

Two friends are sitting by a river when they spot a child drowning in the water. Both friends immediately dive in and pull the child to safety. But as soon as they do, another struggling child drifts into view. Then another. Then another. After completing several rescues, one of them climbs out of the water.

"Where are you going?" the other friend asks.

"I'm going upstream to tackle the guy who's throwing all these kids in the water."

I first saw this parable in an advance copy of Dan Heath's recently published book, "[Upstream: The Quest to Solve Problems Before They Happen.](#)" (Full disclosure: my wife is Mr. Heath's agent.) One of the book's recurring themes is that most leaders, when preparing for disasters, focus their efforts on creating systems to manage the fallout. In other words, they attack the symptoms rather than the problem itself. ...

"We usually define heroes as people who save the day," Mr. Heath told me. "We talk about firefighters and first responders. But what about all the people who keep the day from needing to be saved? Their work is often invisible, and they don't get the glory." ...

If nothing else, I hope this pandemic will help organizations appreciate the difference between leaders and managers and start learning how to identify them.

There are two occasions when most organizations assess their bosses: times of success and times of crisis. But these are exactly the wrong moments to do so. Nobody is solely responsible for these extreme peaks and valleys—there's nearly always an element of randomness. What's really important is what the leader does during the quiet moments in between. Leaders reveal themselves through a series of small, calculated and precautionary moves. If you're not looking for those tells, you're certain to miss them.

I understand why managers make comfortable hires. They have saved the day before and people will trust them to do it again. Great leaders, by contrast, can come across as killjoys, nags or neurotics. Frankly, their tenures might seem dull. These days, dull sounds pretty good to me.