



## Leading Through Disruption

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# Crises Are Difficult, But They Open Up Opportunities To Do Something New



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*Silvia Carpitella, CFO and Interim CEO of Citibank Europe plc, shared her key leadership lessons with me and my colleague Adam Bryant, managing director of The ExCo Group, in our latest "Leading Through Disruption" interview. Subscribe [here](#) to receive future interviews.*

**Lauterbach:** Leadership has become much harder these last few years. What was it about your background that prepared you to lead in this environment of crises and disruption?

**Carpitella:** I grew up in a family where we were taught to never stop being curious, no matter the age, no matter the

situation. That was my parent's approach. I was interested in everything. Whenever there was something new, I wanted to know more.

So whenever a crisis hits, I approach it from the perspective of saying, "We have an evolving situation here—potentially one where we don't have all the facts yet. Let's see how we can break it down into smaller components, so that we can grapple with and understand it, and together find a way out of this situation."

Crises are difficult, but they also open up opportunities to do something new. So I've always tried to see the silver lining that may come from a crisis. Taking people out of their comfort zone actually opens up new opportunities.

**Bryant: Do you hire differently now compared to your approach before the pandemic?**

Carpitella: Yes. We are in an environment that is still changing significantly. There are so many moving parts and questions around the future of various markets and supply chains. What will be the impact long-term of artificial intelligence? There are so many unknowns, which definitely leads to me to look for people who are open and curious.

They also have to be flexible, because in this environment you cannot always be looking for pre-existing rules and approaches because sometimes you have to invent them. So flexibility and adaptability are core elements that I'm looking for in candidates today.

**Lauterbach: What was a key early leadership lesson for you?**

Carpitella: I learned the importance of bringing people together to work toward a shared objective and goal. In one of my first managerial roles, I didn't appreciate this fully and I could see that my team was struggling. They were not contributing in the way that I expected.

So I learned to build more clarity early on around what we are trying to solve for and why. Whenever people understand the reasons certain steps need to be taken, then their perspective changes and they become more involved. It's about making sure everyone is on the same page.

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I'm a strong believer in inclusiveness in management, and making sure that people bring different perspectives to the table, because that helps define the priorities in a much more constructive way. Once I developed that different approach to managing and leading, I could see the difference in the effectiveness of teams. It's about building trust, which takes time, but it's fundamental.

Another lesson learned, which is extremely important, is to always be transparent with people. I encourage my team to ask questions, and I will tell them when I don't know the answer. I'm not going to invent an answer or pretend that I know. Transparency helps establish a level playing field with the team and makes working together even more powerful.

**Bryant: When you move into a new role to work with a new team, I'm sure you share some things about how you like to lead and manage. What do you tell them?**

Carpitella: I'm very committed to my work, so I need people to understand that they don't have to necessarily replicate what I do. So I set some guidelines in terms of my expectations and their expectations, as well. One thing that I particularly stress is that whenever I'm taking over a new role, I want the team to know that I'm not introducing my new strategy or approach because the past approach was wrong. It's simply that the world evolves.

So whatever my predecessor might have been doing even one year ago doesn't matter anymore. I'm sure it made perfect sense at the time. But it needs to change and evolve because everything evolves. I really want the team to feel comfortable that my actions are not to be interpreted as critique of what happened in the past. I have found that approach helps people be more relaxed and open to new ways of doing things.

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