



C E R I U S P R E S E N T S

Key Strategies to Succeed in Q2 2021

Executive Leaders Weigh In
Strategic Focus: Executive Leadership, Nonprofit,
Human Capital and Technology

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Heading into Q2: *Recovery* *Continues*



One year after the pandemic first began, businesses everywhere are still working to recover from the havoc and economic upheaval. But the specific solutions, strategies and timelines are all as individual as the companies themselves. There's no one-size-fits-all approach—the future is still unclear.

That's where Cerius can help. Every quarter, we'll present insights from top executives from different backgrounds and functions. For Q2, we gathered insights from four business leaders—experts in executive leadership, nonprofit organizations, human capital and technology—to help you prepare for the next quarter.



Kristen McAlister
President, Cerius Executives



Pamela Wasley
CEO, Cerius Executives

Four Leaders, Four Insightful Perspectives

Focus: Executive Leadership



Matthew
Wetty

As businesses advance into Q2 and second half of 2021, what do you see as the biggest challenges facing business leaders? How are things evolving?

As we move into recovery from the global pandemic, one of the biggest challenges facing business is shifting from a defensive to offensive posture. Most businesses suffered negative financial consequences during the past year and had to rapidly shift their strategy into survival mode. During this period, many prioritized preservation of capital, cost cutting and maximizing credit as the highest priority. As the world starts to return to a more normal environment, a highly focused strategy will be required to break out of the pandemic mindset. Many employees will be understandably hesitant to move back to a more normal operating environment. For those businesses that survived financially, an opportunity now exists to take competitive advantage and grow revenue and market share within their space. A strategy to make this

transition will be critical. Although the path forward may not be a straight line back to pre-pandemic norms, a well thought-out plan executed by key business leaders will make all the difference.

What are a few best practices to help leaders overcome the current challenges? What do you see working well?

Some of the best practices include: (a) detailed operating plans with milestones; (b) clear development strategies (e.g., M&A); and (c) realistic goals in terms of revenue and profit growth. Companies that are aligned on these types of detailed plans will be able to adjust key decisions such as hiring/re-hiring, potential acquisitions, or key internal investments as they arise. Carefully monitoring gross profit margins will also be critical to ensure products and services are optimized from a pricing perspective. There will likely be growing inflationary pressure as the recovery unfolds and keeping an offensive posture on pricing will be critical to maximize margins. Customer outreach and clear sales objectives will also help drive growth.

Are there any strategies you view to be ineffective?

High-level strategies must be in sync with realistic operating plans. Leaders that set high-level goals but don't have either the cash from operations or capital to fund growth will not be able to realize the end goal. It's critical that key senior and middle management are on board with the plan. Compensation structures should also be aligned with clear upside potential to drive everyone in the same direction.

(Cont.)

What skillsets do leaders need to navigate through these challenges?

Patience and willingness to accept operating changes will be critical. Many businesses had to make significant operating adjustments during the pandemic to survive. Many were forced to find new ways to operate (remote working for example). Leaders should listen to their teams to determine which changes should continue

post pandemic. Leaders should also be mindful of work-life balance within organizations after extended periods of leaning on teams to “get through.” After being locked down, employees will understandably want to take time away. Recognition by leaders of the need to return to a normalized work-life balance post-pandemic will help drive a positive culture and help keep teams motivated for the long haul.

ABOUT MATT

Matt is a financial executive with over 25 years of progressive experience including the CFO of multiple middle market businesses. He has extensive experience working with private equity sponsors and portfolio senior management including post acquisition integration. He has a BSBA in accounting from Bucknell University and spent the early part of his career within the NY audit practice for PwC.

 [Find Matt on LinkedIn](#)

Focus: Nonprofit



**Genevieve
N. Waller,
Esq., CFRE**

As businesses advance into Q2 and second half of 2021, what do you see as the biggest challenges facing business leaders? How are things evolving?

Nonprofit organizations are left wondering what the world, and specifically the workplace, will look like post-pandemic. Employees, having spent the last year adjusting to remote work, may not be inclined to return to in-person work full-time. This inclination likely extends to clients seeking in-person services, donors attending in-person events, and beyond. The second significant challenge, and likely a larger hurdle, is the toll that living in crisis has taken on employee wellness and team cohesiveness. The concessions and grace offered over the course of the past year are hard to maintain, and many nonprofits are experiencing a direct impact to staff morale and teamwork.

What are a few best practices to help leaders overcome the current challenges? What do you see working well?

Organization leaders should evaluate and revise policies, procedures and organizational culture to ensure systems are in place to embrace all employees, regardless of where the employee does his/her job. This includes setting up efficient communication methods

that support collaboration between employees, as well as from office space to individual employee remote space. Employers will also need to support remote employees in establishing professional remote offices and standards for remote operations, ensuring employees have the necessary equipment, tools and space. In other words, the days of working from the kitchen table with the dog barking in the background have come to an end.

Many of the same considerations for establishing formal hybrid or remote workspaces are applicable to rebuilding community. Leaders should establish strategic goals in and around building relationships. Intentional and purposeful relationship-building between management and staff and peer groups is imperative to increase resiliency and rebuild a healthy organizational culture.

Are there any strategies you view to be ineffective?

Flying-by-the-seat-of-your-pants operations—like many were operating in the days immediately following the lockdowns—is highly ineffective. If the leadership’s aim and expectation is for business to return to normal or for the team to magically work in tandem without interventions, nonprofit leaders can expect significant employee turnover.

What skill sets do leaders need to navigate through these challenges?

Leaders should select transformational and democratic approaches to rebuilding their workplaces, allowing employees an opportunity to contribute to the vision of the new workplace and then strategically guiding those changes across the system. Leaders will do well to understand effective change-management and relationship-building to establish a high level of trust with employees and rally them around the shared vision.

ABOUT GINNY

Ginny is a lawyer (licensed in South Carolina), seasoned executive, professional fundraiser, and published author with 17+ years of experience in nonprofit governance and operations. She has received numerous accolades for excellence in nonprofit leadership development, strategic planning, operational efficiency, change management, governance, and relationship building. Ginny’s passion is supporting nonprofit leaders as a thought partner and strategic adviser to build capacity to dream their nonprofits’ visions into reality.

 [Find Ginny on LinkedIn](#)

Focus: Human Capital



Holly
Erlichman

As businesses advance into Q2 and second half of 2021, what do you see as the biggest challenges facing business leaders? How are things evolving?

The last 12 months were not just about a global pandemic and shut down. We faced major issues with inequality and racism, and a dramatic presidential election that has divided our country, our families, and our friends.

However, we learned we are resilient. The next 12 months will be some of the same, but the approach to resolution is changing—especially with strategies around Human Capital, Technology, and Growth.

- *Human Capital* – There is still a talent shortage that will grow as businesses begin to return to full operation. How you handled the crisis may impact your success to win the war on talent. Leaders also need to purposefully address inequality and seek solutions for a more diverse and inclusive workforce. There are many new technologies out there to assist in this process and organizations are adding diversity offices that didn't exist before.
- *Technology* – In order to support the change in workforce (i.e., working remotely and doing more with fewer people), technology and “tech stacks” are becoming a requirement in today's world. The right technology is able to help meet business goals; it is out there, and more is coming. The companies that started digital transformation prior to the crisis, had an advantage when the lockdowns started, like moving workers home with very little disruption.

- *Growth* – Just as you have been impacted by these changes, so have your customers. How you sell, what you sell and to whom are all areas that need ongoing assessment through data and communications with customers. Have your products or services changed, or maybe you have a new value proposition? Look at it all. Update your materials, your messaging, and your sales and marketing processes.

From my perspective, another one of the biggest challenges that exists today (and will continue in the future) is speed—the speed with which leaders respond. Leaders need to make big decisions that are now often based on less data and much uncertainty about the world. In order to survive and thrive, leaders have to take quick, calculated risks, and then change again as new shifts occur, which are completely unknown today.

What are a few best practices to help leaders overcome the current challenges? What do you see working well?

Probably the most important best practice is frequent and candid communication with staff, customers and suppliers. People want to know what's happening and what leadership is thinking, even if it's “I don't know.” We have all changed personally and professionally and are still very much in a turbulent time. Being honest about the state of the business is important. We need to respect people and believe they can handle it. Empower your teams to find their own ways of communicating with each other; there are teams that do virtual walks and others have “water cooler” times to stay in touch.

Additionally, there also needs to be a sense of empathy and caring from leadership. Check in with your people, not just on their work, but on their well-being. Simply asking “How are you doing?” can be invaluable. This may be foreign to many leaders, but people respond better than ever to an empathetic leader.

If you see a change in productivity from a high-valued employee, try to understand why. You can either lose him or her completely and forever, or you can understand their needs and shift them to a new role until situations change.

(Cont.)

According to [CBS News](#) in February, the US workforce that normally is made up 50% of women, lost over 3 million women over the past year. This is not acceptable, and we can do better.

Are there any strategies you view to be ineffective?

Going back to how things were before the crisis will not work, but assuming the changes you made in “reaction” mode are going to work during your recovery isn’t the answer either. While recovery has started for some, we’re still not over this crisis. Sitting back and waiting to see what happens for too long, may leave you in a bad position or with a closed business in the end.

If you’re using a strategic roadmap you created pre-2020 and have not updated it, you may not only be missing out on current opportunities, you may be falling behind your competitors during the post-recovery period. With how quickly things are changing, you should consider monthly reviews and updates for the remainder of the year. It’s time to set realistic goals, to watch them carefully, and to know when to adjust them.

Also, the idea of days filled with video meetings has worn us all down. Zoom fatigue is real. Meeting fatigue is real. Have shorter meetings with real agendas only when calls or emails don’t work. Important decisions should not be made via text or email. Leaders need to be respectful of boundaries and not expect their staff to be on call 24/7 just because they now have access at home.

What skill sets do leaders need to navigate through these challenges?

Normal leadership skillsets still remain, but old techniques don’t really work anymore. Leaders have an opportunity to embrace the changes, rather than attempting a return to business as usual. Leadership needs to be more about dialog and showing vulnerability and maintaining a connection and a sense of belonging within their teams even when they cannot be in the same room together.

From my perspective, these are the most important skillsets to navigate these challenges:

1. *Agility, risk taking, decisiveness, and the ability to execute quickly with fiscal discipline.* Be proactive. Don’t wait for the next crisis to occur to push you into action on projects and changes you thought about for years.
2. *Listening and communicating* helps to strengthen teams as well as your customer and supplier relationships. Being present and authentic in conversations is more important than ever. Be very intentional with your communication and check in regularly.
3. *Integrity, empathy and patience.* People have been through a lot and continue to have hardships. Many feel personally burned by leaders and companies they had been loyal to for so many years. They need leaders and partners they can trust and depend on again.
4. *Innovation and transformation* do not just refer to technology, but also addresses people and processes. You have an opportunity now to change what and how your product is developed and delivered, as well as attract and retain better talent because of these changes.

ABOUT HOLLY

Holly helps businesses build, scale and improve, with a concentration in talent acquisition and human capital. With 25 years’ experience, Holly has held key positions with workforce management and staffing companies large and small, leading strategy, sales, marketing, implementation and operations. She leads with passion, authenticity and candor, and found her niche helping small and mid-sized companies and individuals get to the next level.

 [Find Holly on LinkedIn](#)

Focus: Technology



Gopi
Suri

As businesses advance into Q2 and second half of 2021, what do you see as the biggest challenges facing business leaders? How are things evolving?

Heading into Q2, businesses must look into workforce transition. The majority of the workforce has been remote and somewhat used to being productive working from home. This will require a transition and careful planning of options. Technology leaders need to respond to potentially bringing the workforce safely back to the in-person and office work environment. By now, companies have learned a lot from virtual work experience, in terms of what areas of business work effectively versus what has been challenging. While most of the technology workforce may remain virtual, some may need to be in the office, and some a combination. Business leaders need to give careful thought about who and when the back-to-office transition should occur. This will be a gradual process, but the future is looking like a hybrid model.

Post-pandemic recovery coupled with potential economic slowdown in the second half of 2021 will mean a shift in priorities and increased focus on business sustainability. Technology leaders need to be prepared to respond with agility to changes in focus and chasing moving targets. Potential budget cuts and the need to preserve funds for strategic investments will create unique opportunities.

Automation, digitalization and e-commerce will continue to transform business models and services. IT organizations are going to be under tremendous stress to test and ensure adequate business support

while simultaneously balancing internal IT priorities. Cybersecurity and accelerated cloud transformation will continue to be major driving factors for the rest of 2021 and beyond.

What are a few best practices to help leaders overcome the current challenges? What do you see working well?

Channelize the investments. Particularly, IT leaders should follow the 80-20 model. Ask the question, how good is good enough? Focus on 80% investments and make, for example, 80% of your programs perfect—even if the rest of the programs may have deficiencies.

Review your technology roadmap often and make it a living artifact. Make sure it aligns with rapidly changing priorities. Collaborate with business leaders and improve on expectations from management.

Capitalize on technologies such as content management, CRM and mobile to get closer to your internal and external customers. Develop customized communication channels with customers, specifically in the new contactless world. Mobile technologies will come in handy to deliver intelligent communication based on data gathered at various points, as well as observed behavior patterns. Increase focus on data and cybersecurity. Review and revise remote working policies and safety standards.

Are there any strategies you view to be ineffective?

Not having a unified communication and a common voice from the leadership could cause distrust among the employees. Not managing conflicting priorities well and poor execution of strategy can lead to team burnout.

In addition, lack of clearly defined direction, roles and responsibilities will further exacerbate the productivity loss. Not taking cybersecurity seriously can be costly; and the inability to effectively create organizational-level awareness on security matters will result in unpleasant surprises.

(Cont.)

What skillsets do leaders need to navigate through these challenges?

Strategic thinking, innovation, empathy, interpersonal skills and adaptability. Start with strategic thinking at the senior leadership level. Make sure your top leadership is aligned and invest in training and leadership development. Many IT leaders are married to technology for too long. Keep evaluating alternatives and make wise choices that give the best bang for the buck.

Develop a culture of innovation. Make your organization flat and encourage open door policies. Listen to

your teams, identify and remove roadblocks that stifle creativity. Establishing a reward system and appropriate risk-taking environment will enable path breaking ideas to your complex problems.

Apart from developing interpersonal skills and building relationships with your peers and staff, it's extremely important to develop empathy. Establish connections at a personal level as much as possible and show strong leadership. Finally, being adaptive to operational change and improving engagement with stakeholders is a recipe for successful execution of strategy.

ABOUT GOPI

Gopi is a visionary leader with 25 years of experience in utilizing leading-edge technologies to increase profitability and enhance business growth. He is considered an expert in technology strategy, innovation, transformation, and cybersecurity. He holds an MBA from the University of Maryland. He also founded and scaled two IT services companies and a non-profit organization.



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