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Leadership Lessons Learned

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Authors

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LEADERSHIP LESSONS LEARNED

TEAM MEMBERS

Katherine Donowitz, Pediatric Hospital Medicine Fellow, Department of Pediatrics, Children's Hospital of Richmond

Carole Ivey, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Occupational Therapy, College of Health Professions

Aniket Jadhav, Associate Professor and Director of OMR, Radiology, School of Dentistry

Marcel Jennings, Associate Professor and Associate Director, Creative Advertising, Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture

Emily Lilley, Administrator, Mid-Atlantic Twin Registry, Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation

Patricia Sobczak, Collections Librarian and Assistant Professor, VCU Libraries

Tammy Williams, Clinical Assistant Professor and Undergraduate Program Director, School of Nursing

Project Sponsor: Paula Otto, Senior Director of Special Projects, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Over the past several months, using virtual video meetings, Team Transformers interviewed leaders at VCU and VCU Health to gather their lessons learned, their triumphs, and their challenges in regard to COVID-19. More than ten interviews were completed with leaders across the Monroe Park and MCV campuses and in varying positions. Their responses, gathered in a multi-media case study of "lessons learned," were collected to serve as inspirations for learning about leadership through success in a crisis.

QUEST 2025

COVID-19 changed the way we work at VCU almost overnight. Teaching, patient care, and student services all had to shift to new approaches and protocols while working to keep continuity and calm. Situations like these reveal leadership poise, problem solving skills, communication, and vision and are essential to Theme I: Student Success.

PROJECT GOALS

1. To examine leadership lessons learned during the COVID-19 crisis from VCU leaders.
2. To develop a repository of leadership knowledge and lessons learned across the university to inspire and grow future leaders and VCU as a whole.

PROJECT STRATEGIES

Our project strategy was built from the goals for our project and organized by three main areas: 1) project planning, 2) communication and compliance, and 3) stakeholders.

Project planning. We followed an organized model of project planning, using regular team meetings to keep our project focused and our team progressing on our goals. This involved an early focus on defining team expectations and determining the scope of the project as well as roles and responsibilities, then building a timeline with action items.

Communication and compliance. We worked to establish key points of communication and compliance to ensure there was consistency among all of us. This included components like email templates, permission form, interview scripts, and guide to videoing.

Stakeholders. We worked with stakeholders and our sponsor to develop our project outline and outcomes.

ACTION STEPS

- Created a list of leaders to interview, ensuring selection of leaders across the campuses, university departments, and in varying levels of responsibility to get a range of perspectives.
- Envisioned our final product by deciding on video interviews for a multi-media approach and flexibility.
- Began crafting a plan for platforms to leverage for support and promotion of our project including video hosting and social media.
- Developed standard interview questions in collaboration with our sponsor to capture unique perspectives and keep the project cohesive.
- Obtained permission forms from VCU and The Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute for use of recorded interviews.
- Generated an invitation email template to customize and send to leaders.
- Reviewed interview strategies with the team to ensure quality production with respect to recording features and lighting.
- Team members selected interviewees from the list of leaders and sent invitation emails.
- Team members conducted and recorded interviews via Zoom.

OUTCOMES

Fifteen interviews were completed with leaders from across VCU's Monroe Park and MCV campuses, in varying positions including Senior Vice President and Chief Executive Officer, Dean, and Chair.

Box 1. Campus leaders included in interviews	
<i>Amy Armstrong</i> , Associate Dean of Faculty Development, College of Health Professions	<i>Jessica Laux</i> , Director, Risk Management, Integrity and Compliance Office
<i>Debra Barksdale</i> , Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, School of Nursing	<i>D'Arcy Mays</i> , Chair, Department of Statistical Sciences and Operations Research
<i>Peter Buckley</i> , Dean, School of Medicine	<i>Elias Neujahr</i> , CEO, Children's Hospital of Richmond
<i>Karen Cary</i> , Head, Collections Analysis and Investment, VCU Libraries	<i>Srirama Rao</i> , Vice President, Research and Innovation
<i>Joseph Dipiro</i> , Dean, School of Pharmacy	<i>Betsy Ripley</i> , Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, School of Medicine
<i>Jean Giddens</i> , Dean, School of Nursing	<i>David Sarrett</i> , Dean, School of Dentistry
<i>Susan Gooden</i> , Dean, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs	<i>Christine Wynd</i> , Chair, Department of Family and Community Health Nursing, Interim Chair, Adult Health and Nursing Systems, School of Nursing
<i>Alison Jones</i> , Associate Vice President for Health Sciences-Academic Operations, Office of the Senior Vice President for Health Sciences	

Full interviews will live on social media platforms in the following formats:

- Podcast with audio from interviews
- YouTube channel with full interviews
- Instagram with short "teaser" interviews based on theme outcomes
- LinkedIn with short video content

Themes from the interviews. When expressing who they are as leaders and leadership through the pandemic, a common theme noted by the leaders was humility, often with expression of gratitude to lead or by others who were leading. Five guiding principles emerged as themes:

- Flexibility
- Resiliency
- Teamwork
- Honesty, transparency, and trust
- Communication and connections

SUSTAINABILITY

The collection of *Leadership Lessons Learned* interviews on social media will serve as stand-alone resource available in the future for leaders to review. This has value as both a historical document and teaching tool for future leaders. While this project is unlikely to grow after our program sessions end in October 2020, there are ways it could be reopened and expanded by future VCU Leadership Development Program groups or by VCU.

While we have chosen to interview VCU leaders on the specific theme of leadership lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, many different themes could be explored in subsequent interviews. A cloud-based repository could be created for VCU to archive interviews with not only VCU leaders, but also employees, students, and community members about various topics. To transform our project into an ongoing and sustainable endeavor, we would likely need to apply for grant funding to create and maintain this digital media infrastructure. Working with our digital media studies faculty and students might be one way to leverage resources at the university as well. Ultimately, the ongoing organization and maintenance of this archive would likely require dedicated personnel. StoryCorps is an example of a similar but much larger scale project started in 2003 and now funded as a non-profit through grants and donations.

FINANCING AND RESOURCES

Our group identified a goal of creating a project that would have minimal or no cost to our group. The *Leadership Lessons Learned* project was therefore designed to utilize resources readily available at VCU, namely the experience and leadership expertise of VCU faculty. The major cost was in human energy and dedicated time. Interviews were recorded using Zoom software readily available at no cost to all VCU employees. We leveraged the skills of our group members in editing and refining these interview videos. Videos are posted on a publicly available YouTube channel and no membership fee was required.

Costs associated with future expansion of the project would involve data storage as well as software and personnel for video editing. Cloud-based storage has been sufficient for our group to save videos on a shared Google Drive, however additional data storage would be needed if additional interviews were collected. Professional editing software could be purchased to further refine videos or create podcasts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Team Transformers recommends creating a space for the videos that is accessible for current and future viewers and further exploration of the concept by investigating ways for content to be added and identifying new channels for the videos (e.g., StoryCorps).

FINAL PITCH

This project captured the leadership lessons learned during COVID-19 and provided a breadth of wisdom and nuggets of information from leaders at VCU and VCU Health. Their stories were compelling and varied with each person offering their own perspective of their lessons learned; however, a commonality was shared among the leaders in the following areas:

- Emergence of leaders from all ranks in the organization
- Importance of sharing of knowledge through introspection and reflection
- Significance of innovation during this time
- Recognition that leading through the pandemic “is a marathon, not a sprint”

From all of the leaders we interviewed as part of the project and throughout the VCU Leadership Development Program, one thing was evident — leaders never stop learning.



TEAM TRANSFORMERS

Kate Donowitz, Carole Ivey
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Pattie Sobczak, Tammy Williams

*Project Sponsor: Paula I. Otto
Senior Director of Special Projects
Wilder School*



PROJECT ABSTRACT

Over the past several months, using virtual video meetings, the Transformers Team interviewed leaders at VCU to gather their lessons learned, their triumphs, and their challenges in regards to COVID-19. Interviews were completed with leaders across both VCU campuses and at varying positions at the University. Their responses, gathered in a multi-media case study of “lessons learned,” were collected to serve as inspirations for learning about leadership through success in a crisis.

“LEADERS NEVER STOP LEARNING”



QUEST 2025

Situations like these reveal leadership poise, problem solving skills, communication and vision and are essential to Theme I:

Student Success



PROJECT GOALS

1. To examine leadership lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis from VCU Leaders.
2. To develop a repository of leadership knowledge and lessons learned from across the University to inspire and grow future VCU leaders and the University as a whole.



ACTION STEPS

- Identified leaders at VCU
- Envisioned final product - video interviews
- Began cultivating a plan for platforms to utilize
- Developed standard interview questions



HOUSEKEEPING ITEMS

- Permission forms for use of recorded interviews (VCU & GEHLI)
- Reviewed interview strategies
- Team members selected interviewees & sent invitations



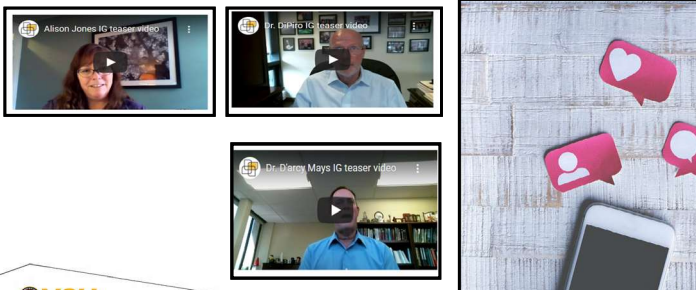
OUTCOMES

15 interviews completed with different leaders across VCU

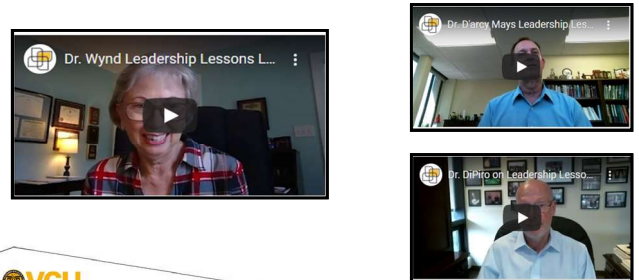
- Interviews would live on social media
- Short teaser interviews on Instagram
- Full interviews on YouTube Channel
- Podcast with audio from interviews
- Lessons Learned quotes for LinkedIn



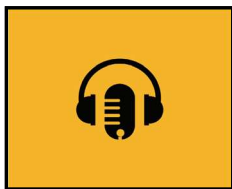
INSTAGRAM TEASER CAMPAIGN



YOUTUBE CHANNEL WITH FULL INTERVIEWS



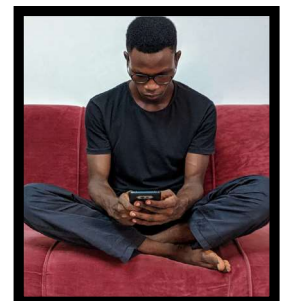
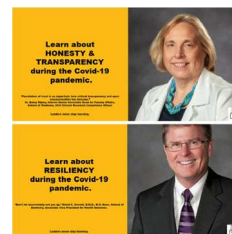
PODCAST WITH FULL INTERVIEWS



Audio interviews with
Dr. Peter Buckley
Dr. Amy Armstrong
Dr. David Sarrett



CONTENT FOR GEHLI LINKEDIN



THEMES

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- Flexibility
- Teamwork
- Honesty, Transparency, and Trust
- Resiliency
- Communication and Connections



SUSTAINABILITY

- End product will remain accessible through social media and video sharing platforms
- If future groups or VCU as an institution wanted to keep the project ongoing, would need buy in from administration
- Needs would include personnel to edit and archive videos
- Potential untapped resources include students and professors engaged in digital media studies who could assist with collecting and editing interviews



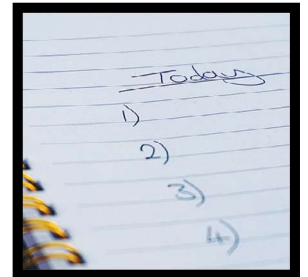
FINANCING & RESOURCES

- Goal to utilize VCU community resources in the form of experience and leadership expertise
- Team leveraged skills of individual members to edit and refine videos
- Utilized software readily available to the VCU community and public social media sites without fees/associated cost
- Video editing expertise, software, and Cloud storage space are potential costs for project if expanded



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a space to access the content for current and future viewers
- Investigate ways for content to be added
- Investigate new channels for the content, e.g. StoryCorps



FINAL PITCH

Lessons Learned:

- Emergence of leaders from all ranks in the organization
- Great sharing of knowledge
- Innovation
- This is a (ultra) marathon, not a sprint

Leaders never stop learning



TEAM PROCESS OBSERVATIONS

- The team worked very democratically and accommodated various members' needs.
- Roles within the team took time to emerge.
- Everyone took turns filling in team needs and guiding/leading the team and the project in various ways.
- We assumed good will and extended grace when needed.

