

# THE NONPROFIT SURVIVAL GUIDE



By Viktoria Harrison  
[thebrandedstartup.com](http://thebrandedstartup.com)

# We're in this together.

Hello friend, I pray your family is staying healthy and virus-free right now. I've heard it said that a healthy man has a thousand wishes, but a sick man, only one.

My guess is that if you're reading this, you're in the former category. Take a moment of gratitude.

Ok, now let's talk about how your nonprofit will make it through these times until the economy recovers. Some of you have had to cancel your revenue-driving galas, others are losing commitments previously made by donors who are in trouble themselves.

In the last week, I've had conversations with multiple nonprofit leaders and board members (our team at charity: water included), and listened in on group calls with CEO's of startups and nonprofits who all had profound insights and ideas to share.

In this guide, I'll share what I've been learning and I hope you find it useful.

Remember, it's not just you out there. We're all in this together.

— *Viktoria*





# If you're new here, hi. I'm Vik Harrison.

If this free PDF happened to land in your inbox through a friend or colleague, a quick introduction is in order.

I'm Viktoria Harrison (Vik for short). For almost a decade, I served as the Chief Creative Officer at [charity: water](#) alongside my husband Scott and an amazing team of talented world-changers. My strength lies in storytelling, marketing and branding for purpose-driven startups.

Now, you can find me on Instagram ([@vikharrison](#)) or over at [The Branded Startup](#) where I help purpose-driven entrepreneurs and founders of non-profits clarify their vision and boldly tell their stories.

## **01. How to lead well right now.**

- Your job is to stay calm
- How to lead with competence and trust

## **03. How to talk to your donors right now.**

- Provide value and make asks with caution
- Go above and beyond to show compassion
- A sample video script outline for donors

## **02. Where to find savings right now.**

- Where to find savings in your budget
- Three OPEX scenarios to model right now

## **04. How to find growth opportunities in this season.**

- Ideas for digitally connecting & innovating
- The opportunities that come with social distancing, slimming down and other constraints.

PART ONE

# HOW TO LEAD WELL RIGHT NOW



**The physiology of leadership is calm presence. Say those words to yourself every morning and throughout the day as necessary. Calm Presence. That's you. Own it.**

**BLAIR ENNS**

Before you can lead your team - big or small - through this shock to the system, you've got to get your head in the right place. As we like to say in our leadership, be a non-anxious presence.

Realize that no matter what happens, you'll be ok. You'll be more than ok - you'll know what you're actually made of.

In his [interesting research experiment](#) while quarantined with coronavirus, Todd Herman analyzed the word choice of fear-focused CEO's vs. strategy-focused CEO's. He found that three CEO's stood out as being the most calm, cool and collected and they had also taken the earliest action. Want to know what they all had in common?

They all had a daily meditation practice.

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**Your team will remember the kind of person you were long after they remember what sort of decisions you made.**

DAVID C. BAKER

## The two qualities people need most in their leaders during times of crisis are **trust** and **competence**.

— BRIGADIER GENERAL TOM KOLDITZ

When things are going well in our organizations and people feel safe, secure and stable, we can get away with distant or even mediocre leadership.

But when the environment becomes uncertain, unpredictable or dangerous, the only way to lead people is through trust.

You can't give them all the answers, so the only way they're going to do anything you tell them to do is because they trust you.

**According to Brigadier General Tom Kolditz, one of the most effective ways to earn trust as a leader is to expose yourself to the same risk as you're exposing your employees to.**

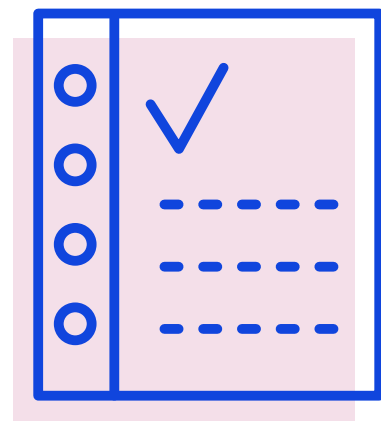
If they feel that you're hiding in a glass tower, highly removed from the reality they face, trust goes away quickly. If they see that you have skin in the game and you're just as vulnerable as they are if things go south, you cultivate a sense of camaraderie and inspire loyalty among employees.



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**Leadership is not about being in charge.  
Leadership is taking care of those in  
your charge.**

SIMON SINEK



## 7 Ideas to cultivate team trust & lead from out front (virtually).

**01.** Call your team members on the phone.

Don't talk about work, just ask how they or their family is doing.

**02.** Host a virtual weekly happy hour on Zoom where people can hang out socially and blow off some steam.

**03.** Host a virtual Monday morning huddle with your immediate team - have everyone give a 3-min personal update (not related to work).

**04.** Give parents who have kids at home more flexibility and less work, if possible at this time. Their mental capacity is extremely divided and it's not their fault.

**05.** Be as transparent with your teams as possible. When you're not physically together, distrust and confusion can creep up. More transparency is needed now than ever.

**06.** Ask everyone to contribute ideas for ways to save money or make money at this time. Everyone should be invested in helping the organization survive, not just the leadership.

**07.** Normalize kid noise or interruptions on video calls so parents are not on edge about it. Make a simple announcement to the whole organization to make it a new temporary norm.

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**Remember that at this time,  
everyone's walking a tight rope.  
Keeping their job or business running,  
and keeping their family safe.**



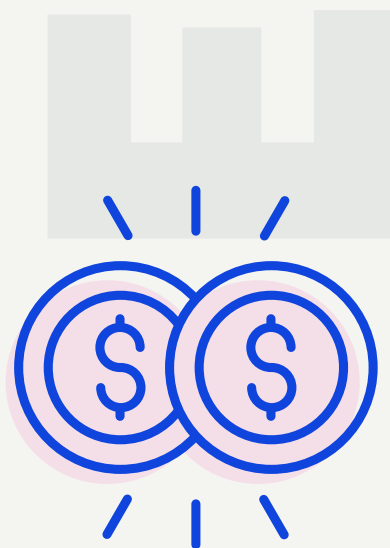
## Further reading

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- 01.** Todd Herman's experiment which distinguished between the psychology of the Fear-focused CEO, the Un-focused CEO and the Strategy-focused CEO [here](#).
- 02.** [Three steps to surviving and thriving in a crisis](#) by Blair Enns
- 03.** [A CEO Plan for Coronavirus: Actions to Take Now](#) from Bain & Company
- 04.** [Coronavirus: The Black Swan of 2020](#) by Sequoia Capital

PART TWO

**WHERE TO FIND  
SAVINGS RIGHT NOW**



**Prepare for the worst,  
and be thankful if it doesn't  
happen; a wait-and-see  
approach is a nonstarter.**

— BAIN & COMPANY

There's no way to overstate the impact this will likely have on your operating budget for the next 1 - 3 years. There, I said it. Not 3 months. Not 9 months. 12 - 36 months. I know it's not what any of us want to hear right now.

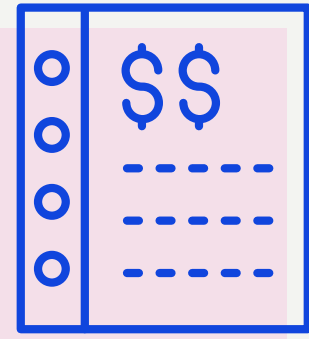
Nonprofit founders tend to be overly positive, optimistic people (that's why you're good at your job!) and you may

be tempted to hold out hope that things will go back to normal quickly.

That kind of an attitude right now will likely put you in a "trying to catch a falling knife" type of a situation, and I don't want that for you.

Your first goal should be to survive the shock that is coming. And survival starts with running different scenarios of reduced revenue and cutting costs to match the scenario.

If you haven't already, make a plan for what you'll do at each scenario or trigger point. When the time comes, just follow the plan. Here are three scenarios I recommend you run for your operating budget.



## Make sure that you have a plan for three different scenarios (for the remainder of 2020).

01.

**Cut opex  
by 15% immediately.**

If you haven't done this already, this needs to be your first step. Involve everyone on the team to come up with ideas of how to make and save money.

02.

**Have a plan to cut opex  
by 30% (most likely)**

You will likely need to move to this next step at some point. Understand what this plan looks like and know your triggers for executing it.

03.

**Have a plan to cut opex  
by 50%-60% (survival)**

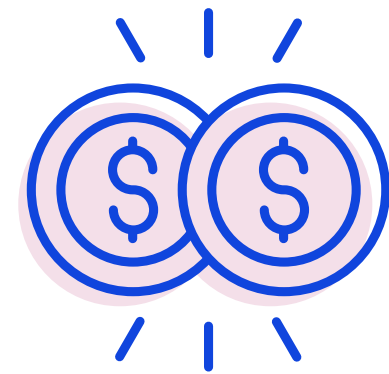
Although I hope you don't have to use this scenario, I strongly recommend you are prepared for it, knowing exactly what it looks like.

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**The capital you have in the bank is  
the most precious capital you can  
imagine right now.**

CHI-HUA CHIEN, GOODWATER CAPITAL





## 10 Ideas of where to cut costs right now.

- 01.** Renegotiate your contracts. Talk to your landlord, your legal team, vendors and consultants about discounts/new terms.
- 02.** Cut all nonessential travel.
- 03.** Pause all non-essential hiring and salary increases.
- 04.** Cut or reduce *non-essential* employee benefits.
- 05.** Consider moving to a 4-day workweek and reduce salaries accordingly.
- 06.** Before laying people off, consider a 1-4 week furlough for employees, which is a temporary, unpaid leave from work.
- 07.** Freeze non-essential marketing spending (but be careful not to freeze anything that's driving revenue.)
- 08.** Change Org/Business goals as needed and re-allocate/repurpose budget items.
- 09.** Freeze bonus plans or cost of living increases for all staff.
- 10.** When previous options have been exhausted, consider pay cuts for leadership and all employees.

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**The reality is that this year, most nonprofits will take a hit to their efficiency ratio. If this keeps you up at night, go listen to Dan Pallotta's TED talk.**

SCOTT HARRISON

PART THREE

# HOW TO TALK TO YOUR DONORS RIGHT NOW



**Your donors - the people who have cared enough to give to your cause year after year - are now suffering. We have a chance now to show up with empathy and serve them in return.**

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For most nonprofits, the biggest priority is to raise funds. But in this critical time, we have to be really careful of our tone so we don't appear self-serving.

Never have your donors been more concerned with what's happening in their own lives, families and cities, and less aware of needs somewhere far away.

If we show up in their inbox asking for donations right now, we're likely to get ignored unless there's a very strong relationship.

But if we, instead, seek to add value, ask how our supporters are doing, offer them connection, support and maybe even a laugh or two, we'll build a relationship that will pay off in months and years to come.

Take care to show up selflessly and with gratitude - play the long game and your donors will take notice.



## Create a plan to have these three touch points with your donors in the next 1-2 weeks.

### **DONORS / SPONSORS WITH PENDING LARGE COMMITMENTS**



This revenue is the most precious. Call each donor on the phone and have a candid conversation. Ask them if they're in a position to give now to increase your cash position. Offer payment plans if necessary.

### **DONORS WHO ARE GIVING MONTHLY / RECURRING**



This is the second most important source of stable revenue. Depending on the size of this group, you may reach out personally or in a mass email. Send a video update from you, the CEO if possible.

### **EVERYONE ELSE (DONORS, VOLUNTEERS, SUPPORTERS)**

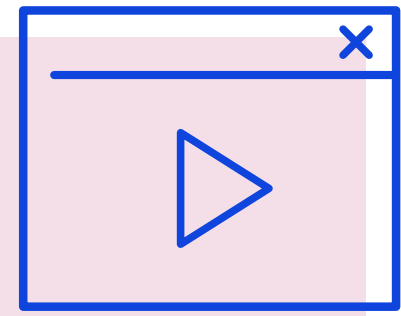


Communicate proactively with your wider audience through social media, email, video, etc. and speak to the current situation in the most transparent, empathetic way possible.

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**Cash is king.**

- EVERYONE



## Sample script outline for a video update from you, the CEO.

**If you haven't already, I suggest recording a simple, candid video update for your most engaged group of donors. Showing up with confidence and a plan right now is crucial to instill trust and remind your donors why they should continue to support you.**

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Hi everyone. [insert personal info here if needed]  
I wanted to reach out and connect with you during this critical and uncertain time.

I hope everyone in your family is doing well. I know a lot of your businesses have been impacted financially and others of you may be facing possible unemployment.

I just want to say, we're here for you and your family. If there's anything at all I can do to support you at this time, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Continued on next page →

As for [insert your org name], here's a high level update on how things are going for us.

- Speak to the health and safety of your employees first, how remote work is going, team morale, etc.
- Give a high-level update about what you have done financially to adjust the organization's finances. What cuts have you already made?
- Update your donors on how your beneficiaries are doing. Have they been affected by this virus? Are they in danger of being affected?

- Speak to the importance of your work as it relates to the Covid-19 pandemic. Why is your work still relevant and important at this time?
- Close with a confident, positive tone that shows you are planning wisely.
- Make sure you thank your donors again for supporting you through this, and show gratitude for their previous and future commitment to your cause.
- Remind them one last time you're there for them and thinking of them.



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**Only 7% of how we communicate with one another is in the actual word choices we use. 93% is nonverbal. It's all about facial expressions, vocal intonations, gestures. Video is a far more effective tool than email.**

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**Excellence matters, but humanity and imperfect glimpses of realness into a brand, team or leader are what could be most effective at this time.**

ANGELA POPPLEWELL

PART FOUR

# HOW TO FIND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES



**Am I Going to Be Okay?  
This is the question on many  
minds these days. The answer  
is no, you are not going to be  
okay. You are going to be  
spectacular.**

— BLAIR ENNS

When this crisis ends - and it will end - the economy will heal and the world will move on. People will again remember the less fortunate and your work will still be as relevant as it's ever been. That's the great news about being a nonprofit.

If you're able to stay calm and rational through all of this, to keep a positive outlook, you'll find fascinating opportunities that arise out of this crisis.

You will learn surprising truths about what the people around you are capable of, and foster raw and real connections with your audiences that you never thought possible.

You may invent new products, get rid of old ones that weren't really working, find new ways of working together and flex a muscle you never knew you had. One of my favorite leaders said it best: **"So let's just agree that the goal is not to be okay, the goal is to be a spectacular leader, entrepreneur and human being. Beyond that, let the chips fall where they may. Your job is to shine."** -Blair Enns

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**Put your people in control. Tell everyone “we’re all responsible for keeping each other employed”.  
Involve everyone in coming up with revenue-driving ideas for the business.**

SIMON SINEK

# Opportunity brainstorm

Marketing & communication ideas you can implement while socially-distancing.

Tackle internal projects that have been on the back-burner

Repackage your existing content in new, creative ways on social media.

Profile how your team members are getting through this to build trust.

Teach your audience a skill you excel at - cooking, juggling, etc.

Have each team member make a thank-you video for your biggest donors

Start that industry-leading podcast you've never had time for.

As companies pull their advertising, ad revenue will get cheaper. Make the most of this to create relevant content on social platforms.

Create educational content from home - have a team member host an ask-me-anything zoom call about their area of expertise (finance/ programs/ leadership, etc).

Put together a kid's guide about your cause - full of stories, videos, pictures and family activities that parents can read/do with their kids while they're home (if appropriate).

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**It was during self-isolation in the plague of 1665 when Isaac Newton, then a 23-year-old student, invented calculus and, while watching apples fall in his family orchard, discovered the theory of gravity.**

**Thanks for reading.**  
**Remember, everyone is in the exact same boat you're in. Take comfort in that fact and continue to show up with wisdom and confidence.**  
**We need you.**

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I know none of us saw this coming only a few weeks ago. I know life feels really strange right now and it's hard to know what the future will look like. But we must act regardless, and keep things moving forward despite extreme ambiguity. Please don't go radio silent. Continue to create meaningful

content and show up for your people. When this is over, you'll be glad you did.

**Here's a big thank you to everyone who contributed ideas and feedback to this guide:**

**Scott Harrison** - for all the ideas, feedback and keeping my kids occupied while I worked.

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**Becky Straw** - CEO of Adventure Project

**Thomas Keown** - CEO of Many Hopes

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**Angela Popplewell** - Founder of 100Cameras

**Kevin and Kathleen** - Mighty Ally