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In our personal and professional lives, we are continually learning about one another, subtly adjusting our behavior as we understand ourselves and understand others in order to get along, enjoy being together and become more effective. While every day is different, we generally know each other's habits and reactions in most situations. In other words, normal behavior. This knowledge builds our informal social norms, and we become comfortable operating within these norms.

Now bring stress into the picture. Stress is usually introduced by change, over which we have little or no control... like we're experiencing now. So, how do I act under stress? How do you act under stress? A better question is, how do others experience me when I am under stress and vice versa?

It's interesting, because most of us shift into behaviors under stress that are sometimes very different than our "normal" behavior. If that's the case as individuals, what happens when a family, a company, or a country is under stress?

First, just ask yourself when you have five to ten minutes this week: how do others experience me when I am under stress? You may be surprised if you have an honest conversation with those who know you well. With that self-awareness, you can then think of those around you. If they don't seem to be themselves, you'll need to get to know and understand this new stress behavior. This allows us more grace with each other if we can understand and in fact be ready when those behaviors show up.

It's often said that leaders are forged under stress, and I think that's true. These times can bring out the best in our organizations, our families, and our other social groups. You may have been experiencing some startling and positive moments, finding that the people surrounding you (albeit following social distancing guidelines) are even stronger, more resilient, and more capable than you'd realized.

Brightworth has experienced a lot of change over the last several years, and I am proud of how well we have managed that stress. Even as it has been challenging, it has also been rewarding, with new relationships forming and managing change together. The key to great leadership across our firm starts at each and every relationship we have, with our clients and with one other. It's the reason we are still operating at the highest standard over these last weeks: because of our relationships and because of the value they hold for us. It is, in two words, the Brightworth Culture.

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