

Accelerated Transformation in the Midst of the COVID-19 Crisis

How many companies would you say are focused on self-preservation during the COVID-19 pandemic?

If you said a large majority, you'd be right. But that's just it; they are focused on just getting through it. Is there a case to be made for going beyond a preservation mindset, to a transformational one? Perhaps you are a business leader, wondering if your organization can still boldly pursue its long-term plans even in these turbulent times. If so, then you'll be encouraged by this story about an entrepreneurial company in mid-town Toronto, Ontario that has taken this approach during the COVID-19 crisis. They are punching above their weight, because they chose to be led by their core purpose rather than fear. They didn't just shift their operations to address immediate concerns. They also chose to build for the future and impact their industry.

In the hopes of helping others, they have allowed me to share details about the transformational steps they took during the COVID-19 crisis. The company is Consolidated Energy Solutions ([CES](#)), which provides energy and business solutions for the food retail sector. Having been part of other transformational initiatives, I have learned that leadership and culture plays a pivotal role. The quality of leadership at CES and the strength of their culture are comparable to the best that I have seen among top Fortune 500 companies.

Creating a transformational culture in the workplace

About a year ago, my firm started a three-year engagement with CES and the scope included: guiding the CEO and executives on vision, strategy, culture, innovation, executive coaching, leadership and organizational development. Founder and CEO Bryan Elliott started the company over 20 years ago, and today leads his company not just with a passion for excellence, but also a passion for people. Bryan also founded and is currently the Chairman of [Bee Me Kidz](#), a charity with a mission to inspire and support at-risk children.





Bryan Elliott, CEO

When Bryan received his 360-Feedback Report in January 2019, he saw that he was spending 80% of his time managing day-to-day needs. Others at the company described him as the “chief engineer”, “chief sales guy” and “chief trouble shooter”. Bryan realized that, to truly transform his company, this needed to change.

So, we set out a plan for him to shift his chief executive role from managing day to day to leading for the future. His progress has been incredible. As a result of the executive coaching and building the executive team, Bryan now spends 80% of his time leading with strategy and culture to build CES for the future. Bryan is transparent in sharing his annual 360 feedback results and development plan with all employees. In fact, having assessed, trained or coached more than one thousand executives, I can say that today Bryan would be among the top 1% of executives who represent the very essence of great leadership.

“My leaders helped me to discover and develop the leader within me that I never knew as an Engineer. I enjoyed the Action-Learning Project where we could develop a new line of business for CES. I also feel privileged to be part of the CEO Advisory Panel. Our CEO, Bryan Elliott is one of the most caring people that I have met.”

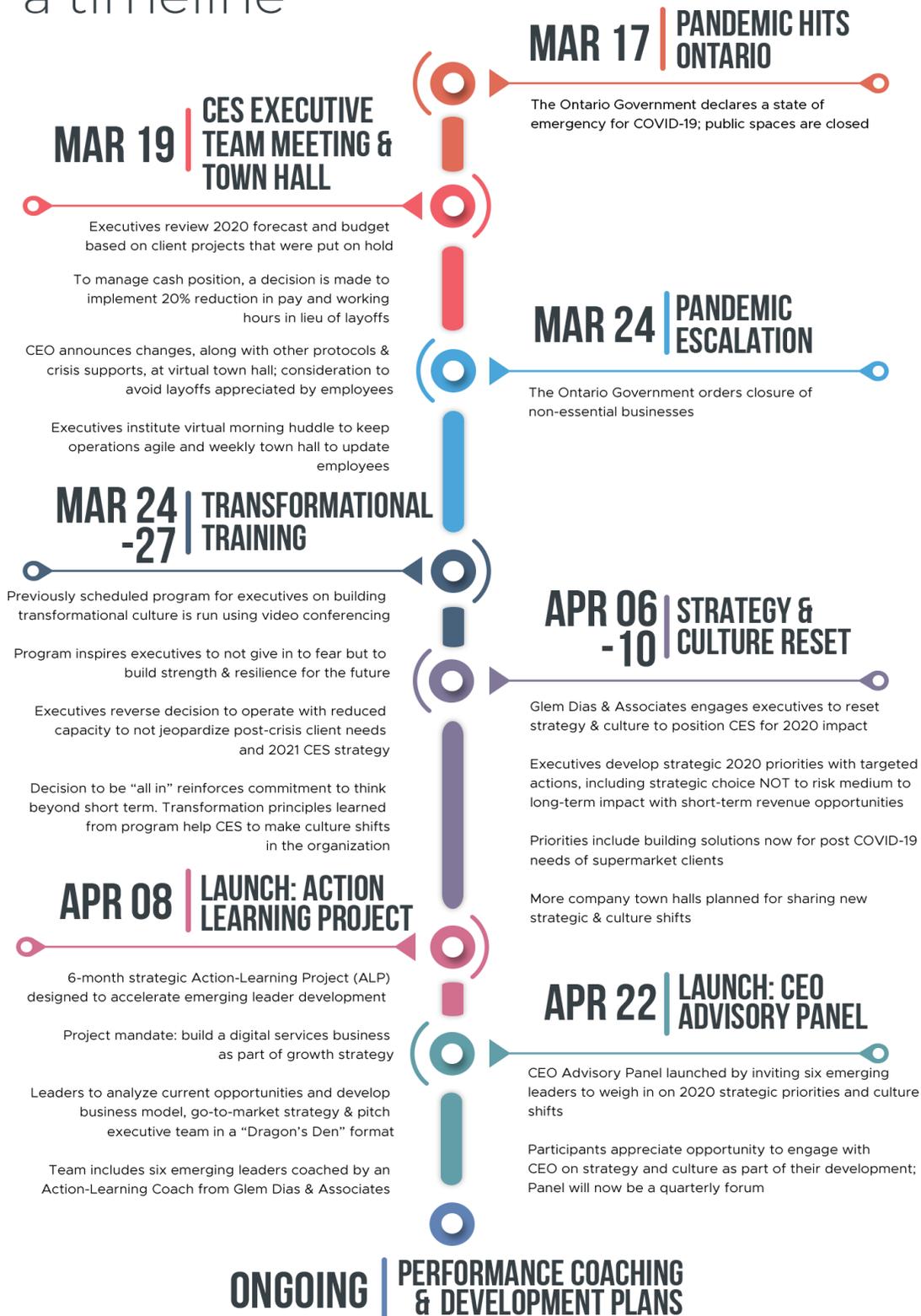
**- Laura Semidey,
CES Engineering Manager & CEO Advisory Panel member**

Now, all of this development took place before the COVID-19 crisis hit. When it did, CES faced a serious choice: pull back from their commitment to the transformational journey, or double down on it. I want to now show you a timeline of events that took place from the beginning of when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Ontario until now. In it, you will see not only the decisions made, but also some of the rationale behind the decisions.

I encourage you to view this timeline less as a procedural how-to list, and more of the footprints of a company radiating a transformational culture and value set.

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CRISIS

a timeline



Leaping forward towards transformation

Where is CES now? They are ahead of the milestones of their three-year transformation roadmap. They are meeting or exceeding their key performance indicators. They have accelerated their path to bringing an innovative digital solution to the market as part of their growth strategy. It did come with a cost. The COVID-19 lockdown has created a second quarter shortfall, presenting a real risk in near-term operations. Everyone at CES will need to press in, to bring in the year. But the resiliency I see built into the culture of CES gives me confidence that they will weather the storm.

"I am amazed at the level of investment in people and the depth in talent and organization to support clients. Even though I am brand new, I feel unbelievably welcomed to share my outside perspective. I have never seen a CEO who is so committed to people, culture and values."

- Peter Reist,
IoT Solutions Executive describing his experience
at CES since joining the team in March

Developing organizational strength by investing in others

That strength and resilience didn't just appear overnight; it's been intentionally fostered over the last 15 months. Before the COVID-19 crisis, Bryan has been providing opportunities for CES employees to discover their purpose. Last February, he offered all employees a workshop on how to discover your BIG WHY. After the lockdown, he committed to personally reach out to his employees. To date, he has completed about 20 one-on-one conversations. He connects with them personally to see how they and their family are doing during this crisis. He also shares personal stories and coaches them in finding meaning and purpose in life and work. This simple practice impacts others and gives life to the values of CES.

"I was touched that the CEO took the time to get to know the "real" me. It was so insightful and meaningful and gave me a chance to dig deep and to continue this thought process moving forward. I strongly believe this will help me in finding joy in relationships, work and life."

- Lisa Bhatt,
Key Account Executive on her conversation
with Bryan during lockdown

From self-preservation to transformation

The story of CES shows you that transformation, even during a time of crisis, is possible. Based on our experience, only about 5% of organizations are ready for such a journey. As an organizational leader, I would encourage you to consider putting one or two of these practices into action. But the most profound action you can take right now is also the simplest: make time for meaningful conversations with your team members.

Regarding the process of building into his team, Bryan Elliot says, “It has been an honour to connect with my fellow CES colleagues and to know who they are and what is important to them. I’m getting so much more from these conversations than I could have imagined. I am more convinced than ever that investing in our people and culture builds our competitive edge through a unique expression of our talent and values in the marketplace.”

I agree with Bryan, and believe that transformational organizations will be best positioned to adapt, stay relevant and seize opportunities for growth in a post COVID-19 world.

About the Author

Glem Dias is an award-winning leadership and talent strategist. He has advised CEOs, Executives and Board Members on leadership strategy at Fortune 500, entrepreneurial and social enterprises including Walmart, Morgan Stanley, Pitney Bowes, Starbucks, Home Depot, CIBC, TD Bank, SE Health, CMHA, and others. He is also the Director of the Global Talent Centre at the **Schulich** Executive Education Centre, York University. He is a leading keynote speaker, has been published in industry journals and has coached executives and emerging leaders in North America, Europe, Asia Pacific, and Latin America.

He and his team of global thought leaders bring together an end-to-end solution to guide organizational transformation.

