

2020 TURMOIL: PAVING THE PATH TO CLARITY

By Don Henderson | VanAllen

2020 has shifted so many things into strange territory. Something as simple as an introduction now requires multiple layers of thought. Do I shake hands? Bump elbows? Just awkwardly stand six feet away while attempting intermittent eye contact? Nobody really knows proper pandemic etiquette. In the same way that our social standards have become a guessing game, business aviation is experiencing similar ambiguity and turmoil. A cloud of displaced airline pilots and technicians are looking for a new roost. Executives feel a pressing need to keep their businesses moving forward and present a sense of progress. These situations layered on top of economic tension and polarized social conversations leave many of us with the sense that the rules we were accustomed to are now dated.

But how do we move forward?

The answers to three simple questions may help provide a clear path. This applies to anyone; whether you are an executive responsible for an aviation team, an aviation team leader, or an advisor to a high net worth individual, these questions are universal.

Question 1: What can I control?

Often, we live in the delusion that we are the great director of everything around us. As an aviation team leader, can I control the avalanche of airline pilots descending on our industry? If I am the executive to whom aviation reports, can I immediately control the seemingly unstoppable aircraft expenses that are incurred even when the aircraft are not being used? If I run a family office, can I control the local regulations that prohibit my principal from traveling to their desired destination? The answer, of course, is no. Trying to move a mountain only costs us energy. Learning to ask, "Is this something I can control?" will quickly increase our personal efficiency.

Question 2: How do I create value for others?

An aviation leader must actively evaluate what value on-demand transportation provides those they serve. If you are the executive to whom aviation reports, does your aviation leader ask probing questions? Are you communicating the changing corporate strategy? The current value of business aviation may not be less than it was pre-COVID but will probably be different. Have you begun to shift to a new model? We recently completed a risk review for a privately held enterprise that owned their own aircraft and outsourced the operation to a management company. We suggested they completely review their executive access and board use policy. There was a need for key executives to travel, and the aircraft had the ability to serve the additional demand. However, they did not have easy access to the aircraft.



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Question 3: Can I be honest?

Not comfortable shaking hands? Tell somebody. Learning to be clear about our expectations at the beginning of the conversation is a key relationship skill. I have learned to ask clients if they would prefer to meet virtually or in-person. If they want to meet in-person, I disclose what other places I have been and how I have been managing my contact with others. Offering this information upfront gives others the opportunity to express their thoughts without feeling judged. Have we considered the same level of transparency to our aircraft users? Would you like to know where your crew has been? For some, this may create information security issues. What about the crew member who is comfortable flying to Des Moines, Iowa but is uncomfortable traveling to Atlanta? Are we creating an atmosphere where others can share their thoughts? Does the executive to whom aviation reports feel comfortable engaging their aviation leader with the question, “What does it look like to reduce our expenses by 50%?” I recently completed a leadership and engagement project with a large aviation department. Implementing a practice of candid, non-judgmental, communication would have solved 80% of the issues we identified within their aviation and executive team. Organizations that learn to talk constructively about the “unmentionable” topics have the greatest opportunity to create value in the future.

Next Steps

My father, an executive for a large corporation, scheduled an hour a day for “thinking.” I would offer there may be value in closing the door and participating in a reflective routine.

As you review your circumstances, write down the items you can control, what value you need to create, and what you need to say or hear. Consider listing both personal and professional thoughts. When you are done, reflect on the “big picture.” Maybe even sit with one of your trusted advisors to share your list.

Control	Value	Communication
What can I control and what is outside my control?	What value do I need to create for others around me?	What do I need to say and what do I need to hear?

When I reflect on my own list, I am left with an overriding feeling that tomorrow will not look like yesterday. The tools, skills, standards, and assumptions we have been using in business aviation may not create value in the future.

In a world full of ambiguity and turmoil, constant evaluation is key. To learn more about this, contact VanAllen today.

Contact VanAllen to learn more.