



# Case Study: Adopting a Proactive Mindset During a Crisis

By Hannah Bick and Steena Chandler

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*How one E&C company decided to grab the global pandemic by the horns instead of waiting around for it to impact its operations.*

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With the world around us changing at a rapid pace, it's easy to adopt a highly reactive, alarmist mindset. The constant influx of information and the need to make quick decisions create a constant sense of urgency; but leaders must retain clarity of vision and purpose in order to be able to make the right choices to protect their people and their companies' futures.

While almost every business has been deeply affected by the COVID-19 virus, few have been able to successfully deploy solutions to the urgent problems facing society. The FMI team had the opportunity to interview Faith Technologies' Senior Vice President John Gunderson, who runs Faith's manufacturing division, Excellerate, to learn how his team is leveraging existing capabilities to innovate during the current crisis.

When asked how Faith Technologies is innovating in today's environment, Gunderson says the company has leveraged its prefabrication capa-

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John Gunderson, Senior Vice President  
Faith Technologies Manufacturing Division

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bilities and containerized solutions expertise to open an entirely new market. "We decided to repurpose and combine our separate efforts and make mobile and transferable hospital rooms," he explains. "It's not far off from the containerized solution we were already making, and not much different from our construction trailers."

This was a bit of a stretch for Faith Technologies, but one that its leadership was able to make in terms of product capability and capacity. “I would say it was on the edge of what we thought was possible,” Gunderson says, adding that the plan came together organically. “We were wondering what we could do to support the community based on what we were already making, and we wanted to create a solution that would keep the business moving.”

Upon speaking to a doctor in Chicago, the Faith Technologies team learned that his facility’s makeshift hospital beds were hardly up to the task of accommodating an influx of patients suffering from COVID-19. “We knew we could come up with something better,” says Gunderson, who said the team learned some hard lessons about the importance of getting in front of opportunities and making the best of the situation during the 2008-09 recession.

“This time around, we wanted to hit it on the head,” says Gunderson, “versus just ‘wait it out.’”

## Team Resilience Impacts Innovation

Armed with core values that are deeply rooted in redefining what’s possible and driving innovation, Faith Technologies was already prefabricating equipment for the Children’s Hospital in Milwaukee and doing containerized solutions elsewhere when COVID-19 reared its ugly head. “When we put it all together, it made sense to innovate and bring a solution to market.”

“We’re in the problem-solving business, and this was a global problem that needed solving,” Gunderson says. “We’re not in the space where we can solve it all, but we can certainly create a modularized prefabricated construction solution to help the health care community; so we just went all-in on it.”

Just a few days later, Faith Technologies started talking to customers about the innovative new solution. The entire company got behind the effort, with all team members rallying around the new idea. “Everyone had a lot of energy going into it and felt like being a part of the solution to this larger crisis,” says Gunderson. “It’s interesting from a leadership perspective in this type of situation to see how people can go negative or they can elevate their game.”

Asked whether he ever doubted Faith Technologies’ ability to mobilize an entirely new solution in under one week, Gunderson gives credit to his team for overcoming the initial obstacles and points to the positive energy that resulted. “Some of our product development moved faster in the past two weeks than it did in the past two years,” he says. “We’re learning the value of actually doing rather than just conceptualizing.”

Still, Gunderson knew that getting a product to market in a few days was a long shot. “No one thought we could get a multitrade containerized design for health care that’s deployable to anywhere in the country in two weeks,” says Gunderson. “When we got together and worked to make it happen, it happened. There’s a lot of pride in that and a lot of energy.”

## Guided by Core Values Every Step of the Way

Reflecting on how his company’s purpose and core values inform decisions during a major, worldwide crisis, Gunderson says it’s times like these when the basic aspects of a firm’s core values become the most important. For Faith Technologies, those values are: a focus on safety and trust, redefining what’s possible, team ethics and team success.

“In times like these, you can rally around those; these are the bedrock of how we solve problems,” he explains. “They help to get alignment around the goal of getting a solution to market and



doing as much good as we possibly can. And it's a win-win for suppliers, trade partners, workers and the health care community.”

Acknowledging the hardships and challenges presented by the crisis, Gunderson points out that there have been numerous “silver linings” for Faith Technologies during this difficult period. For example, the company has made improvements and progress on some of its existing structural and building designs.

This bias toward action allowed Gunderson's team to create solutions that go beyond the current crisis. “In terms of brand recognition and reaching different areas of the country and different potential customers,” he adds, “the work we've been doing will all be beneficial for existing and future partnerships.”

## Strong Leadership Supports Positive Action

Tough times call for strong leaders, and the Faith Technologies leadership team showed that high commitment, combined with purpose, can be a driving force for problem-solving. This proved to be yet another advantage for the company, whose leaders were forced to manage an extremely high level of ambiguity overnight.

“Many of our employees are either tradesmen or engineers; their expertise is not necessarily focused on taking big risks. But we had to make some assumptions and take risks here; and the design

had to be iterative,” says Gunderson. “You're operating with limited information and somewhat limited resources—they're not infinite.”

Along the way, teamwork, collaboration, risk-taking and decisiveness in the face of a tight timeline also came into play, helping Faith Technologies realize its goal of creating a product that could address a very real and current problem. Through that process, Gunderson says it was interesting to watch how challenges with working relationships sort of “melted away” when everyone was working toward an urgent vision.

“This allows people to come together to achieve a team goal that they hadn't yet thought about,” he says. “I cannot understate the amount of energy and effort that needs to go into it from a leadership perspective.”

## “We Didn't Set Out to Change the World”

To other industry leaders that are grappling with addressing certain challenges during this time of crisis, Gunderson says it's important to understand that there are many different ways to add value in any situation. To do it right, he says, you must think about how your particular capabilities might add up to a solution and then take the necessary action to bring that idea to fruition.

Faith Technologies' innovative course of action illustrates one of many ways that E&C leaders can motivate and inspire their teams to reach a

bold vision by leveraging company values and hard work. More than ever, leaders must think critically about how they can utilize their existing resources to proactively respond to the changing environment.

In the E&C environment, the most innovative and effective solutions come from leaders who intentionally leverage the creative thinking of their teams and pursue paths that align with their purpose and values. Now is the time to look closely at how your leadership team is driving the organization forward.

Gunderson summarizes it well, “We never thought we were going to solve the whole problem; we thought there’s probably a place where we can help. Our problem statement was: We can do better than what we see out there. We didn’t set out to change the world; we just set out to solve one problem that was matched with our capabilities.”



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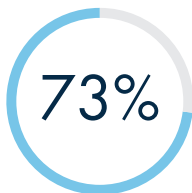
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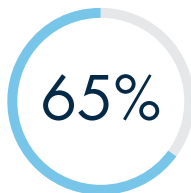
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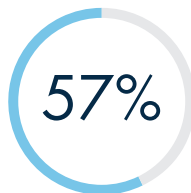
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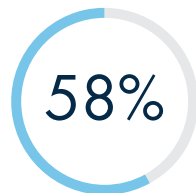
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