



To our team members, partners, stakeholders, friends and families:

We are living through a challenging time—one we will undoubtedly tell our unborn children and grandchildren about in coming years. COVID-19, a virtually inconceivable threat until it was upon us, is forcing us to rethink the definition of uncertainty and our plans for the future in every area of our lives and in every industry.

In the design and construction industry, the story of COVID-19 is just beginning to unfold. But as it continues to do so—from broken supply chains to material shortages to security issues to remote workforce concerns—we cannot lose ourselves in a sea of confusion and vague unknowns. We have the opportunity to lead courageously, think courageously, rebuild courageously and deepen the trust we want, and need, with our employees, partners and clients.

My first thoughts are with those affected most by this catastrophe. My heart goes out to the many ill-equipped healthcare professionals on the frontlines as they fight the virus heroically every day while dealing with shortages of protective gear, ventilators, tests, knowledge and time. We extend our faith to those who have contracted the virus, and our deepest condolences to the families that have suffered a loss. And we have hope and empathy for the millions of employees and businesses who are isolated and at risk.

Yet through this all, we are creating a new script for how to work together now and in the future. And we are heartened by the fact that each moment is yielding new discoveries and innovations to help our fight.

Like me, I am sure many of you faced a powerful COVID-19 moment of reckoning. Mine came last week when a high temperature forced me to stay in Miami instead of flying home to Washington, D.C., the next day. I realized our lives had changed. I had just finished reflecting on McKissack & McKissack's achievements over the last 30 years and what we might hope to accomplish in the future. But I realized much of it was no longer relevant. Instead, what was going on around me was not only critical, it is what will redefine the future roadmap for most businesses.

My thoughts raced to all the families that we are personally responsible for today. I thought about their health and their livelihoods. The pandemic imposed an immediate threat to not only their health, but also their livelihoods. And industry downturns can affect all of us. Business continuity has always been an essential tenet in our industry, and we have never faced a situation where our entire team would have to work remotely.

It brings up obvious questions. What does work look like today, and in the near future, for our employees, their families, our partners and even our stakeholders? How can we continue to sustain our business so we can avoid disruptions and support them all?

Part of being an effective CEO is knowing how to be flexible and try new things. With the changes COVID-19 has brought to our workplace, I've had to learn to trust that our team is doing everything as efficiently and effectively as possible—even if our leadership team can't see them do it. Thanks to advances in technology and automation, we have already been working virtually for quite some time—yet often in one of our offices while collaborating with colleagues in other locations. But I had to trust that this could continue even when team members were no longer sitting right next to each other.



And as it turns out, trust changes everything. Not only is our team working effectively, they're working more collaboratively than ever before to produce documents and meet major deadlines. I believe our team's heightened level of collaboration signals a sea change for our company's culture. And ironically, it has been spurred by working virtually these past few weeks rather than in physical proximity.

Much of this sea change is due to the consistent way we've structured team check-ins daily, met more frequently and strengthened procedures. In truth, our daily COVID-19 update calls give solace to the entire team. And it's all made possible by using technology flexibly and in more sophisticated ways. It has given us a remarkably effective and intimate way to stay connected despite our individual isolation.

We've all learned, and will continue to learn, much from this experience, and will talk about these lessons learned on our new blog going forward. As a CEO, this has strengthened my leadership. As a team, we've learned that sometimes you need to have everything torn down and taken away to build it back up better than ever.

But as a CEO, my most important realization is that this crisis presents us with so many meaningful learning opportunities that will make us not just better professionals but also better, and more compassionate, people in the long run. I firmly believe this because I see how my team is coming together and working so hard to get through this time; I can only assume this will lead to stronger relationships between our team members and with our partners and clients—as well as new economies of scale, innovations and improved project outcomes.

The key to achieving all this is to remind ourselves of our commitment to three principles: communication, collaboration and, most significantly, trust. This situation is reaffirming my trust in all the professionals I work with; teaching me a new way of doing business; and helping me lead purposefully and courageously. My goals are now clearer than ever: to make sure my employees and partners are healthy and safe, with all the tools they need to be productive, and to build on the lessons we've learned from this tragedy to serve our clients and stakeholders more effectively than ever in this new world order.

Sincerely,

Deryl McKissack