



**ADF** | INNOVATORS IN  
HEALTHY AGING



## 2020: A FIGHT TO SAVE LIVES INSIDE A NOT-FOR-PROFIT MILITARY RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

KNOLLWOOD COVID-19 HISTORY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# THE KNOLLWOOD COVID STORY

For communities across the nation, COVID tested the ability to keep older people and the frontline caregivers and staff safe. For the ADF (Army Distaff Foundation) and the Knollwood Community, it was an unprecedented time revealing six key lessons summarized below.

## AGILITY

COVID required the organization to “think outside the box” and set the conditions for not transmitting the disease. The Knollwood community was the proverbial box. And staying in the box – meaning in close quarters, which heightened the risk of transmitting the disease in a small community during a pandemic – limited our ability to “get out of the box.” Testing created the opportunity to step outside of the box safely.

### DEFINITION

Agility is “out of the box” thinking”. Leaders make “smart and effective decisions in a rapidly changing world. It’s being able to anticipate the best way to go forward; knowing the best ways to inspire your team; turning thoughts and ideas into actions; and evaluating results for successes and failures,” according to Study.com.

Agile leaders make a difference because they can evaluate situations and act beyond the immediate crisis. They draw people in and use their knowledge and ideas to develop strategies and address circumstances. They pivot when conditions change again, turning challenges into opportunities. Agile leaders search for solutions or at least stopgap measures, keeping in mind the mission and goals of the organization.

### KNOLLWOOD EXAMPLES OF AGILE LEADERSHIP

During the pandemic, ADF fundraising operations temporarily ceased and the entire fundraising team re-organized into a strategic operations unit. As strategic

operations unit, the development department focused upon communications, data collection and tracking, procurement, and resident support services. By thinking outside the box to address Covid-19 and re-imagining staff roles to fit the new reality of the pandemic, they contributed to the safety and health of residents and staff.

### THE RESULT OF AGILE LEADERSHIP

Thinking outside the box made Knollwood safe and reduced deaths. The numbers indicate how this out of the box thinking set Knollwood apart. According to The Atlantic’s Covid Tracking Project, the District of Columbia in April-May-June saw nearly 200 daily positive cases of the virus. In April and May, hospitalizations from Covid-19 reached as high as 450 people on a 7-day average, and deaths on a 7-day average exceeded 12 per day. For long-term care facilities and nursing homes in the District, by the end of June in 30 facilities, 975 residents of long-term care and nursing home facilities had tested positive and 162 had died of the disease. Knollwood stood strong with only 9 residents dying from the disease, and there was a remarkable 150 days with no Covid-19 in Knollwood.

## INTEGRITY

The organization demonstrated integrity when explaining the decision-making process before the availability of vaccinations. In the early days of COVID, at the height of the pandemic, it is difficult to tell key personnel like frontline caregivers, managers and directors that they have to stay home on quarantine, especially with mild symptoms and no ability to test initially. The organization held a firm line on any staff member who demonstrated the slightest symptoms, insisting staff stay home to ensure residents and their colleagues would not risk being affected. In many cases, staff expressed strong interest in returning to work and serving the needs of the community prior to clearing the requisite 14 day quarantine period and getting a clean bill of health. Although this presented a challenge to health administration operations, the practice recognized that the decision was best for the whole community.

### DEFINITION

Integrity is considered by many as one of the top leadership traits. Integrity in leaders refers to being honest, trustworthy, and reliable, as described by Sigma Assessment Systems. Leaders with integrity practice what they preach and do not hide from their mistakes. Leaders with integrity model ethical behavior and follow-through on their promises. They are consistent in their actions and decision-making.

Integrity in leadership also goes beyond moral behavior, according to Shonna Waters of Better up. Integrity involves creating a positive work environment. Leaders express gratitude to their co-workers. They respect themselves and

others no matter the circumstances. They foster openness. Leaders with integrity demonstrate patience and flexibility despite mistakes or unexpected challenges. Integrity provides room for leaders and their staff to interact in a positive and trusting workplace.

### SIGNIFICANCE

ADF and Knollwood had a responsibility to follow the DC Health Departments requirements in name and in spirit. The organization could not show favoritism toward individuals or make the requirements less onerous. The organization interpreted the requirements to the Knollwood setting with an eye toward protection and safety. The integrity of the entire medical establishment at Knollwood rested with the faithful implementation of the DC Health Department rules.

### KNOLLWOOD EXAMPLES OF LEADERSHIP WITH INTEGRITY

ADF and Knollwood functioned under a whirlwind of changing regulations, magnifying the need for integrity. The DC Department of Health, acting under guidance of the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), implemented and updated requirements for protecting people from the virus. With changing scientific and medical information, the DC Health Department necessarily modified its recommendations. Knollwood’s top managers addressed this volatile situation with the CRB (Coronavirus Review Board), which included the Medical Director, Director of Nursing, the Infection Control Nurse, and the Knollwood Administrator.

Knollwood displayed integrity in a different example. With the beginning of testing for Covid-19, staff members who tested positive would be sent home for quarantine. Knollwood leaders decided to not dock employee vacation or sick time for this two-week quarantining requirement. Having the best interests of employees at heart was an act of integrity. Knollwood leaders built trust and fostered commitment through this decision to support employees at their most vulnerable.

### THE RESULT OF LEADERSHIP WITH INTEGRITY

Integrity in leadership has meant that Knollwood has created a reliable and positive environment for staff and residents. The rapidly changing situation of the pandemic might have produced overwhelming fear and halted all but the most essential actions. Leadership instead made integrity an underlying rule for making and implementing decisions. Residents felt heard when they asked the CRB to recommend action regarding a family visit. Union members felt protected by management, knowing that their paid leave was safe. People trusted each other and knew that no one received favored attention. This setting helped Knollwood meet the pandemic challenge in its fullest way possible.

## CREATIVITY

Knollwood’s staff and leaders demonstrated creative leadership in a myriad of ways. The most common question and refrain was to ask to one another to “think deeper” in finding a possible solution to a vexing problem. This management philosophy built a framework for inspiring creativity among the staff at every level of the organization. The organization understood it was important during the Covid-19 pandemic to bring a little bit of levity to counteract the doom and gloom. Staff and residents were feeling uncertain and anxious. And the situation required creativity.”

As a non-profit, the organization required creativity to think about how it was going to accomplish the mission during COVID. And that requires flexibility. It requires creativity. I think it’s important not to be stuck in our ways of working and doing and just really being able to pitch in and do what’s necessary.”

### DEFINITION

Creative leadership, according to THNK.org, is the ability to create and realize innovative solutions especially in the face of structurally complex or changing situations. Creative leaders can set clarity of purpose for their teams even when everything seems to be shifting and new approaches are unknown. Such leaders are often driven by a larger vision, wanting to improve life on a global basis or showing people that what they thought was impossible may not be.

Creative leaders foster creativity in others. They value new perspectives and diversity of experiences and backgrounds. They remove barriers so that people can take risks, but these leaders also provide a safe harbor in case risks go awry. Creative leaders foster education for themselves and their teams. They draw upon their team members’ expertise as a resource for further creativity.





SIGNIFICANCE

In the face of a 100-year pandemic, in which people were dying with no known cure, creative leadership was essential. Knollwood’s leaders had no playbook to draw upon. Medical and scientific resources were incomplete and sometimes wrong. But Knollwood had a responsibility to its residents, people who had served their country and their immediate family members.

Knollwood also had a responsibility to its staff, many of whom chose to work at this long-term care facility because it served veterans and their families. These dual responsibilities meant that leaders had to think creatively to address the unknown. They needed to keep a sense of calm determination within the facility while experimenting with ideas to keep residents and staff safe and protected. Top management encouraged directors to take the lead in their primary areas and find creative ways to meet resident and staff needs.



KNOLLWOOD EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

The organization displayed creative leadership at the beginning of the pandemic by finding innovative solutions to the essential question of how Covid-19 entered Knollwood. Long-term care facilities rely upon a range of skilled nursing staff who provide short- and long-term care for residents. Many of these skilled personnel work at multiple facilities, which means that they might contract Covid-19 at one place and then unknowingly bring it to another. The DC Department of Health did not keep a database early on of where Covid-19 struck and who was sick. The organization scoured media sources in a meticulous process and reported the findings to team members so that Knollwood’s leaders would have some warning if personnel potentially carried the disease into the facility. This example of creative leadership saved lives.

The organization used creativity by thinking creatively about bringing wellness to residents and staff. Residents in skilled nursing had severely restricted access beyond their caretakers, staff used carts to bring art supplies or reading materials in a socially distanced way. People under quarantine sometimes had ice cream sundaes delivered via carts, where they could choose the toppings. During the pandemic, the staff opened a MakerSpace where residents could use a 3-D printing machine to make earrings or use self-threading sewing machines to sew different fun items. The staff needed attention, too, due to the toll the pandemic had had on staff. So virtual yoga classes were offered for all staff members to reduce stress and burnout.

The organization promoted the idea of starting gratitude journals to cite what we are grateful for. It was a good example of creative leadership to address the wellness of residents and staff during very trying times.

THE RESULT OF CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

Creative leadership at Knollwood has found solutions to significant problems, such as tracing staff members who work outside the facility. However, creativity also meant that needs were met sometimes in fun and quirky ways.

COURAGE

Knollwood’s top managers regularly recognized staff members who had done exceptional work in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. People who really cared about their job, really cared about the people they were taking care of and were professional and dug down deep, reaching into their bag of courage pressing on and caring.” Courage was essential to meet the challenge of caring for the facility’s residents.

DEFINITION

Courageous leaders, according to WeWork.com, push through uncomfortable situations. They make difficult decisions and do not back down when things get too hard. Courageous leaders will climb over obstacles, confront the tough, and do that every day. Their actions inspire others.

When circumstances change, courageous leaders take the next step. They lead their staff into what may be uncharted territory with confidence and knowledge. They help their organizations progress and succeed.

SIGNIFICANCE

The simple act of showing up at work each day, helping residents at Knollwood during the Covid-19 pandemic, required courage. Courageous leaders set the example and applauded their staff members who followed and gave more. Everyone came to work every day, though many chief executives stayed home and managed virtually. The example Knollwood chose to set was to be courageous, and lead by showing up and tackling each challenge.

KNOLLWOOD EXAMPLES OF COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP

At Knollwood, each staff person feared for their own lives, the lives of their families and friends, and the lives of their co-workers and the Knollwood residents. Covid-19 is a deadly, unpredictable, and unforgiving disease. Directors and their staff members overcame these fears and came to work every day to do their jobs and more. They expressed the ultimate leadership trait, courage, to face whatever life may throw at them.

In the first months of the pandemic, Knollwood implemented testing of all staff and residents. The DC Department of Health refused to support such action, stating that only people displaying symptoms should be tested. An insufficient number of tests and the lack of proper equipment to conduct the tests likely influenced the health department’s reluctance to support full testing. But Knollwood’s top managers knew that they needed the tests to know where the silent disease was.

Knollwood aggressively pursued Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and identified a willing testing partner, LabCorp. Knollwood trained its nurses to do the testing. They were brave. They were fearless. They tested the community and staff continuously, the nurses demonstrated courageous leadership by setting an example to their peers and the residents.

The organization had the knowledge and the skills, but there was so much fear of the disease because it was unknown. Almost every single day, the organization had to ask people how they were doing. Each day, the organization had to recognize that caregivers will be

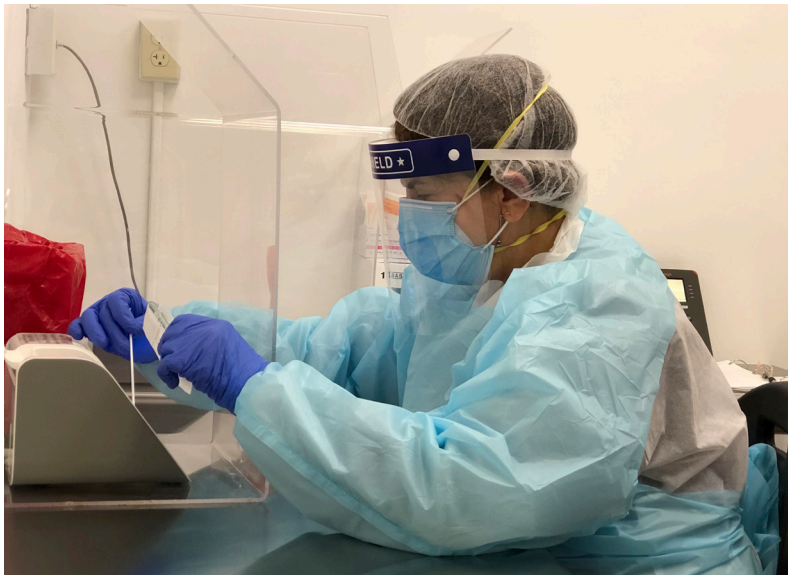
concerned for themselves and for the people they care for because they are afraid.

THE RESULT OF COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP

Courageous leadership has made it possible for Knollwood staff to confront the unknown and maintain a safe and healthy residential facility for America’s veterans and their families. Leaders made a difference every day that they showed up at work, followed safe protocols, and modeled what could be done despite the pandemic. From regular newsletters to wellness programming to care and attention for staff and residents, Knollwood’s courageous leaders modeled how to overcome fear and the unknown.

PERSISTENCE

Persistent leadership was a top attribute needed to manage during COVID. That same persistent leadership was needed at Knollwood when it was decided to have universal testing early in the pandemic. Initial guidance suggested only symptomatic people should be tested, which only spurred the organization to seek out LabCorp as a partner to conduct tests. In addition, Abbott was a partner helping Knollwood to establish an onsite testing lab.



DEFINITION

Persistent leaders, according to Michael Ray Hopkin’s Lead on Purpose blog, have determination and a mindset that no matter what happens, they will stick to their principles and goals. They recognize that achieving success requires hard work and overcoming obstacles.

Persistent leaders, according to FONA Leadership, do not act in isolation. They empower their workers to make decisions to support the goals of the organization. These leaders also reject a scarcity mindset. They think in terms of abundance and have a can-do approach to everything.





## SIGNIFICANCE

The Covid-19 pandemic challenged the basic functioning of every institution or organization worldwide. Governments and businesses came to a literal halt, waiting for guidance on how to proceed safely. These conditions challenged supply chains and initially reduced access to medically necessary items, especially Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Persistent leaders identified what their organizations needed and sought workarounds to obtain these items. They also sought support from outside their organizations but relied upon their own staff and ingenuity when obstacles appeared.

## KNOLLWOOD EXAMPLES OF PERSISTENT LEADERSHIP

Knollwood's persistent leadership in finding scarce medical supplies led the organization acquire requisite medical supplies of masks, gloves, gowns, goggles, and face shields. Key leaders drew upon their background acquire equipment from unlikely sources; mechanics used rubber gloves, and people who worked in shops wear goggles and paint stores carry Tyvek gowns and masks.

This effort paid off, but at times the scene at Knollwood seemed otherworldly. Early on, when supplies were hard to come by people would wear mechanical safety goggles or a wood chipper's face mask, for example.

Persistent leadership led to universal testing, which identified during the first round 20 + staff members with asymptomatic Covid-19. These staff members could have been spreading the disease without their knowledge. Persistence cut short this dangerous possibility, thus saving lives by conducting universal testing.

## THE RESULT OF PERSISTENT LEADERSHIP

Persistent leadership at Knollwood meant that people's lives were saved. The determination to pursue Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) allowed nurses to continue their assignments with confidence in their safety. Persistent leadership made universal testing the norm and kept Covid-19 from spreading through asymptomatic staff members and residents.

## COMPASSION

Compassionate leadership allowed "the human aspect" of dealing with Covid-19 to shine through the pandemic. Caregivers are affected as much as residents that could get sick. So it was critical to take care of the caregivers and the resident population at the beginning of the crisis and start educating everyone in order for the caregivers to give quality care to the residents."



## DEFINITION

Compassionate leadership, according to Michael West and Suzie Bailey in the King's Fund blog for the National Health Service of Great Britain, involves listening to employees and arriving at a shared understanding. Leaders empathize with and care for those they are leading and then take action to help or support them.

Compassionate leadership creates the conditions where the collective good, such as employees, are prioritized. This leadership style identifies and challenges inappropriate use of power. The center of compassionate leadership is the staff working under a leader and the resulting boost in morale from that attentive care.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The Covid-19 pandemic's severe possible results made compassionate leadership a necessary antidote. In the face of weeks- or months-long disability and the possibility of death, leaders who showed compassion helped raise morale and demonstrate to employees that their well-being mattered. Organizations could move away from fear and instead focus upon their mission and goals, comfortable with the understanding that leaders were looking out for staff.

## KNOLLWOOD EXAMPLES OF COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

The organization's team of nurses and caregivers expressed deep compassion and commitment to the resident population in their care.

Compassionate leadership was a prevailing attribute for caregivers who served the most vulnerable at Knollwood. Knollwood maintains a skilled nursing and memory care unit. The humanity made clear the staff's basic stance as compassionate leaders. When a memory care resident tested positive for Covid-19, all of the residents in that unit had to be separated. But these residents did not understand why. It led to confusion and a sense of isolation. It "was really heartbreaking and the need to express compassion was critical to providing wonderful care during the Pandemic.

## THE RESULT OF COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

Leaders at Knollwood expressed compassion to both residents and staff, boosting morale and giving everyone strength to survive and thrive under the Covid-19 pandemic. Compassionate leaders thought deeply about the people they worked with and cared for, seeking ways to improve life. These leaders made the human experience the priority. They sought creative ways to help those in need, and they thus elevated everyone, making for a better living and working environment.





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