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VITAL SIGNS

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Background

CivSource Africa is a philanthropy support and advisory organization committed to nurturing a more sustainable, effective, and connected civil society that advances the dignity and voices of all people. We do this through promoting reflective, responsive, and accountable philanthropic practice.

We work through our core strategies to support civil society organizations, movements, individuals, companies, and social enterprises to advance their mandates. We firmly believe that resourcing civil society and strengthening its leadership is critical for advancing social justice.

The Experience Leadership Retreat

One of our passions at CivSource Africa, is enabling leaders from assorted spheres to be their very best selves. We believe critical self-reflection is core, not only to our quality of practice but to our ability to withstand processes of exhaustion and attrition.

We believe leaders drive organisations as vision bearers; and that their well-being is crucial for the health of their organisations especially when it comes to growth and success. As part of our leadership work, CivSource Africa runs 'The Experience'; an Executive leaders' retreat that challenges participants in every field to achieve meaningful leadership growth through a critical examination of themselves.

Vital Signs

Just like the five main vital signs of the human's state of health, which include the measurement of: temperature, respiratory rate, pulse, blood pressure and blood oxygen saturation; CivCourse Africa performs a vital sign check on the participants of The Retreats after every quarter to reveal the wellness of leaders and their organisations. The Retreat methodology treats the body as the lens through which leaders examine themselves and their organizations. Through the examination of 7 energy points (also known as Chakras), the leaders' consciousness is awakened to the importance of the body as a vehicle through which to exemplify better, more healthy leadership of self and others. The metaphor of the body and the energy points in the body, are also used to help the leader examine how the organizational vehicle is operating. The tool used in The Retreats is one that supports civil society leaders to reclaim their wholeness. It is a powerful tool which integrates the heart, mind, and body, together with the organizations these leaders manage.

On March 30th, 2020, Uganda instituted a nationwide lockdown because of the coronavirus. The next three months (April - June), which are the focus of this quarterly Vital Signs report, have been some of the most challenging ones for many of the leaders who came to The Retreat in January. The leaders were, just like the rest of the world, adjusting to working from home, loss of jobs, physical confinement, pay cuts, downsizing within some businesses and organisations, and managing the internal pressure of acknowledging the presence of a virus which spreads fast, kills viciously and has no cure. Everyone is dealing with the effects of COVID-19. However, for leaders, by virtue of their role, there is an extra strain as they must carry everyone else around them.

Read about, how some of the leaders who came to The Retreat navigated the second quarter of 2020. Also read about how they took the tools they received at the leadership retreats and how they have applied them. Some fell and got up repeatedly. Some reached out for help when they could not cope on their own. Some became innovative, starting new projects and product lines, and pivoted. Others managed to simply stay alive. All of them, however, drew from the toolbox that was handed to them at The Retreat, to steer through this grim time.

This report documents testimonials of change over the second quarter of 2020, across four areas of the program impact framework:

Individual - Impact of the programme on the individual in body, mind, and soul.

Organisation - Impact on the organisation since the leader's well-being directly affects the wellness of the organisation

Collective - This term is used to describe the specific cohort that attended The Retreat and any synergies and collaborations created within the group. This could be as a whole or within smaller groups.

Society - Impact on the wider community the leader belongs to and represents. This is where movements could potentially be built.

What changes have happened for you, in the last 3 months, in your leadership journey because of The Retreat?

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I have become more deliberate about self-care. I was crushing under the weight of stress, worry and frustration. However, with the training on chakras, I was able to reclaim my vision, energy, focus and direction. I also developed my personal strategic plan which has helped shape my ambitions. I have become more deliberate about journaling and have adopted the gratitude-jar approach (fill a jar with what I am thankful for everyday). I feel less stressed, more confident about myself and able to stay levelheaded amidst calamities.

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Since The Retreat, I have learnt to take responsibility for all my choices and decisions. This has in turn helped me to take charge of my life. I am deliberate about separating myself from circumstances, thoughts and external voices which are harmful for me. Reflection questions about what is best for me have become routine: Who is Grace? What does Grace want? What does she need?

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The last three months were characterised by uncertainty because of the coronavirus. Working from home came with a whole host of challenges: work, being a mum, housekeeper and teacher all rolled into one. The Retreat gave me tools to build confidence and stop second guessing myself, especially during this season. I am journaling and I trust it will help me track my progress.

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The Retreat helped me to find balance, not to panic in a crisis but instead measure my energy levels and work towards staying grounded. I struggled to adjust for the first month of the coronavirus induced lockdown because very many things in my life were in flux. However, I leaned on the information from The Retreat to check my energy points. Whenever I found a chakra was out of order, I went to work on restoring it to health. This repeated process has helped me stay grounded and balanced during that season.

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In the last few months, I have been intentional to acknowledge and appreciate me, when I do big and small tasks, in any area of my life. I take deliberate time to re-energize and ground myself daily.

I am more patient and empathetic with myself and appreciate the-now without any regrets.

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I have continued to walk the journey of self-care, respect and listening to myself. It has required a lot of intentionality in this season of the lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Retreat helped me create a safe and respectful space, for me, which allows for self-reflection on how I am doing and my role as a leader. It has taken small incremental steps, while working from home, of listening to my body to take breaks and then get back to work when I am feeling better. I have also learnt to rest eight hours which was not the case previously.

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In the last few months, I have practiced reflecting on my vitals (chakras) on a regular basis to make sure they are balanced. I have also put myself first more than I used to. My savings have increased because of my intentionality in that area. Unlike previously, I now only make financial contributions to extended family requests when I absolutely must.

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During this season of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have concentrated on recreating and rebranding myself. It has not been easy unlearning and re-learning certain aspects of my life, but I have learnt to challenge myself no matter the price. I have also consistently gone for evening walks and this has enabled me to connect with nature and myself.

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The Retreat and follow up engagements contributed to a deeper appreciation, within me, of intentionally investing in staying grounded.

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For the last three months, I have focused on understanding which chakras are strong and which are not. This was critical for me to know where to focus my energies for effective growth.

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From The Retreat, I realized that sharing is a healing process as it helps one lift the heavy burdens in the heart. In this period, I have learnt to share my challenges with my support team which has provided diverse solutions and advise to overcome the present struggles in this COVID-19 crisis. Before The Retreat it was hard for me to trust anyone and share my challenges largely because I was afraid people would backstab me or share my challenges with other people. I am thankful for my friends, family, and elders (my support team) who have helped me to gain courage in this season.

““

Being a leader is tough. But having friends that listen and understand you and what you are going through is priceless. It has lifted off some burdens from me and given me help beyond my expectations.

Reflecting on the low and high times of my chakras has, from time to time, helped me find inner peace. Understanding me and my body has encouraged me to be more resilient, patient, and to listen to me with no judgment. I have grown deeper in my spirituality and focus which has helped me get through the season.

What changes have happened in the organisation/team you lead, in the last 3 months, because of The Retreat?

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The organization has taken more deliberate steps to reach out to individuals who are going through personal challenges. I was able to secure counselling services for one of our staff members who had a traumatic childhood. I have ensured that all the staff members stayed focused, energized, motivated and delivering even during the tough time of the COVID-19 lockdown.
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There has been better communication between my staff and I because I am careful to guard my emotional well-being. Angry words, judgement and negative criticism towards my team have reduced.
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There is a greater sense to accommodate people with different personalities, after The Retreat. Particularly people who may be very different from me. My relationship with organizational partners has become more understanding and as a result, productivity has improved.
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I have also been able to accommodate positive criticism because I am comfortable in my skin. I receive the information as feedback to do tasks better.
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I have been able to stay calm, during mostly negative changes, happening for my business. Most of our clients have changed their priorities due to the uncertainty of COVID-19 which meant putting our work on hold till next year. In spite all this, I have remained calm and grounded.
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During the last three months, I managed to read two books and listen to one on leadership to help me support my staff better.”

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I am more gender sensitive and aware to intentionally uplift women in my work spaces. I also serve with renewed passion and purpose.”

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For the last few months, I have been more aware of the energies that surround my team and how I can improve them. I have been intentional to address negative energies among teammates to improve the general working environment. This has helped forge closer relationships within the team and a greater awareness of team members' needs.”

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The last few months I have been deliberate about bringing my voice to meetings and discussions especially since meetings have been virtual. The morale at work has been low, particularly during online engagements, and because of this, some of my teammates do not say much during meetings. I have had to be intentional about using my voice to contribute to the team because I now believe I have something important and useful to share.”

I have stepped forward to lead in spaces I previously was reluctant to take responsibility for.

As a leader, I mobilized a group of colleagues with whom I started a saving group constituting 9 members. The group is continuously realizing growing savings. Members are able to borrow and take loans to help support themselves. The group is driven by a common goal of empowering ourselves economically

I have promoted the visibility of my colleagues when they did their work assignments well. I know this is important because it reminds people in my team that they matter and bring value to the business.

The great friends I made at The Retreat who have guided me through my organization's growth and transition, have been the mark of my three months. Wellness and healing are at the center of Rella's heart. We have been able to come up with a wellness and healing plan for our staff. This has and will help us empathize with each other's circumstances as we deliver our best.

What changes have happened within the Collective, in the last 3 months, because of The Retreat?

“ My cohort has in some ways been disjointed and low on energy. Perhaps a survey to find out why this is so would be helpful. I have tried to reach out to some of the members, but the relationship always seems one sided which leaves me exhausted and disappointed. We had 2 Zoom catchup meetings which I have attended and found very useful and enjoyed thoroughly. ”

“ I have built relationships with a few women from The Retreat. There is a sense of belonging and accountability whenever I interact one of the participants. ”

“ My relationship with one member of the cohort has been very helpful for career development. She has provided helpful advice as I transition to another role. ”

I have also been able to participate in feminist conversations organized and hosted by members of the Collective. ”

“ Amek and I shared ideas on how to bring life in our spaces. It was a good reminder of the spirit of sisterhood and support that is available in the cohort. I was able to check on her when she was going through a difficult time and I provided emotional support. ”

“ Delphine shared information about funding opportunities with me and another member of the cohort which we were encouraged to apply for. This gesture gave me hope and reminded me not to give up on doing my job, particularly during this season when the COVID-19 pandemic has made it normal to be discouraged. ”

I developed new friendships with the ladies from my Retreat cohort. Catherine hosted a feminist platform and invited us to attend. It was very uplifting and inspiring. This is an indication to me that a new network of women is growing.

I have supported the businesses of some of the women in the cohort by buying products from them. This was very encouraging especially in this season where businesses have taken a hit. I was glad I could help a sister economically.

I am in touch with individual sisters from the cohort, occasionally.

I have connected with Resty, a member of the cohort, and we have gone on walks together in our neighborhood. This has built a bond of sisterhood between us.

We have extended support to each other through sharing what has worked as well as put in practice the knowledge acquired during The Retreat. We have so far had three meetings empowering each other with lessons learnt and affirming one another. We encouraged each other to achieve more with the motivational messages from feminist mentors.

As a collective, our Zoom meetings have given me a sense of sisterhood and personal accountability. In everything I do, I know that I have to give accountability back to my sisters. It has pushed me in the right direction. More so, I have learnt to listen more and care more for people.

My sisters have given me an ear for all the ridiculous, tough, over-thought questions I have had in the last quarter. They have guided me in good and bad times with no judgment. I have even been able to create working relationships with a few individuals.

What changes have happened in your wide society, in the last 3 months, because of The Retreat?

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I am deliberately coaching and mentoring young people. After many years of travelling around the world, to over 30 countries, I am excited to share all that wisdom, skill, and experience with the youth around me. This is going to be my focus for a while.

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Recently, my immediate family told me that I am calmer and more forgiving nowadays. The wider family, including my neighbours, are hearing more from me than before - my voice chakra is active. I am no longer afraid to share correction or compliments alike.

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The Retreat gave me skills to parent better. I listen to my children more and allow them to be themselves.

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After The Retreat, our organization incorporated checking in with all our community structures, not on work related issues, but to find out how people are, personally. This has been especially critical in the last few months with the COVID-19 induced lockdown. The people in the community have appreciated us interacting with them on a personal level. We are going to continue this approach for the foreseeable future. As an organization, we now understand that the wellness of our community is our wellness too.

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As an Association, we are discussing initiatives we can undertake, as a group, to contribute to society. We have previously partnered with a Rotary club to carry out a community health project. However, with the new guidelines around the coronavirus we are in conversations to contribute more effectively to our wider community.

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The Retreat reminded me of the need to intentionally take care of my vehicle (my body-God's temple). When I am well as a person, I am better as a colleague, friend, wife, mum, daughter, citizen, brethren and thus able to bring my best to every relationship, leading with grace and humility. I am consciously holding out more for others, as a leadership function. I call other leaders and ask how to better support them or even just to listen.

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At community level I have engaged with women in my circles who were going through depression. I recently reached out to a friend who has been going through a very difficult time trying to balance her work and personal life.

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I ensured that a tenant, during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, was able to get rent payment relief. This was important to me because I learnt from The Retreat to consider the plight of people around me.

““
I have learnt to relate with different people, and I am slowly working on putting myself out there. I keep pushing myself and encouraging myself to leave a mark everywhere I go - I should be remembered. I am still working on my throat chakra so that I can share my experiences with different people as well.

What the Tests Show:

COVID-19 has caused a strain globally on the wellness, social, economic and political dynamics of individuals and institutions alike. Leaders all over the world, including those who attended the 2020 Leadership Retreat organized by CivSource Africa, have had to grapple with the destabilizing effects caused to them by the coronavirus pandemic, their families, organizations and businesses they oversee. In spite of the many challenges, the leaders were able to pick from the tools they received during The Retreat, in varied degrees, to find the most useful support for them and their organizations to stay afloat.

Contributors

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GET IN TOUCH

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