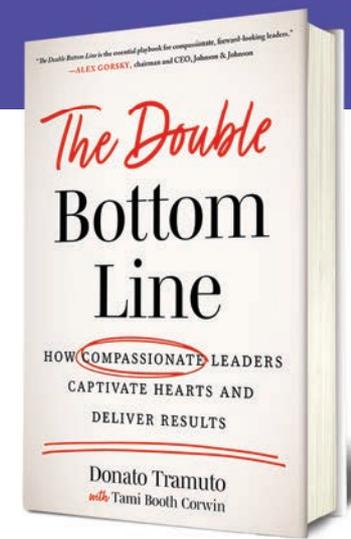


# Heal the Villages



## An Interview with Donato J. Tramuto, Chairman and Founder, Health eVillages

**EDITORS' NOTE** Donato Tramuto is the former CEO of Tivity Health and is widely recognized for his commitment to social change and transformational leadership in healthcare innovation that led The New York Times to deem him “a global health activist.” Tramuto is also the founder and chair of the TramutoPorter Foundation which advances young people’s rights to education and healthcare access and combats human rights violations. Since the launch of the foundation, over 100



Donato J. Tramuto

young adults have received a TramutoPorter Foundation Scholarship to pursue their dream of a college education and many organizations have received financial and partnership support helping them deliver on their promise to make the world a more equitable place. His three-decade commitment to social change and innovation has earned numerous awards, including the prestigious Robert F. Kennedy Ripple of Hope Award and the RFK Embracing the Legacy Award. Tramuto currently serves as a member of the board of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and is chairman of its Leadership Council where his foundation has committed to funding a three-year, \$1 million grant to address workplace bullying, leading a national initiative to address workplace dignity and inclusion in the U.S. and Europe. Tramuto is a passionate champion of cutting-edge approaches to healthcare access, drug safety, and addressing the social determinants of health (SDOH), defined by the World Health Organization as the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. Under his tenure as CEO of Tivity Health and following his execution of a successful turnaround, he transformed the business model to center around partnering progressively, profitably and collaboratively with consumers, payers, healthcare practitioners and employers in cutting-edge approaches to SDOH conditions including nutrition, fitness and social connection that improve health outcomes and reduce medical costs. Before joining Tivity Health, Tramuto’s record of bringing together social commitment with healthcare innovation included his founding of Physicians Interactive Holdings (Aptus Health sold to WebMD in 2019), a global provider of insight-driven digital engagement solutions for healthcare professionals and consumers. Reflecting a conviction that universal healthcare

is a basic human right for all people, he launched Health eVillages in 2011. Tramuto is a member of the Brown University Healthcare Leadership Board, as well as the boards of directors of the Boston University School of Public Health, the Livongo Health Foundation, Sharecare, Inc., GoCheck Kids, as well as a member of the Gryphon Investment Executive Advisory Board. A proponent of lifelong learning, Tramuto holds honorary doctorates from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, Thomas Jefferson University, Lasell College and

Saint Joseph’s College of Maine where he was recently named Honorary Scholar-in-Residence. Tramuto is the author of Life’s Bulldozer Moments: How Adversity Leads to Success in Life and Business and The Double Bottom Line: How Compassionate Leaders Captivate Hearts and Deliver Results.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Health eVillages ([health.evillages.org](http://health.evillages.org)) collaborates to advance healthcare access and improve the quality of care by providing state-of-the-art mobile health technology including medical reference and clinical decision support tools, as well as other community-focused resources, to medical and public health professionals in the most challenging clinical environments around the world. Its partners include Tramuto Foundation, Cherish Health, Promerica Health, Sharecare, Skyscape, and others.

### How do you define Health eVillages’ purpose?

Health eVillages was launched because of my having come across an article in 2010 stating that in our lifetime, 1 billion people will go to their graves prematurely because they do not have access to a healthcare worker. 6 million are children who will die each year because they do not have access to clean water or medication. This is simply unacceptable and recognizing that this problem cannot be resolved quickly by training more healthcare professionals, Health eVillages was launched to address this problem of healthcare access by providing state of the art medical content and decision tools via mobile devices. Health eVillages – when you examine the Health eVillages name more closely – it actually reads as follows – Heal the Villages, and that is precisely our mission: to

help heal the villages whether it be healthcare access, violation of human rights, addressing food insecurity or loneliness – whatever the challenge may be we are there to support the organization to address these challenges.

### Will you highlight Health eVillages’ work and global efforts?

Over the last 11 years we have addressed maternal, infant, and pediatric maternity in some of the remote areas across the globe. In Lwala, a small village in East Africa, we have helped to reduced infant mortality from 100 infant deaths per 1000 births to less than 20 deaths. We have championed the building of a maternity ward so that no pregnant woman will ever have to deliver her baby on a dirt floor – rather and because of Health eVillages, they are afforded the same opportunity to deliver their child in a clean and well-staffed facility. We have addressed loneliness by being one of the first organizations to call attention to this new chronic condition of the 21st century and encouraging everyone to take the time to listen to the stories of others. Health eVillages has partnered with organizations to provide mobile devices and education to seniors to help them navigate through the social media process to ensure they can get connected to others and to be engaged.

### How did Health eVillages adapt the way it works to address the challenges caused by the global pandemic and how proud are you to see the resilience of your team during this unprecedented time?

Long before the pandemic, Health eVillages was addressing the social determinants of health recognizing the fact that where you live – where you eat – your financial makeup, has more of a determination on your health outcome than your genetic code. When one looks at the last 24 months and examines the impact of the pandemic there is no question that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on the vulnerable population of people who live alone, who have financial challenges, etc. Health eVillages in the last 24 months launched the “Inspired Chat” calls bringing together people who were lonely, isolated and did not have a mouthpiece to share their feelings. In these calls, we addressed every week issues and challenges, and simply shared words of inspiration that would otherwise have been lost without having this forum. We launched during the 2020 Holiday season an outreach

program to support more than 150 families with food and gifts who would have otherwise not have enjoyed a much-needed festive holiday.

**What do you see as the responsibility that leading companies have to being engaged in the communities they serve and to being a force for good in society?**

There are many reasons why this makes sense, not least of which is the reality that the recent term the “Great Resignation” is more related to individuals feeling a sense of belonging than what I believe some are categorizing as employees wanting more pay. As outlined in my new book, *The Double Bottom Line: How Compassionate Leaders Captivate Hearts and Deliver Results*, the many leaders we interviewed were keenly aware of the benefits that come from active community involvement. Such engagement impacts the bottom line, yet more importantly it incorporates a “soul” – a sense of purpose in the company triggering significant brand loyalty. Today’s challenges are no longer successfully handled by one quintessential leader – rather they are best handled by groups of people from all demographics and generational bandwidth. As a CEO of private and public companies, I never saw my involvement in community activities as simply a focus of increasing shareholder value, although we did see increase return; rather my involvement was associated with the belief that I, as well as my company, had a responsibility to give back to the communities we served. That responsibility also includes creating a “purpose” for each employee who will spend on average 30-50 percent of their time at work.

**You mentioned your book, *The Double Bottom Line*. What interested you in writing the book and what are the key messages you wanted to convey in the book?**

After publishing my first book and traveling throughout the United States and in Europe promoting it, I uncovered a real thirst for more compassion and kindness in our world. Additionally, when that book was released in 2016, there appeared in the years after a significant decline of our ability to listen, to respect and to understand the varied viewpoints from others. If you were a staunch supporter of the opposing view of a certain issue, you were immediately dismissed. This became even more apparent in the corporate world and even in my dealings with my own Board of Directors specific to when a challenge surfaced, they would not take the time to understand the thought process behind how executives may have used their compassionate antenna to navigate to a solution and rather they would dismiss that approach as weak and arrive at their own conclusion leaving out important data points which in many instances did not yield the right outcome.

Hence, the idea of writing this book came to surface a few weeks after I left my role as CEO of Tivity Health. The notion of interviewing 40+ leaders – a control group – who had adopted a more compassionate leadership approach and had the results to support such an approach made perfect sense to me

as a data point that would help both current and future leaders to better understand that compassionate leadership is not weak leadership, and the many examples highlighted in the book support the opposite. Compassionate leaders are tough, yet compassionate, in how they make decisions. To avoid the trap of relying on insights from high-profiled leaders, we also conducted a global survey of over 1500 individuals to examine their perspective on compassionate leadership against the cohort of 40+ leaders. The findings are astonishing in that there is an enormous gap between what the control group sees as happening in the organization versus the survey group. For example, in our research of all workers, 86 percent said that a compassionate workplace encourages cooperation/collaboration which in turns leads to greater productivity, yet 68 percent of the survey group felt that the workplace was more competitive than cooperative. This is a very important finding, and we believe the research conducted provides other important findings and identified some actionable insights for leaders.

**What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how critical is compassion as a part of leadership today?**

Empathy Isn’t Enough: Empathy has been a major buzzword in the leadership discussion, but we believe empathy can be insufficient, even a negative, if it is not coupled with action. The gap in perception between leaders and those they lead shows that in many cases, leaders believe they are compassionate when they are probably stopping short of that – they may feel and express empathy, but without the action, it isn’t enough. It can even backfire if a leader expresses empathy for an employee’s challenges but does nothing. We believe that empathy + action is core to the definition of compassionate leadership.

The Compassionate Leadership Gap: A “Leadership Gap” exists in many organizations between what leaders think they are expressing and what their workers perceive or observe. We see compassionate leadership as a broad concept encompassing many key areas and dimensions. Once a leader identifies this gap in their own organization, there are myriad of opportunities to increase the potential within their workforce, to strengthen their teams, to increase productivity and innovation, and to drive better results.

The 3 C’s of Compassionate Leadership: We saw in our survey that there were three dimensions that workers perceived as the most important when it comes to compassionate leadership – communication, commitment and collaboration. This is compelling as we see communication and commitment as the two elements that combine to form trust. When employees receive clear, regular and honest communication from their leaders, and the action of the leader aligns with what they say, and when employees see that leaders are committed to their welfare and development, it builds trust and a sense of safety. These are keys to stronger teams and a healthy culture.

We also see that when employees see a leader actively working on their behalf, they are more motivated to work hard for that leader.

Compassionate leadership is the new model of leadership – it is empathy in action.

**Do you feel that compassionate leadership can be taught?**

Yes, and this was confirmed in our interviews with the 40+ leaders – no one was born with the compassionate gene and rather each one of them had unique experiences that created this sense of understanding around how to be compassionate. That said, there will always be a few who just for whatever reason will not pick up on how to incorporate the compassionate formula in their leadership mantra.

**You have been engaged in philanthropy for many years. Do the skills that made you successful in business translate to your work in philanthropy or do you approach this work differently?**

We are not segmented creatures and rather dynamic and what business has taught me is the importance of constantly recreating yourself. Additionally, I have also learned that leadership is not about doing one great thing – it is about doing a lot of little things that ultimately help you to implement a transactional and transformational strategy within your organization. These two skills are not easily grasped by everyone and once you have them and you are implementing them in your business, they can be used effectively in your personal life and in the not-for-profit world where I have utilized them to launch two successful not-for-profit organizations.

**What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers during this challenging and uncertain time?**

Unlike when I started my career where it was taboo to speak up and to add your point of view to a leader who may have been 20 or 30+ years your senior, today the gen Z and millennials have an equal place at the table and they must voice their insights, thoughts, and have the confidence to push forward their point of view. Second, there is no longer this notion that we go to work simply to get a paycheck – one must quickly assess whether the value system of a company aligns with your own value system. If, for example, you live one hour from the office and your employer is unwilling to be flexible allowing you to work a few days at home, then find a compassionate leader and company who is willing to support you. Third, develop enduring relationships early on in your career, not just at your level but throughout the organization. No one owns anyone in the company so do not be afraid to approach executives who are leading the company. Lastly, there is nothing wrong with taking “gaps” and if the pandemic has taught us anything, it has been a wakeup call that the life we live is temporal and the best approach we can take is to enjoy each and every day, even if that means five years into your career you want to take a break and spend a year doing something else. I truly wish I would have realized this important lesson 30 years ago. ●