



Managing with Empathy



With the shrinking of the traditional workspace, employees are reporting worsening mental health—in a recent study of telecommuters, 35% said their mental health had deteriorated. Of those 35%, 41.3% said it was difficult to separate their work and personal lives, followed by 39.9% who said they weren't able to do enough exercise, and 39.7% who said they had difficulty communicating with co-workers. We are in need of leaders to help with this transition and help those who still going in to work.

Leading requires people – regular everyday people – to step up and see above what *is* to look at where we want to be. Then guide people in our organizations on how to get there.

As leaders, how can we remove the barriers inhibiting our employees? Whether your workers are still going in to work or are working at home, you can better lead by focusing on three areas: empathy, inclusivity and motivation.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to recognize the emotions in another and understand the logic behind their emotions and is a skill that goes a long way for managers. Empathy and compassion significantly improve employee performance, engagement, and profitability. A recent study looked at 56,000 people across 77 organizations and found that “the single greatest influence on profitability and productivity within an organization...is the ability of leaders to be compassionate.”

For leaders, empathy is the ability to balance your managerial mandates with the context and feelings of your team. It is a skill that can be honed through practice.

Understand the unique circumstances that some people may be facing and make accommodations if needed

Negativity is an emotional contagion that will run amok given the chance. The leader sets the tone so managing your own emotions and emotional response goes a long way.

Most importantly, look out for signs that someone isn't coping well and increase contact. Understand where they are and get them the help they need.

Inclusivity

Some of us are being asked to work from home while others are not—each has their advantages, disadvantages and stressors. As leaders, the key is to provide equal access for everyone.

Technology: For remote work, it's important that everyone have equal access to technology. We have enterprise-wide social media tools

that allow us to store and capture data, to have one-to-many conversations, to share best practices, and to learn.

Meetings: If you're used to having meetings, continue to do so. Maintaining frequency of contact in a telecommuting environment is key to keeping your team united. Even if your team is essential, touching base with your team allows you to keep track of your employee's mental health.

Don't neglect the fun things! It's still possible to have happy hour, coffee breaks and lunch breaks virtually. There's ample research showing that virtual teams can be completely equal to co-located ones in terms of trust and collaboration. It just requires discipline.



Communication: Make sure that team members feel like they know what's going on. For those telecommuting, it can feel like they've been extracted from the mother-ship and if employees are still going in to work, they can feel insecure about their health or job security. Knowledge is comforting so keep all employees updated about the company, clients and common objectives.

Responsiveness: Just as communication is important among employees, managers must be available for employees to contact them. In addition, managers should be quick to respond so that employees are assured of their support. The coronavirus pandemic can cause a lot of stress and uncertainty. Not only that, but quick responses will prevent employees from feeling isolated.



Motivation

Between 2010 and 2015, a study was completed of 200,000 work-from-home employees worldwide. It shows that motivation went down with people worked from home. The study identified areas that negative motivation likely resulted in reduced productivity, which have probably spiked with the pandemic.

Positive motivators:

Play: Play is when you are motivated by the work itself, that you work because you enjoy it. But this motivation can decrease if it becomes harder for people to work from home.

Purpose: This is when the direct outcome of work fits your identity. You work because you value the work's impact. Purpose can also decline with team's decreasing visibility into their impact on clients and co-workers, especially if no one is there to remind them.

Potential: When the outcome of work benefits your identity, that's purpose. In other words, the work enhances your potential. Potential can decline if people can't gain

access to resources that teach and develop them.

Negative motivators:

Emotional pressure is when you work because an external force threatens your identity. Those still going to work may feel fear around their health or whether they may lose their jobs. Fear, peer pressure, and shame are all forms of emotional pressure.

Economic pressure is when you work because an external force makes you work. You work to gain a reward or avoid a punishment. Now the motive is not only separate from the work itself, it is also separate from your identity.

Inertia is when the motive is so far removed from the work and your identity that you can't identify why you're working. Inertia for work is bound to increase as people wonder if there's a point in even trying.



What can leaders do? The most powerful way to navigate this situation is to give people the opportunity to experiment and solve problems that really matter. These problems won't be the same for every team and may not be easy to identify at first. Your employees will need your help to do this. Resist the temptation to make work tactical only through strict processes, rules and procedures. While some degree of boundaries and guidelines help people move quickly, too many create a vicious spiral of demotivation. In such cases, people tend to stop problem-solving and thinking creatively, and instead, do the bare minimum. For more information, click [here](#) and enter the password s3.Uw2KW.