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Leading and communicating effectively during a crisis

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Now more than ever, companies need strong leadership as COVID-19 hits communities worldwide

Although working from home was trending prior to the new coronavirus outbreak, many companies only occasionally offered telecommuting options. That dynamic changed, almost overnight in some areas, from an option to a COVID-19 mandate.

Navigating these immensely difficult times isn't easy for anyone — especially for team leaders. You're the one people are looking to now in their uncertainty. This makes communication skills crucial, which includes the following:

CONTINUAL

A colleague reports that it wasn't until four days after his local government declared a state of emergency that he received an email from his work supervisor detailing new protocols and processes. Four days.

During that time, while prioritizing arrangements for his family, job uncertainty added to my colleague's anxiety. Was

the office open? Was business continuing? Were his existing projects disrupted?

To the extent possible while prioritizing health and safety, maintain communication with your team during this crisis while laying out expectations for communication frequency and duration. Even if those communications will not be able to provide substantive answers for the myriad questions you'll face, such communications serve an important purpose in maintaining connections and reducing collective anxieties.

CLEAR

Human resource issues will be top of mind for all, so anything you can do to provide reassurance about job security will be welcome. And if you are unable to offer such details, acknowledge as such. Transparency is essential for retaining any semblance of morale.

Each communication should also include precise details about future communications — their frequency and expected duration — while allowing for additional touchpoints should conditions warrant them.

If you are holding teleconferences, provide attendees with an outline in advance, ensuring that the discussion is focused to the greatest extent possible.

If there are unknowns, state them clearly and at the outset. For instance, my son's elementary school conducted parent-teacher conferences online, and parents were informed that the teachers had no information regarding when school would resume, whether classes would continue where they left off or if children would advance to the next grade if school did not resume until fall.

CALM

During this unprecedented crisis, your team members will look to you for solid leadership, which they will gauge in large part based on your demeanor. Remaining calm is essential, a behavioral regulation that demonstrates you are in control (even though, as this pandemic has underscored, there is so much that we cannot control).

Advance planning prior to communications may be necessary. Preparation structures your thoughts and keeps you on point as you address your team.

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