

## Managing My Team During Covid-19

With employees remote working, worrying about job security, experiencing anxiety, having to look after children whilst working, panicking about a global recession, concerned for elderly loved ones... keeping up swan-like leadership can be extremely difficult!

Here are a few tips to help you navigate this challenging time:

- Don't ignore the situation and pretend it's not happening. This will, understandably, annoy your employees. Be open and honest about the fact that you are all in this together and no one has all the answers. We are all trying to do the best we can.
- Try to avoid getting caught up in dramatic storytelling and try to avoid using sensationalist language. It's easy to accidentally join the, 'what if...' and 'have you heard...' clubs. Stick to the facts – what do we know here and now? Stick to the present. Avoid predicting the future, conspiracy theories and speculation.
- Show empathy and compassion, 'you're right, this is an anxious time of uncertainty'; 'oh you poor thing, that sounds really tough for you'. Ask your team how they are feeling. If they are struggling, show compassion.
- Don't judge people for how they are dealing with the situation. We all handle things differently. Practice patience.
- Try to have sensible, adult conversations about workload and include them in the conversation rather than telling them what to do in a transactional style. People are already feeling a loss of control at the moment. Include them and treat them as grown-ups, not children. If you start acting like their parent, they will behave like children.
- Signpost to useful resources, such as the mental health and remote working top tip documents.
- Signpost to support services, such as Mind or the Samaritans.
- Signpost to gov.uk for up-to-date government advice.
- Inject humour in to your skype calls and emails, share memes and jokes (as long as they're not going to seriously offend anyone). A little bit of banter can help keep everyone calm.
- Communicate regularly and check in with employees at least once a day.
- Ask them if they need any advice on how to structure their working day at home or how to create an effective workspace. Share how you are trying to achieve this yourself and what you've found works well for you. Ask them for their tips (you can learn from them too).

- Be as honest as you can be. Even if that is saying, 'we don't know what is around the corner and what impact this will have. I assure you I will keep you in the loop and please get in touch if you have any questions'.
- The pressure and responsibility will be difficult to juggle. You need to take time to look after your own mental health. Take a deep breath before responding to people. Think through what you say before you say it. Think through what you type before you send it. Respond don't react.
- Whilst it is good to be authentic, try selective authenticity. Show your team that you are in the same boat by sharing a few of your own challenges (genuine challenges). However, try to save the bulk of your inner fears for your trusted friends and family. Your team are looking to you for strength and hope at this time. If you need someone to talk to/vent to at work, to voice your own concerns, try calling a trusted peer, manager or HR partner.
- Allow time to disconnect outside of work. You may feel like you have to work 12 hours a day. It is very important to take breaks and rest. Working flat out is a false economy, you will not be as effective. Try to take some time to re-charge where possible.
- You could try a team challenge to collectively practice using balancing statements. Every time someone says something negative they have to try balancing it with a positive. It can be a bit of silly fun (which will subconsciously increase resilience at a potentially stressful time).
- Avoid unhealthy habits, don't rely on alcohol, caffeine and smoking as ways of coping (easier said than done, we know).
- Do not take employee frustrations personally, this is a stressful time and people are worried about their jobs as well as their health. They may take this out on you. Take a deep breath and practice the mantra, 'it is not personal'. Calmly explain that you are listening to them and doing the best you can in the circumstances.
- Learn to sit comfortably with the fact that you will not, and cannot, have all the answers. As managers, we often feel as though we have to know everything. No one has all the answers at the moment.
- Be as active as possible. Exercise will help reduce stress.
- If you're not sure how to handle performance issues at this time, for example if someone is under-performing whilst working from home, or whilst trying to look after children, and you're not sure how to handle it - please call an HR partner to talk this through. We are here to support you and provide a sounding board and our perspective.