Managing Employees in Uncertain Times

Human beings like certainty. But the coronavirus is here, and it is disrupting our way of life. That means a lot of uncertainty for a lot of people. During this difficult time, managers need to be especially mindful of the stress and anxiety of their workers. By providing more open and honest communication, empowering their employees, and removing roadblocks, managers can help make this stressful time less overwhelming.

Those who are fortunate enough to keep their jobs have been compelled to find new ways of working. The pandemic has prompted many employers to mandate telecommuting whenever possible. Asking employees to shift to remote work can be demanding and difficult under the best of circumstances. It can be especially challenging for organizations that don’t have remote work already embedded in their cultures.

Check Out Concern’s Coronavirus Resources

Coronavirus Resources

Concern is closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation. The health of employees and their dependents is our top priority. As we continue to react to the outbreak, Concern will post new tips and resources for yourself, your workforce, and the people you care about. Go to employees.concernhealth.com and login with your company code.

Successful Telework

One of the biggest challenges in managing remote workers is ensuring effective and efficient communication. Fortunately, there are many simple collaboration tools available. Check with your organization for tools and best practices that may already be in place. While there is no one size fits all for communicating in a virtual environment, here are a few suggestions that will help keep the lines open.

Clarify goals and roles. Revisit individual and team objectives weekly. Do not micromanage your remote workers. Instead, ensure each team member has clear objectives for the work week. Create a shared document that clarifies ownership of projects with deadlines regularly reviewed by the team.

Testimonials

Here are some quotes from HR Managers who recently called on Concern for a Management Consultation:

“The Counselor was asked to come back another day to assist. She was great at helping the team cope with our loss. We so appreciate her.”

“The Concern Clinical Manager went out of her way to make sure the problem was resolved and that we had all the information we needed to monitor the issue.”

“The Clinical Manager was extremely responsive to our situation and followed up to make sure our needs were met. Concern exceeded my expectations during this very difficult time for our employee family.”
Make time for collaboration and connectedness. Schedule time for virtual team huddles and team building to maintain engagement.

- Exchange cell phone numbers amongst the team and **encourage the use of a chat platform** throughout the day.
- Schedule a **weekly kick-off meeting** and at least two additional times to pull up as a team throughout the week to check in on priorities and connect with one another.
- Continue to **encourage group projects** rather than over-relying on solo work.

Empathize and manage the need for flexibility. Open communication and mutual understanding is key to a remote team’s success.

- Set aside time for the team to share their home work spaces—and note any restrictions; e.g., children at home, roommates, etc.
- When possible, allow flexibility for personal or family needs.
- Help team members work through disruptions and prioritize their time.

Make virtual meetings effective and engaging. Provide structure for virtual meetings and encourage active participation.

- **Encourage the use of web cameras** and the chat function for all virtual meetings.
- **Assign roles** to participants to manage the chat function, take notes, or lead an ice breaker.
- Open and close with **team building** like highs and lows, or sharing a meaningful object.

Provide guidance on working hours. Help employees set a realistic daily schedule so that there are boundaries between work and home life.

- Encourage **taking breaks** throughout the day to get outside or exercise.
- **Limit communication** outside of regular working hours.
- If team members need to adapt to their schedule, have them **use their away message to clarify when they’ll be working** and when they’ll need personal time.

*Sources: 2020 Advisory Board; Psychology Today, 3.17.2020*

**Be Alert**

Despite your best efforts, there will be times when things don’t go as planned. Some employees will need extra help coping with this new normal. If you see signs that an employee is struggling—maybe there’s less communication or they seem more unfocused than usual—talk with them to understand where they are. They may benefit from talking with a counselor. Encourage them to contact Concern for an appointment.

Don’t forget to take care of yourself. If you feel overwhelmed by stress or anxiety, Concern counseling and work/life services are available 24/7 by calling or visiting our website.

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Concern teams with Human Resources to provide another resource for managers and supervisors to consult about how to manage issues with individuals, within and between work groups, and across departments. When you call Concern, ask for a Management Consultant or request to speak to a Clinical Manager.

**Call:** 800.344.4222

employees.concernhealth.com