

the ADVISOR

RESOURCES FOR SUPERVISORS, MANAGERS, AND HUMAN RESOURCES PERSONNEL

Leading with Empathy During Change

The only certain thing about the COVID-19 pandemic has been a constant state of change. The pandemic has upended how we live, shop, travel, parent and, of course, work.

The impact on the workplace has been profound. It's likely your team has experienced one or more of the following changes:

- ▶ Working from home rather than at the office
- ▶ Virtual meetings
- ▶ New procedures, both when working remotely and in the workplace
- ▶ Turnover in, or the elimination of, key positions
- ▶ General uncertainty about the future

With so much change in the air, you may find it difficult to hold your team together. The question becomes, how do you help your team not just survive these rapid changes, but also adapt and thrive?

Empathy is one answer. An approach that emphasizes understanding and compassion will help your team stay focused on and invested in their work. Here are some ways to bring an empathetic mindset into your management philosophy:

- ▶ **Be aware of stresses.** Think about the challenges your team might be facing. These might include isolation, child or elder care issues, financial concerns (particularly if their partner now has limited employment), and general worry about both their own family and situations in the news.

- ▶ **Acknowledge losses.** Many people have experienced personal losses and disappointments in the last year. In addition, your team may be absorbing collective losses, such as the death of a colleague or decreased workplace camaraderie. Encourage your team to support each other through these difficult experiences.



Inside:

- ▶ Offering Encouragement
- ▶ Management Consultation



- ▶ **Create a sense of normalcy.** Many people on your team may find the stability of a work routine soothing. You can help to foster this feeling of “safe space,” even during rapid change, by creating a set schedule of events. Some examples include weekly team meetings or socially-distanced Friday lunches.
- ▶ **Establish purpose.** When too much change happens too fast, it can push people into survival mode. Give your team “big picture” goals to strive toward. Explain how day-to-day tasks are foundational to reaching these larger goals.
- ▶ **Shift the focus.** If your team has had change imposed upon them, shift the focus so that the change feels more

designed. For example, if your team no longer has access to a specific resource, shift the focus onto developing new processes that will work around, and perhaps even improve upon, how tasks were handled previously.

- ▶ **Embrace adaptability.** Change forces people into a state of transition, whether they want to be there or not. Encourage your team to focus on how adapting to constantly changing circumstances may benefit the workplace and help them grow as individuals. “What can we control?” and “What steps can we take to be more prepared the next time this happens?” are questions that will help your team maintain a solution-focused,

forward thinking mindset.

- ▶ **Express appreciation.** Frequently remind your team that you value their contributions. In addition, recognize individual team members when they step up to help a colleague or put in extra effort.
- ▶ **Avoid micromanaging.** Your employees were hired because they each bring needed skills to your workplace. Keep the focus on meeting your team’s goals and objectives and on following procedures that help them stay safe. Demonstrate trust in your team.
- ▶ **Maintain perspective.** Be sensitive to when your team needs to catch its breath and when it should put its foot on the gas.
- ▶ **Be honest.** Let your team know that you’ve been challenged by the last year, too. Encourage team members to access LifeMatters and other relevant company resources for assistance with stress, grief, and any other personal concern.

Instilling empathy into your management approach will lead to increased engagement, improved morale, and greater loyalty from your team. To learn more, contact the LifeMatters Management Consultation Service anytime.

How Do I Say That? Offering Encouragement

Sometimes, events within or outside an organization will leave your team shaken. Violent incidents, the stresses of the pandemic, a natural disaster, and changes at work are all reasons why people may feel uncertain or discouraged.

In these circumstances, it may be difficult to find the right words. While some people can come up with an inspirational speech straight out of the movies, others may be less sure of what to say. If your team needs encouragement and reassurance, try these tips:

- 1. Consult with Human Resources.** Determine what resources are available to assist

employees who may be feeling overwhelmed by current events or workplace change. The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service is also available to provide resources and can help you plan your message.

- 2. Determine a format.** Think about the best way to communicate about the situation. If everyone on your team is affected, a team meeting may be the best format. If individual employees are struggling, then a casual check-in call or a private meeting may make sense. In some instances, an email message to your team, accompanied by a



reminder that you are available if individual employees have questions, may be a way to start the conversation.

- 3. Provide realistic reassurance.**

Start the meeting or email by letting your team know that you understand that uncertainty is stressful.

Sample language: “These have been difficult times, and we are all feeling the impact.”

- 4. Reiterate your team’s value.**

Remind employees that the work they do is important. When appropriate, look for ways to tie what they do to the larger goal of helping their community.

Sample language: “The work you do every day matters not just to the organization, but to our customers and the city we live in as well. Thank you for your efforts.”

- 5. Be available.** Let employees know that you are available to discuss the situation in more detail.

Sample language: “If you have questions or need more guidance, please speak with me. I’m here to help.”





6. Remind employees that LifeMatters is available. Provide other relevant resources as well.

Sample language: “LifeMatters is available 24/7/365 to help deal with stress and other difficult situations. I urge you to call.”

7. If individual employees approach you, listen to their concerns. Be open to suggestions for how to improve morale or make difficult circumstances more manageable. Keep in mind that your role is not to act as counselor, but to help employees stay on track at work.

Sample language: “What would you do to improve the situation? I’d appreciate your ideas.”

8. Follow up. Check in with your team in the days and weeks following your email or meeting. Continue to do periodic “temperature checks” and monitor your team’s mood. Talk to HR about any further steps you could take, such as training, that might help your team cope with challenges.

The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service is available to support your efforts to maintain team morale. Call 24/7/365.

Management Consultation

LifeMatters is available to help with:

- ▶ Confronting an employee about performance issues
- ▶ An employee’s personal problem
- ▶ Suspected drug or alcohol use on the job
- ▶ Interpersonal conflicts between team members
- ▶ Establishing clear, attainable expectations for performance
- ▶ Addressing crisis situations, such as a violent incident, the death of an employee, or a natural disaster
- ▶ Your own personal concerns
- ▶ Any other work-related issue

LifeMatters offers professional management consultation when you need it, as often as you need it. Call anytime.

Call the **LifeMatters®** by Empathia Management Consultation Service toll-free anytime. **1-800-367-7474**

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Call collect to **262-574-2509** if outside of North America

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