9 Ways Leaders Can Support Their Team During a Crisis

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Your team is looking to you to help lead them through this adversity, and even though you definitely have a lot on your mind, you have to find a way to juggle all of your responsibilities while supporting your team. Here are nine ways you can achieve that goal.

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1. Prioritize health and well-being.

Your team is anxious and stressed about their health and the future of their careers. They may also be working too much or struggling with procrastination, depression or issues at home.

As a leader, you can support your team by suggesting mental and physical health tips. Ideas include meditating, eating healthy snacks, at-home exercises or fostering positive thinking. You could also organize digital health events or offer subscriptions or allowances for digital therapy. Most importantly, just let them know that you are available to speak to them whenever they need someone to talk to.

2. Don’t sweat the small stuff.

As I just mentioned, your team already has a lot on their minds. There’s no need to add even more stress and anxiety to their lives by micromanaging or obsessing over perfection.

A better direction? Grant them autonomy, think done instead of perfect and keep their workload at a minimum. I know that there are a million things to get done. But, right now, encourage your team to only focus on their priorities. If you want to have a great company culture like Google’s, everything else can be saved until later.

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3. Create resource lists for support.

“The best way to support your team during a crisis is creating a comprehensive internal messaging strategy,” writes Rebekah Grmela. “In addition to the helpful tips with in-person and virtual communication above, you must also simultaneously create strategic resources that will curate helpful links, applications, news sources, company-wide announcements and more.”

In addition to the email with bullet points, consider developing and sharing a Google Doc, FAQ sheet or dedicated Slack channel. However, keep in mind that during a crisis, not everyone may be available online.

4. Allow flexible schedules with asynchronous communication.

“If employees can’t meet their basic needs because their schedules are not flexible enough to allow them to do so, it’s

going to have a massive impact on their productivity," says Shannon Burns, an engineering manager at Slack. Studies have actually found that people with flexible schedules have less emotional exhaustion, psychological distress and work-family conflict. They're also healthier, more engaged, and productive.

If you want to support flexible schedules, here's how you can make a smooth transition:

- **Evaluate performance with results, not time.** "Before the pandemic began, I encouraged my team to work the optimal hours for their productivity, with the flexibility to meet for difficult-to-schedule meetings," Burns says. You can track results by documenting everything.
- **Improve your asynchronous communication skills.** All this means is that you shouldn't always expect an immediate response.
- **Communicate your schedule in advance.** If possible, share a team calendar so you can see when your team is available and when they're not.
- **Have better meetings less often.** Scratch those low-value meetings and seek alternatives like email or one-on-ones.

5. Be a true leader and not just a boss.

What's the difference between the two? Well, leaders influence, inspire and mentor. They're also empathetic and a part of the team. As for bosses, they command, explain and discipline. They also view their team members as subordinates.

Who do you think your team needs more during a crisis: a leader or a boss?

6. Foster fun and connection.

Yes, you can have fun at work, and studies have actually found that a fun workplace creates happier employees. Additionally, they're more satisfied, motivated and less stressed. It's also a solid way to forge relationships. It's a win-win.

Need some ideas? Well, you should never rule out tried and true techniques like celebrating accomplishments, birthdays or holidays. There's also team-building activities, virtual lunches, friendly competitions or volunteering together. You could also have a movie night, happy hour or Slack channels dedicated to non-work related topics.

7. Acknowledge and reward.

Even the most modest of us want to be appreciated. The reason? Recognition, according to Harvard University Faculty of Arts and Sciences, "serves as a tool for reinforcing the behaviors that drive an organization to excellence … through recognition, we also build a culture that attracts and retains the best talent."

It doesn't always have to cost an arm and leg. In fact, recognizing a team member before a meeting, writing a thank you note or giving them a shoutout on your website, newsletter, or social channels are free.

Other low-cost ideas? Offer them new responsibility, pay for an online course or give them allowance to optimize their workplace. The key is to be genuine, timely, specific and personalized.

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8. Help your team disconnect from work.

The main disadvantage of working remotely is that it can be challenging to switch off from work. That's because there's an expectation to be connected 24/7. In fact, right now, U.S. employees have been working an additional two to three hours per day. Eventually, that's going to cause your team members to burn out.

You can help your team avoid work-from-home burnout by:

- **Maintaining social and physical boundaries.** For instance, putting on "work clothes" during business hours and wearing comfy clothes when they're not. They should also have separate zones in their home, like dedicated spaces for work and relaxation.
- **Creating temporal boundaries.** Allow your team to create work schedules that are best for them.
- **Experiment with shorter weeks.** As opposed to the five-day workweek, switch to a four-day workweek.
- **Encourage your team to take time off.** If they have vacation time, suggest that they begin using it, even if it's just a staycation.
- **Focus on important work.** Don't add to your team's workload.
- **Encourage them to disconnect.** Lead by example and don't them during non-work hours.

9. Be kind to yourself and keep help if you need it.

"Like the in-flight oxygen mask, you have to take care of yourself first in order to weather the storm and help others," says Dave Hill Jr., founder of Go 2 Market Coach.

Mindfulness is an excellent place to start. It’s a simple and effective way to reduce anxiety and clear your head. Going for a walk outside is another way to keep you calm and add perspective. But, if you really need assistance, turn to your support systems like your spouse or mentor. If needed, do not hesitate in contacting a mental health professional.

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