

MANAGER BULLETIN LIFE ADVISOR

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Because employees bring more to work than just their lunches.



Managing employees during a crisis

As a result of the Coronavirus, we are making unprecedented changes in our day to day lives and in our day to day ways of doing business, in order to help curb the impact of a pandemic.

This means that leaders must be prepared to assess and implement changes, sometimes on a daily basis, as we receive new information and new recommendations from our government and public health officials.

Whether you are still operating at your worksite or managing employees remotely, we have some recommendations for Smart Managers that apply to both scenarios, as well as some recommendations unique to each.

Whether working from home or on-site, remember...

Empathy first. It's safe to assume that just about everyone is under some level of stress due to what's happening. There are stressors related to the virus itself and fears of getting sick or becoming a carrier, and then there are stressors related to the sudden changes we have had to make in our work and home lives. Assume everyone, is to some degree, "stressed out," and communicate accordingly. Ask how people are doing, listen to their concerns, and validate their feelings of anxiety and fear. You aren't going to be able to solve all of your employees' problems but listening empathically — trying to really understand where they are coming from, without judgement — goes a long way towards improving morale and inspiring confidence.

If you are working and managing from home ...

Make your virtual meetings count! Even with the right technology and the right mindset, virtual work meetings are a challenge. To minimize distraction, conversational tangents, and talking over one another, do the following:

1. **Establish a Meeting Leader** — this is the person who should keep time and make sure agenda items are being addressed.
2. **Establish some ground rules** — require that employees not work on other tasks during the meeting, and request that employees ask to speak before speaking.
3. **Lastly, if there are things that can be communicated by email and do not require a meeting, use email as your communication means** — attach a read receipt to your email if you want confirmation from each employee that they received the message.

Avoid excessively checking in unless absolutely necessary. It's a great idea to check in on a weekly basis, individually, with your team members if you are working remotely. If you are overseeing a critical task or project, you may need to check in more frequently — daily, maybe several times a day. But if things are running smoothly and there are no indications that business is suffering interruptions or setbacks, trust your employees to do what needs to be done. Frequent, unnecessary check-ins could be interpreted as a lack of trust and confidence in your employees.

Practice good email etiquette. Different organizations may have different expectations and different rules regarding electronic communication, and leaders and employees should adhere to those rules and expectations. However, it should be noted that the following are generally considered poor email etiquette: attaching a read receipt to every email you send; unnecessarily Cc'ing others on an email exchange; and Bcc'ing anyone or forwarding an email to anyone who is not directly involved in the exchange.

If you can be flexible, be flexible. If you have employees with children at home or other family members they must care for, and there is room for flexibility on working hours, allow your employees to be flexible on their hours and work at different times of the day so they can be the least distracted.

If you are working and managing on-site ...

Model (safe) social distancing practices. No more handshakes! (Remain at least) 6 feet apart from other individuals. If you cough or sneeze, do so into the crook of your elbow. Don't share food and be extra thorough when cleaning up after yourself in the cafeteria or break room. (Remember to wash your hands frequently throughout your shift and wear a mask.)

Avoid minimizing employee concerns about health and safety.

If you can do nothing else, listen and validate — let employees know you hear them, and that you are an advocate for them. We would urge you to exercise extreme caution in terms of considering whether to discipline an employee whose performance issues have to do with the employee's concerns about workplace safety.

Institute cleaning protocols. If your organization employs a cleaning service, make sure they are following current CDC best practice guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting work areas. If employees are responsible for clean-up, be sure to adhere to those guidelines, which include some specific instructions on cleaning materials and processes. Learn more here

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>



Make accommodations when possible. While you can't solve every problem or acquiesce to every request, if there are things you can do to make your employees feel safer and more comfortable, do so.

Such accommodations might include:

- Keep everyone's workspace at least 6 feet apart, per CDC guidelines.
- Make hand sanitizer available in multiple locations.
- Hang up posters near the restroom facilities promoting proper hand-washing and good health hygiene — these posters can be downloaded and printed at no cost from the CDC website.
- People can be emotional and anxious. Allow for extra breaks, when needed, to make a phone call for support or take a breather outside. And leadership, don't forget to recognize and appreciate your hard working employees. Recognition and praise can go a long way during stressful times.



For handwashing, visit here <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/posters.html>. For other hygiene-related posters, visit here <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc>

- Visit <http://www.LifeAdvisorEAP.com> – there is a COVID-19 link to Healthsource which includes posters, educational videos, and other great resources.