

5 Keys to Leading Through Coronavirus Uncertainty

Your team members are affected by the stress and uncertainty associated with the Coronavirus (COVID-19). As a manager, what does your team need from you?

Start With Yourself

Research shows that teams mirror the behavior of their manager, so it is critical that you tend to your own emotional needs first. Recognize that it's not the Coronavirus that is causing you stress, it's your emotional reactions to the news that causes your stress. Take three deep breaths and focus on what you can control. You can calmly lead your team through difficult situations. Use a mantra, such as, "I'll take it one step at a time," "I don't need to have all the answers," or "We will get through this."

Assess and Reach Out

Research shows that when times are tough, anxiety and frustration flourish while productivity and engagement fall. Over the next few days, look for the people on your team who display limiting behaviors, such as: withdrawing from the group, complaining, excessive worrying, and procrastination. Reach out to these people to have a calm and empathetic conversation.

Keep Communication Open

In times of uncertainty people often fill in information gaps with negative assumptions. Combat the spread of misinformation by keeping communication as open as you can with regular team conversations. If you don't have time for frequent meetings, send an email/text at the end of the day to share updates. If you get questions that you're not able to answer, say something like, "I don't know, but I'll do my best to find out."

Conduct Trust-Building Conversations

Communication during tough times often involves delivering difficult news. Resist the urge to put a positive spin on the situation at the outset. To communicate more effectively, use the "Bridging the Optimism Gap" technique, where you recognize the challenge and hear concerns before getting into solutions:

- Take a moment to anticipate team worries and concerns before meeting with them.
- Gather your team and acknowledge the challenges in front of you.
- Solicit reactions and listen to concerns.
- Introduce realistic optimism. For example, what things are remaining the same? Or say that even though things may be hard, you will be there every step of the way.
- Finally, discuss specifics and what this challenge will require.

Create Clarity and Reduce Uncertainty

As humans, we don't like change and tend to hang back and keep the status quo. However, now is the time to step up and set clear expectations for your team, getting down to the specifics to reduce uncertainty where you can. If the team is working remotely, for example, set up clear rules, roles, and responsibilities. Give guidance on how and when to check in, how projects will get done now. Be clear as to whether people should cancel upcoming business trips or not. Don't be afraid to revise your plan as things change.