

5 KEYS TO LEADING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

There are many things you need to do as a leader: strategize, build relationships, influence others, and get results. But when times are tough, what does your team need from you?

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Leading through challenges with resilience allows you to do more than survive in the short-term; it sets you and your team up for success so that they can ultimately thrive. Here are 5 research-backed steps managers can take to reduce emotional stress, make those hard decisions, and keep people focused—even when times are challenging and uncertain:

CHECK YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Research shows that teams mirror the behavior of their manager, so it is critical that you tend to your own emotional needs first. In challenging situations, our Iceberg Beliefs—deep-seated beliefs about how the world should work—get fractured, often causing us to react emotionally. This drives our stress and comprises our ability to focus. Try letting go of what you can't control. Use a mantra, such as, "I'm doing my best with the information I have," "I'll take it one step at a time," or "I don't need to have the answers yet."

ASSESS YOUR TEAM

Research shows that when times are tough, anxiety and frustration flourish and productivity and engagement fall. As a manager, the first step is to prioritize your efforts: Who needs your help? Look for the people on your team who display limiting behaviors, such as withdrawing from the group, complaining, excessive worrying, and procrastination. These are likely the team members who most need your support.

KEEP COMMUNICATION OPEN

In times of uncertainty, people will fill in the gaps of information with assumptions. Combat the spread of misinformation by keeping communication as open as you can. For example, check-in with your team regularly. If you don't have time for frequent meetings, send an email at the end of the day to share updates. And rather than asking general questions like, "how are things?" ask something more specific, such as "I noticed that X is happening. Do you need any additional support?" If you get questions that you're not able to answer, respond honestly, i.e. "I don't know, but I'll work to find out."

HAVE THE HARD CONVERSATIONS

Communication during tough times often involves delivering difficult news. To communicate more effectively, avoid jumping into the silver lining. Instead, acknowledge the challenges in front of you, solicit reactions and listen to their concerns, and then introduce some positive thinking and specifics about how we'll move forward.

CREATE CLARITY AND REDUCE UNCERTAINTY

As humans, we don't like change and, as a result, tend to overvalue inaction and undervalue action. In other words, we'll tend to hang back and keep the status quo. However, in uncertain times, it is even more important to step up and set clear expectations for your team, getting down to the specifics to reduce uncertainty where you can. Set up clear rules, roles, and responsibilities. Give guidance on how and when to check in, how projects will get done.

Especially in the midst of change or uncertainty, don't be afraid to revise your plan: Being open to learning and improving will only make your team more agile.

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