

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Managing a Team During the COVID-19 Outbreak

As a people leader, you have an important role to play to ensure the well-being of your team. In these unprecedented times, this has never been more important and at the same time has never been as challenged. We have provided several key points for you to consider.

For employees working from home

- **Increase the frequency of team meetings so everyone can stay connected.** Make sure you also maintain the same or increased frequency of the one-on-one communication that you would normally have. Replace a quick stop by someone's workstation with a two-minute call. You do not need to make your contact overly formal.
- **Use video conferencing if possible, to provide the face time that you would otherwise lose.** Even if your employees cannot be on video, you should try to be, so that they can feel connected to you more easily.
- **Understand that your employees might be balancing childcare responsibilities while working.** Acknowledge this and help them work around it. This is the time when getting the work done needs to be more of the focus than the formality of how. Wherever possible let your employees figure out how and when work will happen. For roles that require client service with undivided attention, talk to your employees about the best way for this to happen. Staggering shifts in smaller chunks of time may allow multiple employees to balance childcare and customer service. There is almost always a solution for every situation if you talk it through.
- **Support a positive culture.** Four walls do not define the culture of your group. It is how people behave, and in particular, how everyone behaves towards each other. Laughter, social conversation, people jumping in to help each other are all part of a positive culture. Spend time with your team just talking, and not necessarily about work. Person- to-person interactions are the building blocks of culture. Make sure that your culture remains strong and people feel like they matter.

For employees who cannot work from home

- **Increase the frequency of your check-ins.** Being in the office when others are not can feel isolating and may even create anxiety. If there is a problem, work with them to solve it quickly. They need your support now more than ever.
- **Be diligent about supporting their safety.** Arranging work to maximize the physical distance between people and implementing all public health and organizational protocols for hygiene, are critical to keeping your people healthy.
- **Remind them of the importance of their role.** If your employees are in the workplace, it is because their role has a critical impact on the operations. Remind them of that.

For all employees

- **Frequently recognize people for the work they are doing under difficult circumstance.** The more effort and strain people are under, the more support and recognition they need. The important thing is that the added stress is ongoing, so authentic recognition needs to be ongoing as well.

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- **Listen without getting defensive.** At some point, problems or dissatisfaction will arise. When it does, listen. Doing so will give you valuable information that you can share with other decision makers in your organization, that you can take action on, or that can guide you in providing more information to your employee. The main thing is not to take it personally. This is a new situation for virtually everyone.
- **Pay attention to changes in productivity or behaviour**. Unexplainable changes should not be ignored, even now. The change might be a signal to a problem that you and your employee can solve together. It might also suggest that your employee would benefit from other support such as the EAP. Tell them the specific change that you notice and open the conversation without judgement.
- **Support the well-being of your people, and yourself.** Remind your employees of resources that are available through your organization, including communication, tools, and services such as EAP. Also, remind them that the best thing possible is to use this support before their stress gets too high. Taking care of yourself is equally as important. The care you show for them in your behaviour, and the self-care you model, both make a difference.