MANAGING EMPLOYEE EMOTIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Creating an Emotional Safe Space at Work

CONCERN. ANXIETY. WORRY. UNCERTAINTY. FEAR.

During this chaotic and challenging time, employee emotions are likely all over the place. A recent survey shows that 43% of Americans are concerned they will personally contract COVID-19 and 45% are concerned about an outbreak that requires quarantines and limits their ability to work for several weeks.

What is your organization doing to manage all these emotions?

Our research shows a clear connection between your emotional culture and employee engagement, and the implications of those findings are serious. Now, more than ever, you need to find ways to keep your employees engaged and your business afloat.

In this resource, we'll provide tips on:

- Understanding and assessing your emotional culture
- Decreasing employee stress and anxiety
- Creating an emotional safe space at work
- Coaching your people leaders to deal with turbulent employee emotions

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UNDERSTANDING AND ASSESSING YOUR EMOTIONAL CULTURE

Some organizations welcome emotions with open arms; others tend to sweep them under the rug. While supporting your employees' emotional health might seem like the job of a therapist, addressing emotions at work is crucial for your organization's success.

Our research found that only 39% of employees feel comfortable being emotionally transparent around leadership. But those who feel comfortable showing their true emotions at work, especially with leaders, have much higher engagement levels than those who don't.

Ask your leaders to reflect on these questions to uncover opportunities for growth.

	ALWAYS	USUALLY	RARELY	NEVER	UNSURE
Do individuals at all levels feel comfortable expressing themselves?					
Are your managers equipped to support employee motions?					
Are employees skilled at managing their own emotions?					
Do employees feel they can have honest conversations with each other?					

If you marked mostly **"Always"** or **"Usually,"** great job! Your organization is creating a strong emotional culture for employees. Don't lose sight of this amid the distractions right now.

If you marked mostly **"Unsure,"** that's okay, but it's not okay to remain in the dark. Consider making some changes to show your organization encourages and supports emotions.

If you marked mostly **"Rarely"** or **"Never,"** these are emotional culture red flags. Your organization must consider action in this critical time.

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DECREASING EMPLOYEE STRESS AND ANXIETY

Bottled-up negative emotions can wreak havoc on employees, teams, and organizations. They increase stress levels, create barriers between employees, and may impact productivity, innovation, collaboration, and customer service.

You also don't want emotions like anxiety and fear running wild. These emotions are dangerous—they can multiply and spread like a virus.

It's important for your organization to understand how to address employee emotions in a supportive manner, and proactively minimize the effects on your workplace.

Here are some tips to decrease employee stress and anxiety:

Communicate reguarly. Be transparent, even when you don't have all the information. Your employees will appreciate hearing updates, even if incomplete.

Provide information. Anxiety often stems from fear of the unknown. Stay informed, don't feed into the panic, and position yourself as a trusted resource for employees.

Empathize and listen. One of the best things you can do right now is listen. Hear what your employees are saying and feeling, and support and react accordingly.

Make it easy for sick and exposed employees to stay home. Employees are worried about their job security and productivity in the event that they get sick. Be clear about expectations and support in this area to alleviate some of that worry.

Remind employees about available benefits and resources. Chances are you already provide benefits and resources that employees can take advantage of. Make sure employees are aware of and know how to access them.

Be flexible and relaxed where possible. This is an unprecedented situation for workplaces around the globe. Understand that your employees are likely facing added stress and uncertainty, and try to relax policies and procedures where possible.

QUANTUM WORKPLACE

CREATING AN EMOTIONAL SAFE SPACE AT WORK

Employees need to feel safe at work. To feel safe is to feel okay being vulnerable.

Leaders and managers must understand that employees are humans and strive to offer a supportive work environment. Employees at all levels should feel equipped to cope with their emotions and confidently express concerns.

Here are some tips on creating an emotional safe space at work:

Build a culture of trust. Sharing emotions, especially uncomfortable ones, makes us vulnerable. And we can't be vulnerable if we don't trust the people we're sharing with. Everyone should feel comfortable being themselves and expressing emotions. When there is a culture of transparency and authenticity, employees can understand how others feel and adjust accordingly.

Be present. When managers and leaders are constantly unavailable, employees tend to get anxious. Regularly make time to connect with your team. Set aside uninterrupted time apart for each team member so employees can ask questions, provide updates, raise concerns, and provide feedback.

Listen more than you talk. Much of the time, someone experiencing negative emotions isn't searching for solutions. They simply want to express themselves and release all the pent-up emotions they feel. Listening to them allows them to get it all out there and makes them feel cared for and heard. It also establishes you as a trusted resource who can be depended upon.

COACHING YOUR PEOPLE LEADERS

Your managers need your support right now. They are not only managing their own emotions, but also the emotions of their team members.

Here are some ways to lift up your managers and help them cope during this stressful time:

Offer free training and topics related to emotions and stress. Help your managers feel confident as new issues arise. Provide training on topics such as emotional intelligence, emotional regulation, anger management, stress reduction, conflict resolution, mindfulness, and other related topics.

Encourage managers to utilize frequent check-ins. If your managers aren't already using 1-on-1 meetings to keep a pulse on what's happening with their teams, this is a quick-win strategy to help boost your emotional culture. In these initial few weeks, we recommend a daily check-in. As managers and employees get more comfortable and settle into a routine, the frequency can decrease to 2-3x a week.

Make sure managers understand available benefits and resources. Refresh managers' memories on relevant benefits such as your EAP program, mental health and wellness benefits, flex-time, etc. They should promote these offerings regularly while also making a case for why they matter.

Ask for and act on employee feedback. You can assume away on employee emotions and needs—but to be most effective, you need to ask them. Use the data you collect to create solutions for key workplace stressors and challenges.

Maintain a culture of work-life balance. Many employees are working from home right now. Others are managing a new slew of problems on the homefront. Stress your commitment to work-life balance, and provide tips and encouragement to help employees maintain healthy boundaries and practices.

CONCLUSION

We know this is a difficult time for your employees, your teams, and your entire organization. Your employees are looking to you as a resource and a leader, and it's important that you keep their emotions and needs in mind.

Being proactive and communicative is key when it comes to crisis management and employee wellbeing. Our parting advice is to **keep a close eye on your employee engagement data.**

Watch for issues that are creeping up within the company, including trends and overall sentiment. Employee comments will serve as a gold mine of information and paint a more comprehensive picture of what is truly happening. Commit to taking action and follow up with pulse surveys to stay informed of any issues that arise.

We have a variety of resources available to help you navigate these uncertain times. We invite you to read, download, and share them with your team.

VIEW MORE RESOURCES

We're all in this together If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at hello@quantumworkplace.com.