Communications Tips to Remain Engaged with Employees During a Long-Term Crisis

ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATIONS

Communicate regularly. In the absence of information, people will fill in the blanks for themselves, often with partial or inaccurate information based on word of mouth. Even if you are not ready to communicate fully, let employees know that you are gathering information, evaluating the situation, and will follow up as soon as possible.

Ask yourself who else needs to know. When making and communicating decisions, ask yourself what other stakeholders, collaborators, or colleagues also need to know about the decision and communications. By involving these other groups, you can more easily find holes in plans and areas where further discussion and planning may be warranted.

Ask your supervisors to share updates with their teams. Encourage information sharing and gathering. It takes our collective efforts to reach staff in as many ways as possible.

Be transparent, open, and engaging. It’s ok to say you don’t know the answer to something. Don’t make promises you can’t keep. Recognize this is a stressful time. Acknowledge the future will bring challenges even if we don’t know what those are yet.

Acknowledge emotion. It’s important that employees know you recognize the emotion around a crisis.

Allow for two-way communication. Encourage your teams to ask questions, and to share what they are hearing. It helps inform your efforts and creates an environment of trust.

Use all the tools in the communication toolbox. Email is a great communication tool but does not reach 100% of your audience. Ensure important information also lives on your website, in your unit social media posts, and in your face-to-face meetings.

Remember that your words have legs. Be aware that whatever you share via email or in any face-to-face public forum can be shared with others. It is important to balance transparency with accuracy.
IDEAS TO STAY CONNECTED

In addition to the 7 Ways to stay connected (and entertained) with coworkers and colleagues, below are other ideas for staying connected. Every team is different with diverse communication styles. Use the following ideas as inspiration while being sensitive to your team members individual preferences.

- Virtual opportunities like office hours, happy hours, non-work sessions to chat or do activities like crafting.
- Touch points at various levels within your department. Hold routine team meetings but also make efforts to attend your team meetings held by your managers and supervisors, and schedule regular 1:1s with your direct reports.
- Recognize staff for their contributions. This encouragement can go a long way in our remote environment. Emails, shout-outs during meetings, or even story submittals to unit or departmental newsletters can highlight staff’s extraordinary efforts during this unprecedented time.
- Ask for feedback and then use it. Many times, those within your organization may have a unique perspective on issues and processes. By soliciting their feedback, you can better engineer your processes while building trust within your organization. However, if you solicit feedback, you should be prepared to make use of what you can, or at least acknowledge it.