Fostering a Culture of Caring in the Workplace

Showing genuine care and concern to employees in times of crises will make a positive difference on how your employees react during challenging times. What should leaders expect today, from a mental health perspective, since employees are constantly being challenged to cope, readjust and stay resilient during these uncertain times?

**Leading with compassion**

After many months living through the COVID-19 pandemic, employees are struggling in unprecedented ways. Employees deserve to feel like their company truly cares about them and their well-being. They are looking to their employer as a source of understanding and support. Managers and supervisors have been tasked with carrying much of the weight during the pandemic. When employees know their employer cares, they are likely to be more productive at work and much less likely to experience workplace burnout.

So, how can managers support the emotional needs of their teams? Here are some suggestions:

- **Engage with employees on a personal level** to build rapport (Ask: How can I support you? How is your family doing?)
- **Share all available resources** to reinforce work-life balance (support hotlines, self-screening assessments and information about the Advocate Aurora EAP program) 1-800-236-3231
- **Be humble, honest and sincere.** Feel free to share your personal experiences or challenges, especially if you sought help yourself. You will be “normalizing” the idea that it’s OK to seek help when needed.

**Fostering healthy coping**

- Understand your company’s policies and procedures (FMLA, PTO, etc.) that can help support employees through tough times.
- Give employees explicit permission to take mental health breaks when needed (walks and other acts of self-care).
- Offer flexible scheduling, whenever possible.

For assistance, please contact Advocate Aurora Employee Assistance Program: 800-236-3231
Take care of yourself first

Many company leaders are working more since the pandemic’s start, while dealing with the same challenges employees are facing (stress, anxiety, shifting work and home-life responsibilities). Managers are tasked with navigating a two-pronged problem - their own potential burnout and their direct reports’ burnout.

Everyone is different, but we all react to stressful situations such as the pandemic. Our reactions may include physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral reactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical reactions:</th>
<th>Emotional reactions:</th>
<th>Cognitive and behavioral reactions:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Less energy and enthusiasm</td>
<td>• Becoming cynical, pessimistic</td>
<td>• Withdrawing from people</td>
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<tr>
<td>• More trouble sleeping at night</td>
<td>• Hopelessness</td>
<td>• Substance abuse</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Changes in appetite or weight</td>
<td>• Moodiness</td>
<td>• Compulsive behaviors (gambling, shopping, internet overuse)</td>
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<td>• Changes in personal hygiene habits</td>
<td>• Angry outbursts</td>
<td>• Missing work or other important commitments</td>
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<td>• Losing interest in friends, family and favorite activities</td>
<td>• Planning self-harm (suicidality)</td>
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If someone is feeling suicidal or having thoughts of harming others, immediately involve Human Resources to address this issue. Call 9-1-1 if the situation seems urgent. You are not a trained mental health professional, but you can’t ignore a serious situation.

Tap into the EAP

Employees should be reminded that Advocate Aurora EAP is here to help.

• No cost to employees or any member of their household
• Immediate access to professional help — virtual, telephone or in-person counseling
• Completely confidential with no stigma attached

Stay the Course

Providing consistent engagement, communication and expressing care and concern will help maintaining a productive workforce as we move forward with the pandemic and beyond. Remember to:

• regularly connect with employees, either virtually or in person
• share available mental health resources
• role modeling positive, self-care in your own life

How leaders behave and communicate during a crisis makes a significant difference in how employees respond and react. Adapting to changes is inevitable as we move forward. Leadership always sets the pace. Promoting a company-wide culture of caring — one that normalizes seeking support when needed — will leave a lasting impression during these challenging times.

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

– Maya Angelou

“People don’t care about how much you know, until they know how much you care.”

– Will Rodgers