



Tips for managers during the corona crisis

The corona virus has led to a partial lockdown of many countries, and, therefore, most of us are working under completely different conditions than we are used to. Remote management is suddenly an inescapable fact of life for most managers. At the same time, we are in the midst of a crisis that affects individuals in very different ways. This requires a lot from managers in terms of both having the ability to master what is, to most of us, a new discipline - remote management - while also handling the reactions from employees.

When you are faced with managing your virtual team, it requires more than just assigning and coordinating tasks.

A clear virtual presence

Just like it is important that you are visible and clear when it comes to communicating with your employees in real life, it is also important that you create a good framework for being present in the current situation. One way of accomplishing this is to create a clearer framework for your meetings, for example:

- Collective morning “check-ins” with the team by video conference
- 30-minute 1:1 talks per week with each employee
- Having a collective brush up of the week that went by and setting expectations for next week via video conference.

With this kind of structure, you can maintain a daily dialogue. It is important that you turn on the video function and are able to see each other during the meetings. This provides a kind of presence that is particularly important now as the corona virus begins flaring up again and many are experiencing some level of corona fatigue.

Be clear about your ambitions for being present and how you want everyone in the team to be present as well

Focus on and verbalise how you and your employees can compensate for the inevitable loss of social networks, contact and intimacy with remote management (such as team breakfast or social gatherings). Pay attention and look for even the most discrete and ambiguous signals that employees are not thriving or underperforming but avoid suffocating them with a bad cocktail of concern and micromanagement/monitoring.

Getting people involved

In a time where the frameworks are changing for all parties, it can be beneficial to involve your employees more in the processes that take place in the management tier. They need to feel that they are included during a time where isolation is an inevitable circumstance – just like you do!

Get involved in the individual tasks that employees are working on, but also consider their “working from home” setup. Due to working from home, you have to be extra careful about finding a good balance where you get involved in your employees’ situation at home and offer support when needed.

Remember to:

- Recognise that this is an extraordinary situation
- Create space for informal management - small talk
- Aim to ensure that your employees are also exposed to the kinds of informal knowledge sharing that normally takes place between team members around the lunch table
- Address the issue of mutual involvement so that you can work together to come up with good solutions.

Close and transparent communication

When you no longer run into each other by the coffee machine, much of the daily communications that we tend to not give much thought is lost.

Any meeting must be planned, and, therefore, there is the risk that your communication become very formal and distanced. In the coming period, you will continue to do most of your communications via chat, email or over the phone, meaning you will not have the physical signals such as body language, posture and tone of voice to rely on when trying to understand each other.

This means that your verbal communication needs to be considered more carefully when talking to your employees, and your senses have to understand signals differently than they are used to – while also remembering that your employees are in the same situation.

Therefore, pay extra attention to both intentional and unintentional signals in the virtual communications - for example, the kind of language you use in emails and your tone of voice when talking on the phone.

Ask open-ended and motivating questions such as:

- How are you?
- How is your workload at the moment, and how are you managing working from home?
- What can I do to help you?

Make sure that you are “on the same page” (are you maybe talking past each other?)

- What is your take on what we just discussed?
- I wonder how you perceive all of this?

Trust and mutual respect

Lack of trust (and this goes both ways) is a killer in terms of well-being, motivation and commitment. Ensuring that your employees get the feedback they need might seem inconsequential - but the fact is that feedback is often skipped when you cannot just exchange a few words at the office.

Therefore, demonstrate that you trust your employees and ask that they trust you as well

Explain why you are “extra” curious about their work tasks and their well-being at the moment. It is not about you needing to micromanage your employees more, rather, it is because part of your job as a manager is to ensure that the working environment is functioning properly and that the scope and type of tasks are appropriate for the individual employee. Let your employees know that it is because of the new circumstances you inquire more about their workday and that their current situation requires mutual trust and respect. Also ask for feedback from your employees on your initiatives. This ensures that you and your employees have the same expectations.

The good online meeting

First and foremost, create a consensus on how you will be communicating. Should it be mostly over the phone? Using Skype? FaceTime? Agree on whether you use the chat function or something else to communicate during the meeting.



Make sure that you also get to see each other on the screen during your online meeting - this makes people more present, which is extra important right now.

It may be difficult to remain concentrated and engaged during online meetings. You are sitting in front of your computer, and it might be tempting to just check your email, continue working on a draft or just idly browse the internet during the meeting. Encourage people to be present during the meeting.

Ensure that there is a calm background so that there are not too many visual disturbances during the meeting. Ensure that the lighting is good, so that your employees can actually see you.

If there are many participants, then, as a general rule, ask people to mute their microphones if they are not talking so that unnecessary noise is kept to a minimum.

This indirectly lets people know that you are aware that during these times there may be some noise from kids in the house or other family members at home.

Make sure that you engage your employees approximately every five minutes during an online meeting so that they do not lose concentration.

Make sure that there are breaks between meetings (ideally, at least half an hour). It takes a mental toll being in front of a screen all day.

Situational remote management

Situational management is a critical component of good management in general, and also of remote management.

Pay close attention to the individual employee. What does he or she need from you?

Focus on whether tasks are completed on time rather than at what specific time during the day they are completed.

Consider that you are building a "new" form of relationship. Your job is to be extra attentive to how your employees are handling this situation and what changes they are going through right now. You also need to understand how best to motivate them and how to keep them engaged.

Help your employees structure their work situation just as you are continually structuring yours.

Worries - how do I deal with them?

As a manager, there is a constant stream of questions coming in during times such as this.

- What particular signs do you need to pay attention to when it comes to the employees feeling under pressure?
- How can you best support an employee who feels overwhelmed by the situation?
- How do you best support employees who worry about the future (their job security)?
- How do you put employees who have direct contact with customers at ease when they are afraid of showing up to work due to the risk of infection?

Fear and anxiety, combined with a huge deal of uncertainty, are perfectly normal reactions to a crisis. Support your employees and let them know that you will work together to find good ways to manage the current situation. For managers who are facing a crisis and helping their employees get through the uncertainty and changed circumstances, it is helpful to be aware of what reactions employees might have when it comes to feeling overwhelmed and dealing with a crisis, uncertainty, etc.

Our nervous systems can react in different ways when we are feeling the strain - it could be a fight, flight or freeze response or perhaps just a feeling of helplessness.



How we react to feeling strained varies a great deal and depends on many different factors such as our general life situation, other stressors, access to help and support, etc.

Think about what you already know about how your employees react when they are in a bad mood, struggling with problems, feeling stressed, etc. Some become more aggressive, are more quick-tempered and irritable, some become quiet and withdrawn, some become unfocused and lose track of things and others might become passive and very inefficient.

Talk to your employees about how they can monitor their own reactions and talk to them if you find that their behaviour is changing. Work together with the employee to find out what you can do in terms of creating a work framework for them that makes it easier for them to deal with the strain.

F-A-C-E-C-O-V-I-D

F: Focus. Help your employee maintain focus on what he or she can control. No one can control the corona virus or what might happen in the future. You also cannot control your own feelings and thoughts. Instead, focus on what you can control while at work. For example, focus on work routines, tasks and specific action plans for the current situation.

A: Acknowledgement. Acknowledge your employees' thoughts and feelings. For example, you might say: "I understand that you are worried. I can't make that go away, but let's focus on whether there is something specific that we can do that would make the situation easier for you."

C: Coping strategies. See if you can work together to make a plan for some specific coping strategies at work. Are there initiatives that can be implemented to help the employee get through the day in a good manner? For example, set a framework for physical activity or well-being (maybe mindfulness activities or taking walks during breaks) so that your employees will not have to "live in their heads" all day.

E: Engage yourself in what your employees are doing and engage with them about how they are feeling. Have frequent meetings where you discuss the state of things.

C: Committed actions. How can you help your employees get more meaningful activities implemented in their everyday lives so that it becomes easier for them to let go of the worries that might pop up? Commit yourself and be persistent.

O: Observation. Be on the look-out for signs of anxiety, anger, despair, shame and guilt. Make room for such topics in your dialogue and respond to your employees with empathy and an understanding of their reactions.

V: Values: Consider what you, as a manager, want to represent in this crisis. How do you want to treat yourself and your employees? For example, with humour, respect, patience, honesty and caring. Let the values guide you and motivate your actions.

I: Identify your resources/tools: As a manager, you do not have to know everything. Where can you find help, assistance and support during these times? From your own manager? The HR department? Let your employees know of the opportunities to contact others if you are not sure how to respond.

D: Disinfect, create physical distancing and mental closeness.

Stay updated on the guidelines from the authorities and update your employees about new initiatives and how they impact people on the individual level - this shows that you are there for them.

