



# COMMUNICATION TACTICS WITH KEY LEADERS

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We often rely on key leaders to make final decisions in our organization. Decision making becomes significantly harder when stress levels are increased and clear information is hard to come by. Undoubtedly, a pandemic amplifies stress and reduces clarity. Therefore, we find ourselves struggling to get decisive responses from our leaders. Here are a few communication tactics that you can implement when communicating with your leaders.

## Empathy

It benefits all when we understand that our leaders are struggling too. Empathy is simply holding space for the challenges and struggles of others. The act of empathy provides different perspectives and helps keep us from feeling as though people are intentionally making things more difficult for us. Remember, we are human and we are all in this together.

## Assertiveness

The second tactic to utilize is assertiveness. Assertiveness is a skill set that allows you to clearly, and concisely share information in a manner that respects the dignity of every person involved.

If you find yourself in a situation where you are struggling to get clear information or your leader may be struggling to make a decision consider these responses.

“I understand that this is very difficult, however, in order for me to continue moving forward and supporting our staff during this time, I need a decision by <insert your deadline>.”

“I can imagine you are very busy, unless I hear otherwise by <insert date>, I will move forward with the plan outlined.”

“I want to assure you that I have completed due diligence in this matter and crafted a solid plan. I am comfortable executing it with your approval.”

Each of these responses are assertive. They provide clear information in a respectful way.

Everybody deals with these situations a bit differently and we understand that there are some leaders that may appear to refuse to address the issue. Frustration can quickly escalate for employees when some businesses are still open while others are not or some employees are given remote access while others must still come in to the office. There are even some situations where leadership has stated things like, “This is being blown out of proportion, from what I understand, the flu and cardiovascular disease cause more death each year.”



In instances like these, stay focused on the need to address the challenges at hand. A response such as, “Yes, that might be true. The question we are addressing is, if you were tasked with significantly reducing the harm done by either of those issues, would you be willing to respond as a leader? In this case, there are direct measures we can take to reduce harm. The question is how will we respond in this situation to reduce harm.”

Once again, this response is assertive, clear, respectful, and keeps the issue at hand the center of the conversation.

## Questions

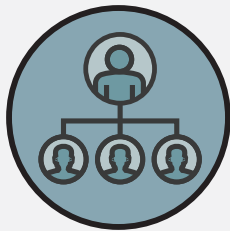
One final tactic to work your way through communications with key leaders; ask a lot of questions. When communication is unclear and cluttered and you need direction from leadership, be sure to ask clarifying questions that keep the information you need at the center of the conversation.

### QUESTIONS SERVE TWO PURPOSES:

1. They require the other person to pause and consider your needs and their response.
2. They rarely put people on the defensive. They can often lower the intensity of communication and allow the other party to feel heard.

In any challenging situation, communication is key to provide direction, clarity, and leadership. If you continue to struggle with communication in your organization or with key leaders, try writing down your own needs. Open dialogue by stating the needs that require a response by the end of your time with the individual or group. Before you leave, make sure that all of your needs have been addressed. If they haven't, kindly state, “I still haven't gotten a clear response on these items, can you please provide that before we leave.”

Having skills to seek clarity and support from leaders will improve business and employee outcomes in any situation. However, during times of stress or uncertainty, partnering with leaders to provide the best possible guidance for employees is even more challenging—and even more important. We hope this module has been of help to you as you continue to work with your leadership to navigate issues related to COVID-19 and your business.



## WANT MORE?

For more support, refer to WELCOA's Committed and Aligned Leadership Toolkit.

<https://www.welcoa.org/resources/resource-topics/benchmark-1-toolkit/>



# COMMUNICATION TACTICS TO PROVIDE CLARITY

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Clear and concise communication is necessary in any organization, and during a crisis it becomes even more important. In times of uncertainty your employees seek information and clarity, which can be challenging when stress levels are increased and clear information is hard to come by. This module will provide you with ways you can provide effective communications to your employees.

## Crafting the Best Message

The best way to provide clarity is to be focused and intentional when crafting your message for your target audience. To craft the best message, start by answering these questions:

1. Who is this message for?
2. What exactly do they need to know?
3. If a response or action is necessary, what is it and when is it due?
4. Is there a location or directions that are required?
5. Why is this message important? Where does it fall in priority of other pieces of information that have been communicated? This is where you can help your employees sift through and prioritize the information.

Providing these details and focusing your messaging is important and helps your employees in times of stress when they may be bombarded with a great deal of information from multiple sources. During these times, it becomes increasingly difficult for people to sort through everything and determine which details are the most important. Your messaging will not only provide them with information, but also ensure them that their employer cares for their well-being and may be what helps them through this difficult time.

## Becoming More Efficient In Your Communication

As these types of situations evolve, it is necessary to continue to provide updated information. In doing so, you want to be sure not to miss any details but also not over-burden your employees with too much or duplicated information. Becoming more efficient in your communications will allow you to provide the right information to the right people at the right time. Here are a few tips to help:

- » Think about what questions you have heard or are answering often. Build a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) document to include in your messaging. Doing so will save you time and energy by not having to answer each person separately. If you don't have enough questions to build out a FAQ document quite yet, be sure to provide information in your communications to help answer questions before they come in. Then, as you do receive questions, be sure to keep track of them as well as the answers you provide so you can quickly copy and paste responses when appropriate and build your FAQ document from there.
- » Keep track of all communications you have provided. This will allow you to access and provide the communication again to anybody that may have missed it as well as avoid duplicating information.



## Choosing the Best Mode of Communication

In heightened situations consider what type of communication would be best and remember that people seek different communication styles. Sometimes, we need a lot of specificity, in which case an email with written detail might be best. In other cases, when stress is high and feelings need to be clarified and addressed, a phone call or video conference may be best so that assumptions are not made about the feelings or intentions of others. Lastly, when multiple decision makers are involved, get everyone on one call or video conference to ensure all voices are heard and included to craft one concise message. It is best to communicate through multiple channels to be sure to get the message across to everybody. Some channels to consider including are:

- » Email
- » Text
- » Company intranet
- » Call / video-conference
- » Downloadable guide or manual

Being able to communicate clearly and efficiently will provide the best possible guidance for employees which is essential in times of stress and uncertainty. We hope this module has been of help to you as you continue to navigate issues related to COVID-19 and your business.



### WANT MORE?

Read *Increase Employee Engagement through Clarity* for more support. This is a WELCOA Benchmark 3 resource to assist you in understanding employee needs and communicating effectively.

<https://www.welcoa.org/blog/increase-employee-engagement-through-clarity/>



# SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES IN MANAGING STRESS

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During crises, our work as Human Resource and Wellness professionals can shift from helping the business or people grow to helping employees manage stress, anxiety, or grief. Many of you have likely already found yourselves doing a lot of supportive listening and re-assuring during these uncertain times. This module is designed to provide you with the techniques to respond in meaningful ways to support others.

*\*Please note, that it is essential for your to care for yourself in order to care for others which is why there is another module focused on your own self care. Remember, we have to put our own oxygen mask on first.*

When supporting employees and helping them navigate their way through stress, anxiety, or grief in response to a crisis, here are a few things to consider:

1. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. When someone comes to you with their experience of this crisis, empathy is the most effective tool we have in our toolkit. It often comes in the form of compassionate listening and language. Here is an example:

**Employee:** I am feeling incredibly overwhelmed about the long term sustainability of the company in the midst of this pandemic.

**Listener:** It makes sense that you might feel that way.

Notice that the listener does not belittle or try to fix the other person's challenges. There is a simple acknowledgement of another person's struggle.

2. Listening allows us to be present with another person without having to solve their problems or exert emotional caregiving that allows for others to feel heard and acknowledged. As you continue to respond to people's stress, remember that listening is a very powerful tool. You may become a point person who hears a lot of employees' stressors. Listening can provide you more resilience to continue.

Listening provides people with a sense of connection and safety to be able to speak their truth with someone who is capable of withholding judgement. Here are some ways to be a great listener:

- » Be open-minded to their perspective.
- » Focus on what the other person is saying - don't allow yourself to be distracted by thoughts of what to say next.
- » Summarize what you hear and ask questions to check your understanding.
- » Try to empathize with them.
- » Avoid trying to offer an immediate solution and be sure not to interrupt



3. Anxiety can spread; in essence, it is contagious. The human response to anxiety is primal. It is part of the body's natural defense system as an alert to a threat, especially something that is unknown, vague, or that we can't control. Though a natural part of who we are as humans, anxiety does present with both physical and mental symptoms. Therefore, it is especially important in times of crisis to help others move to a mental and emotional state of safety. This can be done in a few ways.
  - » When someone shares their anxiety and fear with you, ask them to tell you more about it. In doing this, you can determine the depth of information they have and whether or not their fear is based on facts. This also helps the individual process how much of what they are feeling is based on factual information.
  - » Acknowledge the fear, and ask the person to consider what might make them feel safe. This will move them mentally to a state of identifying their own needs and determining how many of those are currently being met.
  - » Help them keep in mind that we can't control everything about a situation and encourage them to change what they can and let the rest take its course.
  - » Suggest exercise—it's a great way to relieve tension and help the body feel relaxed or stress management techniques such as meditation.
  - » Encourage them to avoid the temptation to turn to caffeine, nicotine, alcohol or unprescribed drugs for relief, which can make anxiety symptoms worse.
4. Follow these basic language skills for compassionate caring. Avoid statements that begin with "at least" as these statements portray that one's feelings or experiences aren't hard enough or could be worse. Instead, lean into statements with the words or sentiment of "me too." When someone says they are hurting, scared, worried, anxious, etc, "me too" becomes an anchor of connection. Connection settles part of our brain and helps us feel more secure and safe. Here is an example:

**Employee:** I am really worried about my mother; she has a respiratory illness and has traveled recently.

**Unhelpful Response:** At least, you have your mother. Lots of people have already lost their parents.

**Helpful Response:** I can understand that. I lost my mother a couple of years ago, but I would be worried for her if she were still alive today.

There is a flight attendant analogy, created by author Elizabeth Gilbert that is fitting for times like this. Keep in mind that you are like the flight attendant during turbulence. When there is turbulence, many people look to the flight attendant to understand how concerned they should be. When the flight attendant is nervous the passengers feel more concerned. When the flight attendant can knowledgeable and honestly explain what is happening in a calm manner while maintaining compassion for the passengers everyone feels safer.

A sense of belonging and connection are basic human needs that you can help fulfill for employees during difficult times using the information above. We hope this module has been of help to you as you continue to navigate issues related to COVID-19 and your business.



## WANT MORE?

WELCOA's Mental Health at the Workplace toolkit is designed to help you understand the current state of mental health in the workplace, connect with personal stories, learn from high performing organizations and take action today.

<https://www.welcoa.org/resources/resource-topics/mental-health-at-the-workplace/>



# SELF-CARE

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As always, your self care is of utmost importance. Even more so during times of crisis as you provide care and guidance for others. This module is designed to help you care for yourself and maintain your personal well-being so you have the ability and capacity to in turn help the employees at your organization.

**Transition Routines:** Give yourself pause to move from one set of work to another. For example, from work to home you might change clothes, wash your face and take a few deep breaths. Now, if you're working from home, you no longer have that commute that signals to your brain that it is time to transition. What's more, you have no built-in margin between your work life and home life. As a result, you may need to be more intentional about moving from one set of work to the next.

### EXAMPLE TRANSITION ROUTINE: FROM WORK TO DINNER TIME

Let's call the area you have set up as your home office your "work command center". When moving from your work command center in your home to making dinner, you'll want to build in a new kind of margin to allow yourself to transition.

*Try:* Before going to the kitchen to make dinner, take a pause, walk to a quiet room or space and listen to one of your favorite songs. Alternately, you can take between two and five minutes to pause, look out the window and reflect on what you are most proud of from your day of work or what you are most looking forward to in the evening to come.

**Mindfulness:** We will all be multi-tasking way more than usual. Many of us will be working from our homes with children nearby and taking on extra duties as we determine how we make everything work. As often as possible, create time to focus on doing just one thing at a time. Mindfulness does not always require carving out time for meditation; you can make just a few simple tweaks in your day to increase mindfulness.

### EXAMPLE STRATEGY FOR IMPROVED MINDFULNESS

Working on a project that does not require ongoing or close communication with other team members? Try to close out chat and email notifications while you are head down on the project so that you can mindfully focus on the task at hand. If you are worried about missing an important message, set a timer to remind you to check back in an hour.

**Stretching and Movement:** Being closed in our houses can make us feel cramped. Stretching can take a few minutes and make our bodies feel more expansive.



## EXAMPLE MIDDAY STRETCH

Try this stretch to help you open up your body throughout the work day.

**Try:** Put your right hand on your left shoulder and put your left arm behind your back. Tip your head to the right, away from the shoulder you are holding. Then, look down at your right shoulder. Finally, tip your head to the right and rotate back; imagine you are trying to take a peak at something over your left shoulder. Hold each position for 3-5 seconds while breathing deeply and then repeat on the other side.

**5-4-3-2-1:** When your anxiety sends you down a rabbit hole, which can easily happen right now, take a moment to notice five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, one thing you can taste. This practice can bring you back into the present moment and into your body.

**Gratitude:** Feelings of scarcity are common in crisis. Gratitude is the practice of noticing and becoming mindful of your thankfulness. Gratitude works even if you don't share it with others. Simply pausing to notice your gratitude can have a lot of helpful responses for your well-being.

**Nourishing Food:** Food is central to our sense of comfort. It is also key to our immune systems. Try to find a balance between comfort and health. Remember, healthy food is full of vitamins and nutrients. The healthiest foods are close to their natural state (like fresh or frozen vegetables or whole grains) and full of color and flavor. Give yourself permission to avoid the mess of low fat, low carb, high protein, low sodium, etc. Instead, when it comes time to pick food, ask yourself, is this nutritious?

## EXAMPLE STRATEGY: MAKE HALF YOUR PLATE FRUITS AND VEGGIES

Keep your fats, proteins, and carbohydrates in the right proportions. Every time you eat, try to make half of your meal consist of fruits, vegetables, and/or beans.

**Connection:** Find a friend. Have one person in mind who isn't a co-worker or immediate family member that you can call when you need some connection. The reason this person should be outside of our immediate circles is that when we need a break, likely the people closest to us do too. In order to support the resiliency of everyone, call someone who is a layer or two outside of your immediate circle.

Navigating issues related to COVID-19 and your business starts with a healthy, strong and thriving you. We hope this module has been of help to you as you strive to maintain balance and wellbeing through self-care.



## WANT MORE?

Download this interactive Quick Guide to explore 5 strategies to beat burnout.

<https://www.welcoa.org/resources/quick-guide-beating-burnout/>





# ADJUSTING INTERNAL EXPECTATIONS

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This module is designed to help you and your organization begin to establish and align clear and realistic expectations of working from home in the midst of this pandemic.

In normal times, it might make sense to insist that we keep the level of deliverables the same regardless of working from home or in the office. However, right now, many people are at home attempting to work with spouses, partners, or roommates also in the house sharing space and resources. Several are also caregiving for children with many schools and daycares being closed. The reality is that people cannot double their workload and maintain the same output. Perhaps someone can do so for a day or a week, but burnout will certainly ensue if existing expectations remain the same with double the work.

## Adjust Your Mental Model of a Work Day

Most of us formed our mental model of the work day over the last five or so decades. We think of the work day as encapsulated between the four walls of our office during normal operating business hours because that is what we watched our parents and grandparents do—and it is what work still looks like for most of us. The reality is that for many jobs, this structure of a work day is not necessary. A lot has changed—from the nature of our work to the technological advancements that have been made to allow us to do work from virtually anywhere.

Now more than ever, it is time to consider shifting our mental model of what a typical work day looks like. For most computer-based or collaborative work, the reality is that it can happen anywhere, any time. We must consider that the time in which work will be completed will be more fluid and flexible. For example, if parents are having to provide school lessons for their kids in the middle of the day, they may need to work after hours to complete some tasks.

### WHAT'S A MENTAL MODEL?

A mental model is a representation of how we think something works in the world, including relationships between people and things or perceptions about cause and effect. We use mental models to predict outcomes and experiences, and often they are shared by members of the same community or culture.

Think of a child's birthday party. If you asked most North Americans to describe a child's birthday party, it would go something like this. You arrive to the party, you play games or watch some entertainment, you have cake, then you open presents. It seems simple, but think about how unnatural it would feel to you if you arrived and opened presents immediately, then ate cake, then watched a magician. We all share a pretty common understanding, or mental model, of what we can expect to experience at a child's birthday party, and it governs our expectations of what we will experience and how we should act.

## Adjust Your Expectations of Work Time

The temptation may be to want to ensure employees “earn” their time. Given the unprecedented nature of what we're experiencing, we can break from normal expectations of committing to a certain amount of work in a given amount of time.



Many businesses are also experiencing reduced consumer demand. Perhaps this is an opportunity to let employees invest in some professional development or even rest. Regardless of your company's situation, the reality of working from home remains and adjustments to internal expectations will be paramount to everyone's health and well-being. In Module 7 of this Toolkit, *Resources For Managers To Support Their Teams*, you'll find an outline to help them assess their priorities and adjust.

## Focus on Mission Critical Performance Deliverables

Help managers to focus on benchmarks of work rather than requiring employees to log tasks. Setting top or "mission critical" benchmarks for employees to be accountable for each week is a great strategy for ensuring work gets done without micromanaging. It may be tempting to ask employees to account for their time or log their tasks throughout the day in an attempt to ensure employees are doing the job. The problem with this strategy is two-fold. First, it creates more work for both the employee in writing it and the manager to have to review it. Second, it can breed distrust both ways between employees and managers if it sends the message that the organization does not trust the employee to be productive if they are not being closely monitored.

We hope this module has been of help to you as you continue to navigate issues related to COVID-19 and your business.



### WANT MORE?

Supporting efforts toward healthy employees includes evaluating policies, practices and promotions to ensure the environment helps foster a successful wellness initiative. It is grounded in the core vision and purpose of the organization. Access WELCOA's Toolkit for *Cultivating Supportive Health Promoting Environments, Policies, and Practices*.

<https://www.welcoa.org/resources/resource-topics/benchmark-6-toolkit/>



# SUPPORTING YOUR EMPLOYEES WORK FROM HOME EXPERIENCE

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Stress and tension run high during uncertain times and adapting to a new work experience, like working from home, can add to the stress levels. The temptation to control every aspect of your employees experience may be increased as everyone adjusts to working physically distanced. However, everyone needs ample autonomy to manage a mountain of shifting dynamics in their homes. Here are a few ways to support your employees in their work from home experience:

## Do They Have What They Need?

Working from home comes with the realization that employees may not have exactly what they need to do so effectively. Connect with your employees and make sure they have the resources and materials to do their jobs well. Some things to think about include:

- » Laptop
- » Internet/VPN access to company files
- » Phone line vs computer
- » Downloaded proper applications for virtual conferencing
- » Ergonomics issues\*

\*[Download this checklist](#) and see the training course below for specific tips for ergonomic workstations.

## Meaningful Support

After verifying that your employees have the tools they need to complete their work, the next thing is to provide them with meaningful support. Things to consider for meaningful support include:

- » Clarifying priorities and expectations.
- » Holding virtual office hours for employees to have routine access to you.
- » Finding ways to bring levity to this situation.
- » Creating opportunities to express gratitude
- » Encouraging frequent breaks.
- » Checking in on people's emotional state.
- » Hosting dialogues where people can ask for extra support from team members.
- » Holding space for people to talk about other aspects of coping.



Listen to the needs your employees have to be successful while working from home. According to Self Determination Theory, [needs supportive environments](#) help people adapt to change. Acknowledging what people need to get the job done is part of them feeling supported. In some cases you will be able to meet their need. In other cases you won't be able to, but by listening to and acknowledging their needs, you will still help them adjust to the change. We hope this module has been of help to you as you continue to navigate issues related to COVID-19 and your business.



## WANT MORE?

Learn posture habits and stretching for a healthier lifestyle whether working from home or the office in this course, *Worksmart Ergonomics*.

<https://institute.welcoa.org/courses/worksmart-ergonomics/>



# RESOURCES FOR MANAGERS TO SUPPORT THEIR TEAMS

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As we know, many professionals in management have high level skill sets in the job duties they manage for others. However, many do not have leadership training. Some inherently have excellent people leadership skills, while others will need additional support. In times of stress, managers will look for guidance to communicate and direct people. Employees' well-being will depend greatly on the support and leadership from their managers.

## Sample Communication: Support for Effective Communication

Here is a sample communication that you might use to support your managers:

During this time, it is crucial for our employees' well-being that we communicate effectively and provide clear expectations. Consider these basics for communicating to employees before sending key information.

1. Who is this message for?
2. What exactly do they need to know?
3. If a response or action is necessary, what is it and when is it due?
4. Is there a location or directions that are required?
5. Why is this message important? Where does it fall in priority of other pieces of information that have been communicated?  
This is where you can help your employees sift through and prioritize the information.

Providing these details and focusing your messaging is important and helps your employees in times of stress when they may be bombarded with a great deal of information from multiple sources. During these times, it becomes increasingly difficult for people to sort through everything and determine which details are the most important. Your messaging will not only provide them with information, but also ensure them that their employer cares for their well-being and may be what helps them through this difficult time.

Managers will also be looking to you to understand how to set expectations with their teams as work changes. Encourage managers to lean into their expertise. You can build confidence in your managers by giving them autonomy to delegate and manage work rather than having to wait on leaders above them to direct daily details.

Similarly you want to direct your managers to provide more autonomy to their employees. With the loss of control the temptation exists to grip even tighter to control. However, this will create an unhealthy relationship between the manager and employees and increase tension in an already stressful situation.

Managers will need to assess priorities and provide clarity around new expectations and then trust their employees to deliver. Below is sample communication that includes a priorities assessment.

## Sample Communication: Support for Team Prioritization

During this time, we recognize there are a multitude of changing dynamics and expectations. We value your leadership and capacity to manage the daily activities of your teams.



First we want you to assess the priorities of your team's daily work. Given how quickly things are evolving this may need to be completed weekly.

- » We encourage you to ask the following questions to help prioritize your team's work.
- » What, if anything, were we doing before that no longer needs to be done or should be postponed?
- » What items or processes have changed?
- » What has been added to our tasks or processes?
- » What remains?

Prioritize everything on the list from most important to least important. Can all of these items/processes realistically be completed in the week ahead?

In addition, please consider the following as you manage the daily workload for your employees:

1. Avoid micromanagement. Focus on benchmarks of work rather than daily tasks. Requiring employees to keep daily task logs might only serve to create more work for your employee and yourself in reviewing them.
2. Consider hosting a virtual meeting to discuss work for each day. An agenda for that meeting might look like this:
  - » What needs to be accomplished?
  - » Who will take point on each task?
  - » By when will each task be completed?
  - » How can we best support each other today?
3. During this time, keep in mind that work might not take place in the normal 9-5 work time. Certainly, if that is necessary you can state that, but if there is room for flexibility, please consider giving your employees flexibility.

Once again, we trust our managers to delegate and deliver work for the company while also taking good care of our people. These are challenging times for everyone. Let's take good care of each other.

Managers will be the front line to taking good care of your employees. Remember that if the managers are feeling appreciated and calm, they will pass that along to their employees. Be intentional about caring for your managers and employees, especially during difficult times. We hope this module has been of help to you as you continue to navigate issues related to COVID-19 and your business.



## WANT MORE?

Take WELCOA's exclusive course *Leading the Way to a Healthier Organization* on our online learning environment, The WELCOA Institute. The course provides skill-building for improving communication, focus and trust in the organization through committed and aligned leadership.

<https://www.welcoa.org/resources/leading-way-healthier-organization/>



# MAINTAINING & BUILDING TRUST IN FRANTIC TIMES

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Trust is defined as a firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something. Trust impacts our well-being because it supports our mental health through our ability to feel safe and manage our anxiety, it supports our social health through our relationships, and our physical health because when our mental and emotional health are well, it positively impacts our bodies.

Trust is perhaps one of the most important needs we have during times of crisis. It becomes an anchoring point in a world that offers so much uncertainty. Having the trust of employees is crucial to ensure that operations run smoothly and clear communication flows between team members and leadership. Use these tips to maintain and build trust in unprecedented times:

### 1. **Be Honest**

During times of crisis, uncertainty runs high and many feel a lack of control. Remain honest with your employees about both positive and negative aspects of the business. Expect your management teams to maintain the same level of honesty with employees. This sense of integrity makes your employees and colleagues more trusting of your actions. Let people know what is happening and how leadership is responding. Best practice in times like this are to manage the communication, rather than leaving it to the inevitable rumor mill. If you are willing be honest, people will gain more respect for you and look to you for further information.

### 2. **Admit When You Don't Know**

A common mistake of leadership is trying to create trust by asserting that they have everything under control and know how everything will work out. When there is information you don't know, state that. Then state how you are working to get the information and how you will communicate it.

### 3. **Right or Wrong, Be Transparent**

During stressful times, dynamics change regularly. As humans we learn by trial and error. When you need to change directions on a previous decision, admit that it wasn't the solution you had hoped for. Provide information around what next steps are and the plan for moving forward.

### 4. **Listen**

When people feel heard they feel valued. In times where uncertainty is high, feeling valued and cared for are needed even more. Involve employees in achieving company goals and brainstorming new ideas during times of crisis when flexibility and fluidity are essential. Listen with an open mind even if you don't ultimately choose to follow a suggestion made by an employee. Be transparent with your company's mission and goals so all employees feel they are a valuable part of obtaining those objectives. Employees who feel valued are more likely to instill trust in those leaders.

### 5. **Don't Micromanage**

This makes employees feel like they're being babysat and that you don't trust them to do their work. Be clear on what tasks are most important and the deadlines they should be completed by, then trust them to handle it on their own. Remind them that if they run into problems or have questions, they can ask you at any time. Trust takes time to build, but you can build it faster by showing your employees you believe in the work they do.



## 6. Value People Over Production

At the end of the day, production will not happen without the people. When you focus on valuing people, you will see the results: increased productivity, positive morale boosts and better teamwork. The idea is that when people feel valued, they work harder, they work with more integrity, they work with more intentionality, and they work with more passion.

Building and maintaining trust in the workplace should always be a priority, but in times of crisis it becomes a necessity. Remember that we are all going through this together. Burnout becomes more prevalent during stressful times and your employees look to management to be their guiding light. Care for them, check in on them, and be there for each other.

We hope this module has been of help to you as you continue to navigate issues related to COVID-19 and your business.



### WANT MORE?

Want to get tailored strategies and support for establishing trust across all areas of the organization? WELCOA's Well Workplace Checklist is a 150 item assessment that measures the extent to which you are establishing aligned, people-focused approaches in your organization. Receive your top strengths and weaknesses and measure your scores against other organizations like you.

<https://www.welcoa.org/get-started/checklist/>





# SUPPORTING HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTION

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Connection is vital to maintain health and thriving as humans. As a matter of fact, connection-experiencing positive, trusting relationships with others—is [one of the seven areas of human needs](#) that WELCOA recommends organizations support when creating successful workplace wellness initiatives. Feeling a sense of belonging, acceptance and support has some very compelling outcomes when it comes to our mental health, longevity and chronic disease prevention.

The irony about ‘social distancing’ is that we are, and need to be, more socially connected than ever before. As we connect virtually for meetings, we are connected into people’s homes where they are existing with their families who may or may not pop in during a meeting. If managed well, this time can be an opportunity to foster deeper human connections with each other and maintain new and stronger cultures for belonging and connection in our organization. Here are some tips for managing social connections during a difficult time.

## Keep It Positive

The intensity of our social connection is increased due to this situation. It is imperative to focus not just on social connection, but on healthy social connection. This is a time when some people may feel warranted, due to the stress, to be firm, aggressive, passive aggressive or rude. If you see this happening in your company you can compassionately address it. The below example provides language that everyone can use regardless of their level in the company.

### EXAMPLE: ADDRESSING UNHEALTHY SOCIAL INTERACTION

If you find someone engaging in unhealthy social interaction, try addressing it by saying the following.

*“I want to acknowledge that these are very stressful times. I can see that you are feeling frustrated by the situation. I want to remind you that it is more imperative than ever that we maintain respectful communication for everyone.”*

## Foster Joy through Connection

While we need to be aware of the challenging dynamics of social connection, we also need to facilitate healthy, joyful social connection. There are several ways in which you can have a little fun right now. Here are a few quick-win ideas.

1. Some people are jokingly calling their pets and kids “co-workers” and sharing funny comments about what working from home is really like. Encourage your team to share (via email, internal chat or video conference) funny and real-life examples of their experience.
2. Create a company specific hashtag to share fun things among employees within the company.
3. Join together as a team or company in supporting some of the efforts to help those more gravely impacted by this pandemic. For example, raising money to support a local business, donating blood, or helping out the local food bank to provide food to those in need. Doing so as a group helps everybody come together to focus on a common good.

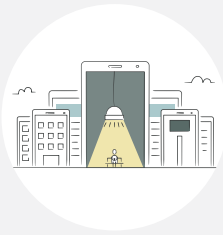


## Be Intentional

During this time of social distancing, with many employees working remotely from their homes, the frequent connections that just organically happen during a work day are no longer going to happen by chance. In Module 7, *Resources For Managers To Support Their Teams*, strategies for managing remote workers with the right types of check-ins were provided. Another important element of remote check-ins is that they might be the only source of connection that an isolated employee has during this time. Here are three great ideas to maximize social connection among your team and organization as a whole.

1. **Make the majority, if not all, meetings video chat meetings.** Systems like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, LogMeIn and many others provide great video conferencing capabilities for organizations. Many of these have free versions that you can access right away.
2. **Schedule multiple all-team check-ins throughout the day.** Consider scheduling a video conference meeting at the beginning of the day and another at the end of the day so that everyone will have the opportunity for face-time with their colleagues.
3. **Take time to actually connect.** Before getting into the flow of meetings, go round robin among all attendees and do a check-in on how they are feeling. Try prompts like “how’s your head?”, “how’s your heart?” and “how’s your health?” to get team members to speak openly about how they are coping.

During these unique times, we are balancing our families, our work, and our social media apps all at the same time. It can be challenging and overwhelming. While it is important to encourage employees to take a break from being constantly available to avoid burnout, being deliberate about fostering the right types of social connection will improve employee engagement and morale as we all work together to manage issues related to COVID-19 at work.



### WANT MORE?

WELCOA has teamed up with subject matter expert, Stuart Chittenden, founder of Squishtalks, to help arm you in the battle against loneliness. Build your arsenal with this Loneliness E-book.

<https://www.welcoa.org/resources/loneliness-ebook/>



# PLANNING FORWARD

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As we are all getting through this unprecedented time, it can seem overwhelming to think about planning forward. However, as we have discussed in other modules, managing workplace issues related to COVID-19 forces us to start thinking differently about communication, connection, leadership, management, team dynamics, and how our actual work is organized to get things done. While some of the changes we are making during this time may revert back after there is no more threat from COVID-19, there is a lot that we can use to plan for other challenging times in the future. Here are two quick ways to make the most of this difficult time by planning forward.

## Keep a Log

Let's keep this simple. On a note in your computer or on your desk, keep a running list of things that went well. Try using the below questions as prompts.

- » Which teams did really well working from home? What can they offer about their experience that others can learn from?
- » Which leaders emerged as exceptional during this time?
- » What platforms worked really well?
- » What things did the company let go of, that were healthy?
- » What things did the company add that were really meaningful to people?

Keeping a list of things that went well will not only help you with your own gratitude practice, but also your capacity to emerge as a leader when things return to normal, whatever that may look like.

## Take What You Like...

...And apply it to the future! As WELCOA continues to help the organizations we serve gain a better understanding of supporting the whole person at work, it occurs to us that many of the things organizations are doing now to manage issues related to COVID-19 have been things we have been encouraging companies to consider for general employee wellbeing such as:

- » Flexible hours
- » Work from home options
- » Clarity of roles and expectations
- » Social Connection

Be encouraged by the possibility that this situation is forming us, inviting us to create new and meaningful ways to take good care of people. In a crisis, we are required to think about the most important things people need from us as leaders. Let us emerge from this in life-giving ways.



## WANT MORE?

If you need more support planning your strategy moving forward, take the [7 Benchmarks Certification Course](#) available on the [WELCOA Institute for Wellness Studies](#). This resource has already helped thousands of WELCOA Members gain a deeper understanding of how to successfully grow their wellness initiatives, increase employee engagement and effectively communicate their wellness value story.