

Leader Tool – Redefining support for ourselves and our people

Just like the virus, our minds can easily become infected with negativity and our feelings of being overwhelmed dominate how we live our life. When dealing with the COVID-19 virus, we use social distancing, washing our hands and staying home. To deal with the virus of the mind – we can reduce becoming infected by using our thoughts, feelings and emotions to remain inoculated from the stress. In times of great stress, yes, the times that we are in right now, we can forget our inner strengths and core skills.

During the initial stage of the pandemic, where businesses had a goal: keep everyone safe. Many focused-on transitions, transformation and supporting employees working from home. Now almost six months later, it is difficult to sustain the level of support and engagement with employees who are fatigued, sometimes unmotivated and most likely anxious. As leaders, we too are human.

In the initial stages, while productivity was high, the ongoing challenges combined with concerns about fears of losing jobs or career concerns kept many moving and working. However, as the weeks have turned into months, the mental health concerns have increased, conflict in workplaces have increased, and productivity has decreased.

Managers are often being asked by their managers (and staff who report to them in a sometimes-unmanageable sandwich) What can managers do to assist their team, their businesses and themselves?

Define what it is that you mean by support. Is it physical, emotional or environmental? Being clear, according to Brene Brown, is being kind. If you can get clarity to do so –this assists all parties involved. That way, precious resources of time, energy and money can be directed into the correct channels.

Find support for themselves, develop a routine with regular breaks throughout the day, plan time for engaging with employees, schedule exercise time or time for a walk. A routine provides structure and allows us to feel a sense of control even if we need to be flexible or agile. If there is something unexpected or unplanned, once it is managed it can be looked at and incorporated into our routine to plan accordingly.

Practice self-compassion. The easiest way to think about this is to imagine your best friend doing your role. It is ok to not complete all the items on the to-do list; it is ok to not feel a sense of achievement. What is not ok is feeling that you have not achieved anything almost every day. Do you need some support? Resources? Training? Get some systems and priorities the need. Give responsibility to others where you can and be kind in showing them the proper processes (again and again) until it is done correctly.

Be kind and patient – self-compassion and compassion for others is a skill that COVID-19 is teaching many people. Try to be fair to yourself and your people. It is about remembering that each and everybody is trying their best, and each situation is different. This may come about because many people on staff are parents of young children. If those children are under ten, then it is very difficult (to say the least) to be productive day in and day out in that scenario. Be open to discussing working arrangements to find a solution that suits everyone's needs.



Recognise that this is a demanding time. The clients that you service or work with have high demands on themselves, and their expectations are high in return. Working with them and discussing their expectations and asking for their understanding can be worrying but needed. The mantra that “everyone is doing their best” especially for those in essential services.

Manage the high anxiety levels that exist, rather than ignoring it. This means avoiding trying to juggle too many demands (yes, stop and slow down if you have too many spinning plates). Recognise that managing emotions now is compromised so modelling calm, apologies and deep breathing is almost vital. Being clear that your people’s capacity to think is diminished by the current stress (similar to flight or fight mode) and their responses not as crisp. Sometimes the stress impedes the thinking, and they are just responding without considering process or alternatives. This high level of anxiety may also mean that you are also compromised and not thinking before responding – this can quickly turn to anger, impatience and aggressiveness. An extreme example of this is where there are increases in incidents of violence (in the media) and threats towards those supporting us in healthcare.

Managers who are experiencing similar emotions of anxiety and may be feeling pressure to deliver ‘business as usual’ on figures, projects or goals. On top of this, there is also an expectation to manage employees who are now working remotely. This can be challenging because (realistically) those employees may not be at their best, and their efficiency and/or productivity may be down. This then leads to managers feeling frustrated and unsure of how to manage employees as they feel overwhelmed too. Remembering your humanness at this point may be helpful. Managers may be reacting instead of responding with clarity, kindness and/or compassion. If you are wanting to discuss this further, remember that there is a Manager Support Hotline at AccessEAP to support you.

The intensity of the pandemic means that what employees are talking about to managers can be stressful. Also, the sheer number of employees with different pressures makes it difficult for managers to feel in control or to deliver on BAU. It is ok to feel very human at this time of great uncertainty. Remembering that your staff can and will learn their required skills and you can carve out precious time for yourself and your priorities.

Look for the win-win in the current situations and try not to take things personally during these heightened times. Remember, everyone is trying to do a good job just by asking for help; they are moving one small step closer to completing the task. Finally, try not to overthink things and focus on what is important right now and what you can control, shift your thinking from loss and blame and focus on moving forward. One small step at a time, and we can get there.

We are here to support you so that you can better support your people. If you have any further questions or would like to discuss a specific concern contact our Manager Support Hotline or your Relationship Manager. As always, as your EAP we are here to support your people whatever the nature of their concerns, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

