

Keys for Leaders During this Crazy Time

When the Covid-19 health crisis set in, leaders had to quickly implement policies for keeping both employees and customers safe. While those changes were necessary, what's often overlooked are the issues that employees may have to deal with beyond their work. Every employee is dealing with a different and unique situation right now and along those lines, I recently read a piece which is apropos to this topic. Adele Spallone, a licensed behavioral health counselor writes about the soft skills leaders should sharpen to keep their employees happy and on track. Here are her thoughts-

Lead with empathy- Many employees have been experiencing higher levels of stress and anxiety due to the uncertainties of this pandemic, says Spallone. Anxiety and burnout have been on the rise, and these struggles can create a disengaged workforce," she says. "Employees need to know that their leaders can empathize with them." Every employee's situation is different, and leaders should make the effort to consider things from their employees' point of view. "Leaders need to ask themselves, 'if these things were happening to me, how would I feel or what would I be going through,'" Spallone says.

It cannot stop with reflection, though. Leaders need to use their sense of empathy to create actions, gestures or accommodations that can help alleviate the stresses of their employees. From something as simple as offering to discuss their concerns, connecting them to available wellness programs, adjusting their work schedules or providing personal time off, leaders can demonstrate that they are genuinely mindful of their employees' well-being.

Be flexible- "If and where it's possible, employers can offer flexible working hours — especially for those taking care of kids or ill family members" Spallone suggests. Employees can feel valued and appreciated if they know that leaders are willing to adjust workload or schedules to their unprecedented life changes.

Be an active listener- Often, people listen without truly *hearing* what the other person is saying. Active listening requires one to fully concentrate and try to understand what someone else is discussing with them. Making active listening a priority can help leaders connect with their employees, reinforcing their sense of acknowledgement and empathy with their employees' situations. It can also help employees feel more comfortable and affirmed in their communications with leaders.

"Employees are a company's greatest asset, and that is why, when you are amidst a crisis like this pandemic, it is so incredibly important to be empathetic, flexible and to really listen to your employees' needs," Spallone says. "Continue to ask questions and acknowledge their feelings and you will be will on your way to eliminating anxieties and improving productivity."