

The Deblieux Report

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KEEP YOUR DISTANCE BUT KEEP CONNECTED

Five Action Items for Staying Connected to Your Team

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Times are changing. But one thing remains constant for workplace leaders. **You must be connected with your team.** In the midst of all the moving parts around us, your team is looking to you to provide some measure of stability. Despite all the uncertainty, your team knows one thing for sure – you are their lifeline to their source of income and security. Let's look at five things you can do to support them through the times ahead.

One

Be Yourself. Be Honest.

It is always important for you to be yourself. If teams do anything well, they sense when their leader is trying to be somebody other than who they really are. They know you better than you realize. Part of their stability rests in their ability to reasonably predict how you operate.

You should always be honest, but these times call for an unprecedented level of honesty. People are worried. They are wondering. They are concerned. They need to depend on you for accurate information. They may not like what you have to say, but they must be able to trust it.

Here is a tip. Check your emotions at the door. Focus on business issues and moving them forward. Let your team hear and see you working to keep them working. Demonstrate your competence as a leader through professional, job-related words, actions, and behaviors.

If you do not know, say you do not know. If you need to check, write it down so you remember. If you said something yesterday that needs to change today, explain why you need to make the change. If you do not remember what you said, ask someone what they remember hearing you say. Their memory will often be better than yours.

Two

Communicate in the Language of Your Team

Every word in every e-mail, every word in every conversation, carries significant weight for your team. More than ever, the message received is more important than the message sent. It does not matter if you think your message is clear. It does matter if your team thinks it is clear.

Here is a tip. Step into the shoes of your team. Craft every message as though you are on the receiving end. Do not speak "management." Big words, long phrases, are unnecessary when your team is worried about health, family and financial stability.

Before you click on send, ask someone else to read your message; preferably someone closer to the shoes of your direct reports than you are. Video record your opening remarks for a staff meeting. Play them back in front of someone who can be brutally honest with you about the effectiveness of your message and your delivery.

Three

Listen More than You Talk

Most of us have a tendency to talk too much. We tend to hear part of what someone is telling us and leap to take over the conversation. We are anxious to tell our story more than we are to listen to their story. Now is not the time to interrupt or talk over a member of your team. They need to share. They need you to share and you need to know their experiences, their concerns, their questions. They may very well be afraid to ask or share for fear of saying the wrong thing costing them their job.

Here is a tip. Give people your full attention. Keep distractions out of your line of sight when you are with your team. Be connected physically and emotionally. Don't interrupt. Instead, ask questions like, tell me more, keep going, give me a little more insight. Don't feel obligated to respond. Sometimes, the best thing you can say is, "Thank you for sharing that with me." In some cases, you may add, "Is there something I can do to help?" In others, it might be best to say, "Let me think about all this. Can we talk tomorrow?"

Four

In-person, Phone, Video Over Text, E-mail

With people working at home and not able to travel or gather, it is more important than ever to connect on a personal level. It is not a good time to be camera shy. It is a time to let your team see you and be in your presence. You cannot do that with a text or an e-mail. Words are 7% of communication. Body language, tone, eye contact and such make up the other 93%.

Here is a tip. Take the lead. Let your team know you would like to have as much face-to-face contact as possible. Respect their privacy but encourage them to experiment with video chat and other ways for you to "see" each other. Start most conversations by asking the other person how they are doing. Don't start with a problem or a question about work. Start with a sincere effort to connect at a human level. Listen. Offer help where appropriate. Be sincerely empathetic.

Five

Take Time for Yourself

Everyone is at least a little bit overwhelmed right now. Everyone includes you. Your team needs you to be even stronger than you normally are. They need you to be their anchor; to be even keeled in stormy waters. You cannot be those things if you are not taking care of yourself.

You do not need to be super-person. You do need to recognize your mental, emotional, and physical capacity is being challenged. You have your own loved ones to worry about and care for in addition to your team. Your batteries have to be charged and recharged for you to be effective.

Here is a tip. Get the sleep you need to be who you need to be for those who depend on you. Watch your diet. Get your exercise.

Make time to get away from work. Kick a ball off the side of a building. Walk to the end of the street and back. Do a few jumping jacks. Just do a little something a few times a day to get away from the stress of being a workplace leader.

Find someone you can confide in. Don't keep it all inside. It needs to get out.

Look in the mirror. Be ready to be their leader before you get in front of your team. Be ready to answer the same question the tenth time it is asked with the same energy you used to answer it the first time.

And One More Thing.

Tell your team thank you and mean it.

You Can Do It

You are up for the challenge. You would not be a leader if you were not. Just take a little time to think about what you are doing, how you are doing it, and how it is working.

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