

A Guide to Leadership in Uncertain Times

Welfare

The Situation

Prior to the Coronavirus outbreak, mental ill health was the number one cause of long-term absence at work. The second cause of long-term absence were musculoskeletal problems. It therefore might not be surprising that there is a belief among HR professionals that the current situation is very likely to exacerbate these.

It is important that during this period of uncertainty, an employee's welfare is still a priority and not forgotten about. This encompasses checking in on their mental wellbeing as well as their physical health.

Why Is It Important to Focus on Welfare?

- Employees are now more likely to be spending longer periods of time on their own. Even though they may be on virtual calls, it is still a different environment from working in an office.
- Long periods of isolation can impact an employee's mental wellbeing so its important to understand how they are feeling about things both inside and outside of work. Thoughts and worries about the uncertainty of life in general just now can play a major part in poor mental health. Equally, an overburdening of work or perhaps having not enough work to do, can play a part in poor mental health.
- Working in isolation or away from a team environment can cause employees to fall behind on workloads and if you don't check in on their welfare, the employee could end up heading off in a different direction from the rest of the team. If an employee is disengaged, their welfare will be impacted.
- Working from home is different from working in the office for physical reasons as well. Employees may have no choice but to sit on a sofa rather than at a proper desk. Even if they do have a desk and chair, it may actually be their dining room table. Spending long periods of time sitting on chairs that are not designed for working at a

laptop can have a serious impact on posture and can cause musculoskeletal problems.

What Will it Really Achieve?

- The current situation allows employers and employees to try out new channels and everyone must be prepared to adapt.
- This could be a chance for employees to work on new projects and concepts, thinking differently about things. It allows for a chance to push boundaries as well and one way to improve mental wellbeing is to allow employees to try out new ways of working.
- The employee's mental wellbeing will be in a much better shape at the end of all of this, as they will feel they have been easily able to transition during this period.
- Employees will feel connected to the workplace and if done correctly, they may not feel as if much has changed because the team spirit is still there, they are just working in different locations, but the team communication continues.

What Happens If I Don't?

- If an employer ignores concerns around wellbeing, they could find that in a few months, a variety of problems will surface. Employees who you think are fine, may suddenly be off with long term absences because the transition back to work has been so difficult.
- If an employee has been working, for weeks or potentially months, at a table and chair not ergonomically designed for long-term use, they could end up with issues that will impact their physical health further down the line.
- If you don't manage welfare just now, there is a concern that issues that you may not be aware of can go unnoticed and cause concerns later. If you are unaware of how your team are getting on, feelings of resentment can build up and in turn lead to grievances for a while variety of

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things. In the same way you should do in the office, checking in on your employees is vitally important. You don't want to have to manage grievances or performance issues when this moment passes. Deal with welfare just now and it shouldn't cause as many issues later on.

How to Manage Welfare

- Don't turn a blind eye to it. If you recognise that something doesn't seem right with an employee, it probably isn't. Checking in with people is important to make sure that everyone in the team is OK. If you notice an employee is very quiet on team calls or you don't hear from them, you should check in with them as soon as possible.
- At least once a day an email or a chat should happen and whilst this can be brief, it's important your employee knows you are there.
- Once a week a conversation should take place over a virtual call. Asking questions of the employee, such as "how are you feeling in general?" "Are you feeling ok?" "Is there anything that is worrying you?" can create an open dialogue. Be mindful that some people react differently to this than others and don't like the insinuation that they perhaps aren't coping. Striking a balance with communication is important and as a manager/leader, knowing your team well and gauging/knowing how to broach the topic is critical.
- There is a danger that you could end up emailing an employee too much; sometimes it is easier to just pick up the phone rather than sending endless emails. If an employee's inbox is overflowing with emails, this is likely to have a detrimental impact on their welfare.
- If an employee is now working from home for long periods of time, they need to be seated somewhere that isn't going to badly impact their

physical health. Can a chair be ordered for them? Or can other reasonable adjustments be arranged/implemented to ensure they have a safe working environment?

- Be mindful that it is hard for people to completely detach themselves from the things that are happening outside of work just now, so it's important to address these things if they are impacting someone at work.
- Be an active listener. Respond to what the employee is saying. Sometimes you can't resolve worries, but you can do things to make things easier for them.
- Fill in a risk assessment survey to identify employees who are struggling.

Final Thoughts

If you try to consider all of the points mentioned you are making sure that you don't lose your staff over this period of time. Staff will become lost if there is no leadership or any attention paid to their welfare in what are incredibly challenging times. You must ensure your employees stay on track.

Having small conversations about welfare link very easily to productivity. Never has it been more important to put people in front of productivity. Having regular conversations with employees could resolve issues really quickly. If an employee has no platform to talk about their own welfare, they can lose track, become lost, worry endlessly and their productivity will slip. If they feel supported and are able to talk through concerns, their productivity will increase.

Every team is different, and you will know yours better than anyone. If a team meeting every morning works for you then that is absolutely fine, just be sure to be aware of how your team members are doing and look out for unusual signs and understand how your team are feeling. If they are not forthcoming, there is more than likely an

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issue that you should look in to, so follow up with a private call with them.

Further Guidance & Support

Contact your Account Manager or a member of the team for support and any further queries you may have.

info@gravitatehr.co.uk / 0131 225 7458

We are here to help!

If you feel a risk assessment would be beneficial to your team, have a look at our demo for our Remote Working Module on our website which can be tailored to your organisation.