

Stress in the workplace in the time of COVID:

A Guide for Managers



Many [studies](#) have stated that in 2020 employees have felt more stressed than ever before. COVID-19 has put a lot of pressure on employees: from the quick adjustment to remote work, to additional caregiving demands and concerns about physical and mental health, the pressure for many is intense. Which ramps up the intensity of management responsibility.

While much of the conversation has revolved around productivity and effectiveness, there's also concern about employee [engagement](#) and [retention](#). Everyone, in their own way, has challenges right now. Engaging with employees to really understand how they are impacted personally can make all the difference – even if the conversation is uncomfortable. Figuring out a way to pull together your team and check on them can pay huge dividends and make them feel more supported by the organization. It lets them talk about, how they are doing, share their perspectives - even vent - and learn from others how to manage.

But how to best create that forum? Check out the tips below:

1. Create a safe space.

The point of these conversations is to hear directly from employees. How are they doing? What have they experienced? What concerns or challenges do they have? What additional support do they need to be successful? Think about whether this should be a one-on-one or group conversation. People are less candid if the environment is not one where they feel safe.

2. Set ground rules & tone.

You want to have a candid conversation but it is important to do it in such a way that is appropriate for the workplace. This is particularly hard at this cultural moment. One way to accomplish this is to remind everyone about the company's code of conduct or values. Because video interaction makes visual cues harder to read, be sure to pull in and respect all of the participants and their perspectives.

3. Have a defined topic.

This will get the conversation going. Prepare a series of relevant questions or experiences to engage others. But don't get bogged down. Let the conversation flow and see where it goes organically.

4. You don't have to have all the answers.

Leaders often feel like they need to have all the answers. That's rarely the case. Acknowledging that you do not have all the answers up front will help set the right expectations for the conversation and allow people to lower their guard. Plus, one of the benefits is to allow employees an opportunity to share their perspective.

5. Encourage and allow everyone to share their perspective.

Letting the conversation flow is the goal. Ironically, following a virtual meeting protocol makes that easier. Consider using the chat or hand raising functionality. If you can, have someone else administrate the Q&A so you can stay engaged in the conversation.

6. Remember some of us engage by listening.

Some people prefer to listen rather than talk, especially in group settings and with sensitive topics. Leveraging the chat function to share comments or observations is a good way to involve quieter team members.

7. Don't dominate the conversation.

It's not about you. The intent of these conversations is for leaders to hear employee perspectives. Make a note to talk less than 10% of the time and stick to it. This is for your employees, not you.

8. Get comfortable being uncomfortable.

Everyone is a little uncomfortable right now. All the rules have changed. At some point, someone will make a comment that will make others uncomfortable. That's ok. Participants should not have to sugar coat things versus sharing their true feelings.

9. Close out the conversation.

Thank the participants for their engagement. Be mindful of the time and close the conversation on time. With 5 minutes to go, replay key highlights and include next steps or follow ups.

10. Continue to have conversations.

Keep going. This is the kind of engagement that helps leaders better understand where their teams are during these unprecedented times - the good, the bad, and the ugly. Bringing teams together once is not enough. Circumstances are changing rapidly. Continued engagement is the only way to stay abreast of how those changes are affecting your team. Life is complicated right now. Honest, open conversations acknowledging the difficulty provides a stress relief valve, ultimately helping you, your team and your company.

Need more help with creating an environment to have honest conversation on difficult and challenging topics?

[Stanton Blackwell](#) is here to help. Reach out to me at info@stantonblackwell.com and let's talk through how to set up a safe space in a remote environment to have conversations with your employees.



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