



Realize Wellbeing

WHAT'S NEXT



A TOOLKIT TO
HELP YOU
LEAD YOUR
COMPANY BACK FROM
THE PANDEMIC

CREATED BY
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INTRODUCTION

I know that so many of you have been in the trenches for months now. First, watching and waiting to see if/when this would become something that required changes in your company. Then, responding rapidly to social distancing requirements and best practices. Once everyone was settled at home, then came the legal changes, loan packages, and a million other points of information to sort and disseminate. .

While serving as station chief of the COVID-19 Command Center in your own company, you also probably answered a million questions from concerned, maybe even panicked employees. You likely created the email communication that went out from your CEO and remained calm and centered for the C-Suite as well.

Your efforts have been monumental. At some point, we will begin the process of returning to work. Like many of us, you likely realize that while we might be returning to work, we will not be returning to normal. So much has changed in our hearts and minds and for our employees as well.

Hurdles that once seemed challenging, like allowing our employees to work from home, we cleared overnight. We have suffered collective trauma, meaning that not a single person in the United States was unaffected by this. By the time we return, it is conservatively estimated that approximately 80,000 Americans will have died. That means that your employees may have lost loved ones. Lastly, our economy has been impacted and will have ripples yet unseen.

I know that many of you are on the brink of exhaustion. My hope is that this toolkit can help support the next bulk of work you will need to address, which is returning to a new normal. This is yet another instance, where we are the helpers Mr. Rogers said to look for. We are the one's we've been waiting for. We will be the leaders who shape the next 50 years of the American work experience as we respond to the massive shifts this pandemic has created.

Let's get to work.

With Love,

Maggie

GETTING STARTED

STATE OF THINGS

Never before in our modern world, with the technology we have and virtual access to employees, have we experienced a global pandemic. There are no instructions for what to do next.

Right now, we are in the midst of the nation's largest work from home pilot project. Although, the experience is muddled with the effects of finding our way through a pandemic.

Many of our industries have had to furlough employees because their work simply cannot be done remotely.

Meanwhile, our essential services are overloaded, and employees are undoubtedly burning out.

GUIDANCE

This toolkit is designed to give you scripts to pull and adapt as your own, survey questions to tactically collect meaningful data that will serve to inform next steps, and prompts to aid you in the development of your own leadership.

Realize Wellbeing grounds our work in the science of Self Determination Theory, and Dr. Brene Brown's Wholehearted Living. This combination provides authentic and compassionate leadership with an understanding of human behavior.

PROMPTS

In each section we will give you prompts to support the development of your own leadership. These questions will help you craft your own roadmap for the duration of the year. We know that the best leadership comes from wisdom and the best wisdom comes from inside of yourself. Take time after each section to write down a few thoughts.

ENGAGING LEADERS

NEW NORMAL

The reality is that we will not be returning to normal. The best leaders will be ready and willing to adapt to the unseen changes that have occurred during this crisis, and there will be those that insist on returning to the status quo pre-COVID.

Either way, you will need to engage leadership in a conversation about how the company will move forward.

Acknowledging that everyone will need to return is the first step. Ideally, leadership will present a way forward that provides consistency, alignment among all leaders, and clarity.

ASSERTIVE

When communicating with peers and leaders, the best communication style is assertive. An assertive language style allows you to be clear and concise while respecting the dignity of all people.

Assertive is neither passive, aggressive, nor passive aggressive.

On the following page, you will find sample scripts to help you open the conversation about returning to work using the assertive skill set.

PROMPTS

What are the things your leadership may not be ready to accept?

What are the ways in which they've surprised you? What strengths did you see?

Where did you find common ground?

At what points along the way did you see your leaders hit their stress point?

SAMPLE SCRIPT

Here are a few communication tactics that you can implement when communicating with your leaders.

Empathy is simply holding space for the challenges and struggles of others. The act of empathy provides different perspectives and helps keep us from feeling as though people are intentionally making things more difficult for us. Remember, we are human, and we are all in this together. Empathetic communication sounds like this:

"This is very hard. None of us have ever gone through this, and all of us are impacted."

"I don't think there is a right or wrong way to feel about what is happening. I am glad you felt comfortable sharing this with me."

Assertiveness is a skill set that allows you to clearly and concisely share information in a manner that respects the dignity of every person involved. To open the conversation about returning to work, you might consider this:

"I would like to begin discussing some aspects of how people will return to work. I anticipate there will be a multitude of things to consider. While we don't currently know when or how exactly this will occur, I think it would be in our best interest to begin thinking through aspects such as employees desire to continue working from home or requests for new flexible work schedules."

If you find yourself in a situation where you are struggling to get clear information, or your leader may be struggling to make a decision, consider these responses:

"I understand that this is very difficult, however, in order for me to continue moving forward and supporting our staff during this time, I need a decision by <insert your deadline>."

"I can imagine you are very busy, unless I hear otherwise by <insert date>, I will move forward with the plan outlined."

"I want to assure you that I have completed due diligence in this matter and crafted a solid plan. I am comfortable executing it with your approval."

Each of these responses are assertive. They provide clear information in a respectful way.

SAMPLE SCRIPT

One final tactic to work your way through communications with key leaders is to be sure you ask a lot of questions. When communication is unclear and cluttered and you need direction from leadership, be sure to ask clarifying questions that keep the information you need at the center of the conversation.

Questions serve two purposes:

1. They require the other person to pause and consider your needs and their response.
2. They rarely put people on the defensive. They can often lower the intensity of communication and allow the other party to feel heard.

"Can you clarify what your desired outcome is for this specific request?"

"Can you help me understand your concern with beginning these conversations?"

"If we were to do a really incredible job with this transition, what would be key factors for success?"

"On a scale of one to ten, one being we allow for no changes from our pre-COVID operating style, and ten being you're willing to think through any ideas people bring to the table, can you help me understand where you fall?"

In any challenging situation, communication is key to provide direction, clarity, and leadership. If you continue to struggle with communication in your organization or with key leaders, try writing down your own needs.

Open dialogue by stating the needs that require a response by the end of your time with the individual or group. Before you leave, make sure that all of your needs have been addressed. If they haven't, kindly state:

"I still haven't gotten a clear response on these items, can you please provide that before we leave?"

"Let's quickly review our desired outcomes for this meeting to ensure we met them."

Having skills to seek clarity and support from leaders will improve business and employee outcomes in any situation. However, during times of stress or uncertainty, partnering with leaders to provide the best possible guidance for employees is even more challenging—and even more important.

ENGAGING EMPLOYEES

CLARITY

There is a lot of information that is unknown and will continue to be. There is also a lot of misinformation and there will continue to be.

This is where the employer can provide a sense of stability for employees.

Share as much information as you can. Even if the information is, in fact, that you don't have the information at that date. Even that provides clarity.

Be willing to answer questions. When employees are able to ask questions, it will help them feel heard. You don't want them to believe you are evading them. Managers are key stakeholders in information. Be sure they are well informed.

AUTHENTICITY

There is no play book for a situation like this. Which, in many ways, is a valuable invitation to show up just as you are; to let go of who you think you are supposed to be, and lead from your most authentic self.

Employees respond to authentic leadership. False leadership breeds mistrust. Offer from the core of who you are, and people will grant you authority to lead because they will trust your intentions and motivations.

PROMPTS

What is it you wish you could say to your employees right now?

In what ways do trust yourself to be the best leader of the current situation?

Remember, you are an employee who works for your company, your needs are not dissimilar from everyone else's. What are the needs you'd like to have met?

SAMPLE TRANSITION LANGUAGE

For Collecting Data Now:

"As we continue to monitor the situation and understand how things will develop, we are also beginning to consider what it might look like to transition back to work. We recognize that you all hold a wealth of information about what this experience was like, how we handled it as a company, and how we might evolve from it. We do not currently know when we will be returning to work, but we would like to begin to hear from you."

For Return:

"Some of you may be glad to be returning, some of you may have found new ways of working that are meaningful that you may desire to maintain, and some of you may be experiencing grief and loss. As your employer, we want you to know we are committed to the ongoing vitality and development of you and the company."

There is no doubt that this crisis has formed every single one of us in many ways. Our goal is to do our best to support your needs and hear from you as we transition back to work. In the coming months, we will continue to collect information about how we can evolve as a company and community of people in support of a common goal."

For Furloughed Employees:

"As we transition back to work, we want to take the opportunity to share our deepest regret that we were in a position to furlough employees. Ideally, the company would have been in a better situation to continue to compensate employees while our stores/manufacturing facility/offices were closed. Our intention is to secure the viability of the company so that everyone has a job to come back to. We want to assure you that we are working tirelessly to do that.

<insert some of the specific actions the company has taken>.

There is no doubt that this crisis has formed every single one of us in many ways. Our goal is to do our best to support your needs and hear from you as we transition back to work. In the coming months, we will continue to collect information about how we can evolve as a company and community of people in support of a common goal."

DATA COLLECTION

NEED TO KNOW

How are your employees doing?

Which managers have done the best job handling this transition?

What ways did the company best support people?

Wouldn't you like to know... The best way to support your employees right now, is by asking them. The best way to support their transition back to work is by asking them what they need/desire.

Aside from when we will be able to return, which will come from public health officials, the best information for how we return is in the heads and hearts of your employees.

NEEDS SUPPORTIVE

Based on the science of Self-Determination Theory, a needs supportive environment builds trust and improves job satisfaction.

Needs Supportive Leadership:

- Listens and acknowledges employee experience
- Facilitates initiative
- Provides feedback

When collecting data, follow these same guidelines. Survey, Facilitate, Explain.

PROMPTS

In what ways do you anticipate your employees will expect new operating styles of work?

What operating styles that emerged from this period of time proved to be positive?

What shifts were you contemplating prior to this crisis that you were able to test, to some degree, during this time?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

How well did the company support your needs during social distancing? *note this is important to know because they will talk about it. If people did not feel the company supported their needs, it will impact your culture and brand.

What would support your transition back to work?

How well did your team communicate while working remotely?

How well did your team perform while working remotely?

How effective was your manager at supporting you remotely?

How effective were you at working remotely?

Would you be interested in continuing to work remotely?

Would you be interested in flexible scheduling?

What processes were improved during the time in which we were working remotely and responding to the crisis?

Within our industry, what ways might our company evolve through the changes/challenges we endured?

Were there any leaders that emerged in the midst of crisis?

In what ways were you able to better care for yourself as a result of working from home?

Did you experience loneliness as a result of being unable to come to work each day?

What was the biggest struggle in your work as a result of being at home?

What was the most effective aspect of your work as a result of being at home?

What resources would you need to continue working from home?

What resources would you desire to continue working from home?

How can we best support your well-being right now?

NOTES

YOUR LEADERSHIP

SELF CARE

Tackling big changes like new fitness routines and learning to cook quinoa might be out of the question right now.

When we talk about self care, we are talking about the basics:

Did you eat today?

Did you get rest?

Do you have someone to call when you really need some extra support?

Self care right now is not about growth, it's about survival. We need leaders like to you carry employees through the next phase of this crisis.

This is a very long crisis. It's happening in slow motion. Be sure to invest in a lot of personal self care. You must put your own oxygen mask on first.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

You are like the flight attendant on a plane in the midst of turbulence. Everyone continues to look to you for clarity about the turbulence and how to respond. They also look to you to be sure you are not losing your sense of calm.

Turbulence on a plane lasts minutes. This is lasting months. Your self care is more important than ever.

PROMPTS

How well are you coping right now?

What do you need to return to a sense of capacity?

Who is in your corner? Who can you call for connection that is outside of your primary circle of those you care for?

What do you hope for in this transition? Where are the opportunities you see?

SELF CARE

As always, your self care is of utmost importance. Even more so during times of crisis, as you provide care and guidance for others.

Transition Routines:

Give yourself pause to move from one set of work to another. For example, from work to home, you might change clothes, wash your face, and take a few deep breaths. Now, if you're working from home, you no longer have that commute that signals to your brain that it is time to transition. What's more, you have no built-in margin between your work life and home life. As a result, you may need to be more intentional about moving from one set of work to the next.

Example Transition Routine: From Work to Dinner Time - Let's call the area you have set up as your home office your "work command center". When moving from your work command center in your home to making dinner, you'll want to build in a new kind of margin to allow yourself to transition. Try: before going to the kitchen to make dinner, take a pause, walk to a quiet room or space, and listen to one of your favorite songs. Alternately, you can take between two and five minutes to pause, look out the window, and reflect on what you are most proud of from your day of work, or what you are most looking forward to in the evening to come.

Mindfulness:

We will all be multi-tasking way more than usual. Many of us will be working from our homes with children nearby and taking on extra duties as we determine how we make everything work. As often as possible, create time to focus on doing just one thing at a time. Mindfulness does not always require carving out time for meditation; you can make just a few simple tweaks in your day to increase mindfulness.

Example Strategy for Improved Mindfulness: Working on a project that does not require ongoing or close communication with other team members? Try to close out chat and email notifications while you are head down on the project so that you can mindfully focus on the task at hand. If you are worried about missing an important message, set a timer to remind you to check back in an hour.

Gratitude:

Feelings of scarcity are common in crisis. Gratitude is the practice of noticing and becoming mindful of your thankfulness. Gratitude works even if you don't share it with others. Simply pausing to notice your gratitude can have a lot of helpful responses for your well-being.

SELF CARE

Stretching and Movement:

Being closed in our houses can make us feel cramped. Stretching can take a few minutes and make our bodies feel more expansive. Example: Midday Stretch - Try this stretch to help you open up your body throughout the work day.

Try: Put your right hand on your left shoulder and put your left arm behind your back. Tip your head to the right, away from the shoulder you are holding. Then, look down at your right shoulder. Finally, tip your head to the right and rotate back; imagine you are trying to take a peak at something over your left shoulder. Hold each position for 3-5 seconds while breathing deeply and then repeat on the other side.

5-4-3-2-1:

When your anxiety sends you down a rabbit hole, which can easily happen right now, take a moment to notice five things you can see, four things you can touch, three things you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. This practice can bring you back into the present moment and into your body.

Nourishing Food:

Food is central to our sense of comfort. It is also key to our immune systems. Try to find a balance between comfort and health. Remember, healthy food is full of vitamins and nutrients. The healthiest foods are close to their natural state (like fresh or frozen vegetables or whole grains) and full of color and flavor. When it comes time to pick food, ask yourself, is this nutritious?

Example Strategy: Make Half Your Plate Fruits and Veggies - Keep your fats, proteins, and carbohydrates in the right proportions. Every time you eat, try to make half of your meal consist of fruits, vegetables, and/or beans.

Connection:

Find a friend. Have one person in mind who isn't a co-worker or immediate family member that you can call when you need some connection. The reason this person should be outside of our immediate circles is that when we need a break, likely the people closest to us do, too. In order to support the resiliency of everyone, call someone who is a layer or two outside of your immediate circle.

UNKNOWNNS

TRAUMA

We are experiencing collective trauma, meaning that not a single person in the US is unaffected by what has happened.

Some of your employees will have lost loved ones or even died. The mental health of our workforce will undoubtedly be impacted.

Be prepared to increase supports such as EAP. We may see a rise in alcoholism, drug addiction, divorce, depression, and anxiety.

Be prepared to let go of wellness programs that require employees to jump through hoops to prove their health. Programs of that nature will test the resilience of already exhausted employees.

ECONOMY

What repercussions the economy will face are yet to be seen. If the economy remains stable, people may choose to look for other jobs as a result of how their employer failed to care for them during this crisis.

We may see an increase in retirement, or because of the losses in the market, a decrease in retirement. Succession planning may be a vital next step for your company.

PROMPTS

What outliers exist for your company, specifically?

What outliers exist for your industry?

What ways do you think your company might want to be prepared, if at all, to these unknowns?

What supports do you already have in place to address trauma? Where do you have gaps?

FINAL THOUGHTS

Companies who invest the time now to plan for the transitional aspects of what's next will capitalize on valuable data from their employees, be more resilient in handling the unknowns, cultivate trust with employees, and do a better job of creating a healthy culture for people to return to.

I think all of us wish we had a better opportunity to get out in front of this pandemic; to be more fully prepared to transition our employees to remote work, bolster our financial resources, and operationalize other aspects of our work. At the time this was written, (4.6.2020) the most optimistic estimates have us transitioning back to work in three weeks. However, it is suspected we will be returning cautiously in 4 to 6 weeks, possibly 8.

Now is the time to begin thinking about that transition. Maybe you can't get to it this week or next, but add it to your agenda. Start floating it to your C-Suite so they can start to process their thoughts. Then get to work.

NOTES
