

Engaging Employees and Earning Trust in the COVID Economy

October 19, 2020



I heard a doctor say that, with COVID-19, we're really fighting two diseases: the actual pandemic and COVID Fatigue - the mental and physical exhaustion many people feel due to the strains on their health, personal lives and livelihoods. It is important for CEOs and other business leaders to remember, as they strive to restore some semblance of normalcy, that they must be concerned with both the physical and emotional well-being of their most valuable assets - their employees.

Employers need to demonstrate an understanding of, and compassion for, the challenges that their employees and their families are facing during these unprecedented times. This is truly a referendum on the leadership of every business or organization and how it will be managed in the future. I would like to share a few of the approaches we're taking at Anchin to combat the emotional impact of the pandemic on our team.

Make connections. We host a variety of virtual events to help people stay in touch socially, not only for work-related issues. Some events revolve around interests such as exercise or music. But we also hosted a "Lunch and Learn" forum on back-to-school challenges, which enabled parents to share experiences and ideas on how to balance work responsibilities with the demands of their kids' schooling, whether in person or remote.

Offer assistance. Many companies have Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that provide counseling and other services. We continually emphasize that support from our EAP is available for family members as well as the employees themselves.

Be flexible. Maintaining a flexible approach by accommodating employees' needs (where possible) as to scheduling, work assignments, etc. Done properly, a flexible approach can motivate employees by showing that you care about and understand their situations and challenges - and may remove obstacles that might otherwise stand in the way of serving clients. Flexibility is especially important as you plan a return to the workplace; you will need to consider physical space arrangements, health and safety, commuting, and other issues, and come up with a flexible back-to-work plan that can be embraced gradually and adjusted as needed.

Invest in talent. In many fields, ours included, there is a great opportunity to add talented employees whose previous jobs were lost to the pandemic. While it may seem counterintuitive to be hiring at a time of uncertainty, selectively adding team members in key positions may make sense and promotes your commitment to the future. Onboarding is difficult in a remote workplace, of course, so consider using mentors or a "buddy system" to help new staff members learn the company's policies and culture.

Communicate. People are desperate for information in times of turmoil, so good

communication is essential. Organizations need to be open and transparent about what they're doing, why they're doing it, and how employees may be affected. We communicate whenever there is a new development or milestone, to acknowledge a change in policy, or if we just feel employees have questions that require answers. Visual communication tends to be more impactful, so don't hesitate to make a video or host a webcast.

Every organization must find its own path to guide employees through the emotional ordeal of COVID-19. For those who do so successfully, the challenge of the pandemic may also be a unique opportunity to secure and build the trust and loyalty of team members that will benefit the business for many years to come.