



## 4 WAYS TO MANAGE AND ENGAGE YOUR EMPLOYEES DURING COVID-19 WORKPLACE DISRUPTIONS

 <h3>Confirm Goals and Priorities</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give direction on what to do and what not to do</li> <li>• Provide clear guidance on business-critical priorities that everyone can rally around and contribute to</li> <li>• Clarify who is responsible for what and where employees can turn to for help accomplishing tasks</li> </ul> <p><small>TIP: Give steady guidance. Focus on the business-critical priorities on which your team can align. Patiently hammer your message—its stability may be as important as its content.</small></p>	 <h3>Establish New Ways of Working</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normalize new work environments and new ways of working</li> <li>• Utilize Stanford technology tools</li> <li>• Share new surroundings</li> <li>• Talk about talking</li> <li>• Take stock</li> </ul> <p><small>TIP: COVID-19 workplace disruptions may be short lived or they may linger for awhile. Your role is to keep the team positively engaged and productive by quickly establishing new team norms.</small></p>	 <h3>Engage During Times of Uncertainty</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look for the "silver lining"</li> <li>• Maintain a sense of calm</li> <li>• Emphasize personal interactions</li> <li>• Keep everyone in mind</li> <li>• Ask emotion-based questions in your 1:1s</li> <li>• Maintain and amplify team rituals</li> <li>• Co-create a communication plan</li> <li>• Last but not least...make sure to take care of yourself!</li> </ul> <p><small>TIP: While there will always be growing pains with creating new ways to work together, focus your team's energy on the long-term potential and opportunities of working together in new ways, and succeeding as a group.</small></p>	 <h3>Lead with Empathy</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to your team</li> <li>• Get to know your team</li> <li>• Be available</li> <li>• Care for remote employees</li> <li>• Set an example</li> </ul> <p><small>TIP: If and when dramatic events occur, give people opportunities to safely express their emotions. Reach out to employees on a personal basis. Get out of your office and into the hallway. Be there for them. Encourage everyone to do the same.</small></p>
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## Manager Guide: Managing and engaging your employees during COVID-19 workplace disruptions

Leading teams during a crisis can be daunting. In times of uncertainty, people turn to their leaders for guidance and reassurance. Here are tips you can use.

### Confirm goals and priorities

More than at any other time, during periods of uncertainty people want strong leaders who give direction on what to do and what not to do. Talking only about the long-term vision and goals for the team may not be effective when people are distracted with other priorities. In the midst of all this chaos, pause and reflect on your teams' goals and objectives and identify what new work must begin in support of COVID-19. Ask yourself, and the team, if the work they are doing is essential and/or are there new and more pressing priorities. **This first step is to provide clear guidance on business-critical priorities that everyone can rally around and contribute to.** When normal work patterns, communication methods, or team dynamics are disrupted, it is important to clarify who is responsible for what and where employees can turn to for help accomplishing tasks.

**TIP:** Give steady guidance. Focus on the business-critical priorities around which your team can align. Patiently hammer your message—its stability may be as important as its content.

## **Establish new ways of working**

With COVID-19 workplace disruptions, members of your team may change the way they accomplish their work. Some may request temporary telecommute arrangements for a portion or all of the work week, while others will not. You may need to lead a fully remote team for a period of time. Certainly, working in distributed teams might be a new way of working for many individuals. Here are some tips for ensuring your team is productive and stays connected.

### **Normalize New Work Environments and New Ways of Working**

On a practical basis, working with a distributed team means that on any given day, part of the team may be in person while others are joining from home. The key to success is to jump in and begin exploring new ways of working so that you and the team can become comfortable and productive in this new work environment as quickly as possible.

**Utilize Stanford technology tools.** Stanford has invested in a number of technology tools that are extremely effective in enabling distributed teams to efficiently communicate and collaborate. Don't worry about mastering a large number of new tools; focus on learning the basics for these key tools: Slack, Zoom, and Google Drive. Slack keeps your team in close contact through instant contact for team conversations and impromptu interactions that are such a staple of being in person. Zoom is essential for virtual meetings. Google Drive enables the storage and sharing of files across the team as well as real time collaboration. Detailed information is on the University IT website, including basic instructions and links to learn more: <https://uit.stanford.edu/collabtool>.

**Share new surroundings.** While you may be tempted to skip this step, especially if the team has been working together for a while, use this as an opportunity to reorient the team given the new distributed situation. On your next Zoom team meeting, encourage each person to take a minute to show the team his or her home workspace and share some personal context (e.g., barking dogs, children coming home from school, sharing a workspace with a roommate, etc.). This context can help others be more sensitive to each other's constraints and lessen the ambiguity about what it means to work in a distributed team and to break down biases and assumptions. Discuss anticipated challenges to working in a distributed environment and brainstorm potential solutions. This will help to generate new and useful ideas as well as help to strengthen the team.

**Talk about talking.** You have probably heard the advice that in times of change it is not possible to communicate too much and this certainly applies to navigating the COVID-19 workplace disruptions. It is also true that it is useful to discuss and create new norms for how the team will handle group and 1:1 communications. Identify how you will address 1:1s and other team meetings in a distributed

environment, which could be as simple as adding a Zoom link to all calendar invitations so that a virtual connection is always available. You may also need to establish new norms for virtual meetings; e.g., always have your video camera on, or avoid multitasking during the meeting. Perhaps you decide to start and end the day with a Slack message to the team, such as a brief check-in in the morning and completing the day with a quick touch base about what you accomplished during the day. There are many creative ways to utilize the technology tools to facilitate team communications. Engage your team in conversation about what they think will work best in your environment. And, don't forget to leave a space for social conversation. Perhaps you develop a habit of starting Zoom calls with a few minutes of casual catch up or create a Slack space to capture ideas for weekend plans. There is no one right answer for how you communicate within the team. The important thing is that you communicate.

**Take stock.** It is important that the team as a whole and individuals on the team have a clear sense of how things are going in achieving both team and individual goals and objectives. Utilize your tried and true tools for effective performance management, such as making sure you revisit goals and expectations during the year and deliver timely and effective developmental feedback. It is also important that you check in with the team regarding progress toward creating new norms that are useful in supporting the team during this period of COVID-19 workplace disruptions. These norms may include reestablishing expectations for work hours and schedules, keeping each other informed, work coverage, or taking of lunch breaks, amongst other topics. Consider devoting a portion of each staff meeting agenda to discussing what is working and what should be changed about how the team is interacting. Look to the team to provide input into what is motivating and energizing and what is draining about the current circumstances. Brainstorm solutions to address the challenges and then measure progress in achieving the solutions. Continue to check in on an individual basis. Utilize 1:1 time to learn about challenges and celebrate success. Ask for feedback as a team leader around what you can do to support the achievement of objectives and goals.

**TIP:** COVID-19 workplace disruptions may be short lived or they may linger for a while. Your role is to keep the team positively engaged and productive by quickly establishing new team norms.

### **Engage during times of uncertainty**

Some events, such as COVID-19, can be a long-term crisis requiring long-term changes. During these drawn-out uncertain times, it is essential for leaders to distinguish the difference between “leading” and “managing.” Leaders need to show the way forward and instill a sense of energy and inspiration. Engage and inspire by reinforcing how the group is contributing to the mission and goals of the university, and what makes them a unique group.

**Look for the “silver lining”.** While many play defense during a crisis, there is an opportunity to be aspirational as well. Imagine that the adversity of the situation coalesces your team to rise to its absolute best. Think about how you may all emerge from this incident stronger, more engaged, and more capable

than you were before. Creating such conditions means you need to reassure and encourage the team that “we can do it”. Explore how you can turn these challenges into opportunities.

**Maintain a sense of calm.** During a crisis, create a sense of calm. People aren’t always at their best when under stress, but you can set the tone with your own behaviors. Think of yourself as representing ‘the calm.’ Focus on practical considerations and actions while reminding your team that you will get through this tough time together. If you need a safe space to share your worries or would like a thought partner on how to communicate with your team, please contact your Human Resources or the Faculty Staff Help Center partner anytime to get support.

**Emphasize personal interactions.** People suddenly working from home are likely to feel disconnected and lonely, which lowers productivity and engagement. Leaders, especially those not used to managing virtual teams, may feel stressed about keeping the team on track. Under these circumstances it is tempting to become exclusively task-focused. To address these challenges, making time for personal interaction is more important than ever.

**Keep everyone in mind.** With some of your team working remote and others in the office, it may be easy to forget some team members -- “out of sight, out of mind”. To avoid forgetting about others, keep a list of the current core and extended team members in front of you while you’re working each day to help you make more conscious decisions about allocating responsibilities and information.

**Ask emotion-based questions in your 1-1s.** In times of uncertainty the human brain processes things emotionally. To help people with their anxiety, make them feel heard and help them sort out their thinking. Ask questions like: “How are you feeling?” “What’s on your mind?” and “What can I do to help right now?”

**Maintain and amplify team rituals.** If you have 1-1s, team meetings, status updates, or team lunches, maintain the same routines (switched to virtual format, if needed). If you don’t have many rituals, consider introducing a few consistent touchpoints like a weekly update email or weekly virtual team standup. Rituals create a feeling of grounding that team members will look toward in times of change and uncertainty.

**Co-create a communication plan.** Ask your team to identify what should be communicated together as a team and who to go to for what. Then, create and share a plan. In your plan, name who to contact and what the decision criteria are. For example, if trying to decide if team travels should be cancelled, a decision criteria would be: “We will follow the CDC’s recommendations for now. On X date we will re-evaluate.”

**Take care of yourself.** Last but not least, make time for you. People sometimes allow a crisis to take over their lives and forfeit family time, meals, and exercise. Such decisions may feel heroic in the moment, but

they aren't good for you or the organization. Attempt to maintain balance in your life—you'll be a stronger leader for it.

**TIP:** While there will always be growing pains with creating new ways to work together, focus your team's energy on the long-term potential and opportunities of working together in new ways, and succeeding as a group.

## Section 4: Lead with empathy

**Listen to your team.** The uncertainty and anxiety regarding the personal dangers from the COVID-19 will have a lasting impact beyond how your team works to meet their goals and objectives. This epidemic and its long-term implications will make the challenge of adjusting to work changes even greater, so check-in regularly to make sure your team feels heard and understood.

**Get to know Your team.** Each person has a different comfort level when dealing with change and ambiguity. Get to know the perspectives of each employee on your team - how are the changes impacting their work, and what concerns do they have? With this rapidly evolving situation, their feelings may change from one day to the next. Be proactive, ask open-ended questions, listen to understand, and follow-up regularly to help your team stay focused and stay resilient during extended periods of uncertainty and change.

**Be available.** Make sure your employees know that you are still available, even if one (or both) of you are working remotely. If your employees are used to being able to step by your office if they have a quick question or concern, share that they can still contact you and the best ways and times to do so. Use Zoom (with video) so you can pick up on emotional or non-verbal cues during conversations with remote employees.

**Care for remote employees.** Unlike working onsite, when working from home there's no physical separation between work and home so it's easier for work to impact home life. Set boundaries with your remote employees so they can easily transition out of work mode at the end of the work day.

**Be visible.** Teams managing a crisis have a tendency to meet behind closed doors for days at a time. While certain discussions require confidentiality, you should still be visible to your employees. Your presence will send a profound message: Everything is under control. Make yourself visible by holding non-confidential meetings in open spaces. And be sure to balance crisis management with running the rest of the work. As a leader, you have many responsibilities. Don't let the crisis consume you.

**Set an example.** Team leaders and direct supervisors play a crucial role during periods of disruption and uncertainty. Your team is likely looking to you to model how they should act and react during this time, so

set an example for how you want your employees to behave: remain calm, communicate transparently, be fair and available, and acknowledge and manage the anxiety or nervousness that may exist.

**TIP:** If and when dramatic events occur, give people opportunities to safely express their emotions. Reach out to employees on a personal basis. Get out of your office and into the hallway. Be there for them. Encourage everyone to do the same.