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DID YOU KNOW??

How Successful Managers Get Through Turbulent Times: 4 Tips To Follow

Managing a team is difficult in the best of times. When you layer on top of the usual demands of life and business, a pandemic and the rising demand to address long-term systemic racial inequalities in society, you stretch your management skills to the limit. How can you ensure that as a leader you support your team appropriately in this time of crisis? Anilu Vazquez-Ubarri, partner and chief human resource officer at TPG, shared advice to help managers continue to succeed and thrive in difficult, changing times.

1. Be more vulnerable, more human and more personable.

“In some ways, physical offices gave us a certain anonymity. We could choose whether or not to share parts of our personal lives,” Vazquez-Ubarri says. “Now, we’re exposed. Thanks to Zoom, my whole team has now ‘sat’ for meetings in my living room and at my kitchen table.” I have no choice but to let down my guard, share a bit more than I normally would and let the human side show through. That’s not a bad thing – and I think it can help us all connect better – but it’s certainly a shift in how we relate to our colleagues.”

As a leader, you have to be willing to share more. While moments of humor, frustration, pressure and other facets of our lives can create new opportunities to connect, navigating this type of candor can be a challenge for many, and isn’t necessarily what we initially signed on for as managers. We’re now forced to literally meet people where they are, and yet we have to set boundaries for ourselves and our teams. Sending someone a late-night email is one thing. Placing a video call well after hours is something else. Each corporate culture is different, as is each work relationship. We’re living in a time of evolving definitions of what is intrusive.

Managers should set clear boundaries with their teams regarding the expected level of connectedness, but also be flexible and solicit from their employees what works for them. Those added boundaries help recognize everyone’s vulnerability in these times and show your team that you care about understanding their personal needs.

Suggested action step: Let people in a bit more than you normally would. This is an opportunity to build trust by letting your team see a broader, deeper, more complete picture of who you are.

2. Spend more time with new hires to build relationships.

If you’ve been working with someone for a while, you have already created a level of trust with that person. You can keep that relationship going through more regular check-ins, knowing that we’re in this for a bit, but likely returning to our previous level of interaction down the road.

But with a new hire it’s different. You have to put in the time to build that rapport, which is difficult remotely. “We’ve recently brought in a number of new senior players at the firm,” Vazquez-Ubarri shared. “They have strong commercial backgrounds, and like many of us, thrive on being around other people. Conducting a

productive and engaging onboarding process remotely is certainly a new and significant challenge for organizations, recruits and HR teams. New hires require a deeper level of connection. We are working on ways for our new hires to meet their teams and colleagues in-person in a socially-distant, responsible manner so they know we're excited about their joining and committed to bringing them into the fold."

Fostering both new and existing relationships is extremely important to keeping employees engaged in this new reality. Being able to pop into someone's office to say hi communicated "I care about you." But sometimes, that quick exchange also opened the door for deeper interaction and built the kinds of relationships that make work fun, rewarding and more meaningful. The "drop-by hello" can't be replaced, but the emails, quick phone calls and if possible and practical, in-person meetings, can help offset the feeling of isolation so many of your team may be feeling.

To cultivate relationships in this new environment, you can provide training for your people on how to develop relationships remotely. Creating opportunities for safe, in-person interaction can also help both new and current employees. Make sure your people know that in-person get-togethers are optional. Depending on your team members' comfort levels and personal needs, they may choose to skip these events.

Suggested action step: Not everyone needs the same level of engagement. Spend more time with newbies and those with whom you don't have as deep a relationship, and look for opportunities to foster relationships.

3. Create trust throughout the organization by setting clear expectations and celebrating successes.

As work environments have changed, so have certain processes and requirements. Roles and responsibilities are evolving, and productivity and engagement can be hard to measure. We're no longer in the same space, so we have to find new ways to motivate teams, track progress, recognize wins and ultimately adopt a greater level of trust regarding how our reports spend their time.

Additionally, it's important to consciously nurture that trust throughout the organization. Vazquez-Ubarri indicated, "I have two teams working on radically different initiatives. One team has very clear deliverables and a well-developed timeframe. The other has deliverables that, while equally important, aren't as tangible or visible. As a result, I need to work harder to both measure and celebrate the successes of that second team. If I don't, I risk having others question that team's effectiveness."

Suggested action step: Articulate for the broader group what everyone is working on, and the additional time pressures and struggles involved. This will help build trust and understanding throughout the organization.

4. Remember that everything is personal.

"When employees reflect on how your organization handled this difficult period, they will likely consider two factors," says Vazquez-Ubarri. "First, they will look at your systemic and structural response. They'll consider what policies you put in place, how quickly and effectively you reacted to the crisis, what protections you offered and how well you maintained your organization's values through this time."

"Secondly, and likely more importantly, they'll consider how they personally were treated through this period. Did someone reach out to them individually? Did they feel the presence and effort by their manager to stay in touch? Did the concerns they heard expressed by management reflect the concerns they were experiencing given their role at the organization, their personal situation, their demographic in society? How well did your messages as a leader speak to the needs of your direct reports? As Maya Angelou once said, "People will forget what you said. They will forget what you did. But they will always remember how you made them feel." Did your team feel your support at this time?

Suggested action step: Prioritize reaching out to people directly. Make sure people feel your support and they will reflect positively on your leadership in tough times.

As a final thought, keep in mind that while your team is struggling and, in some cases, literally suffering, everyone seems to be a bit more forgiving these days. We all know we're trying to make things work in a situation that's novel for all of us. Even those who have worked remotely for years realize the rest of their colleagues are dealing with a huge transition not of their own choosing. These action steps are ways of moving us all forward gently, thoughtfully and with the needs of our teams in mind.

*Source: Jay Sullivan: Forbes.com, Exec|Comm LLC