

Do you know what your employees need during Covid-19?

By [Markus Gschwari](#)

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Responsible leadership has taken on an even deeper meaning, as our workforces and our customers find themselves in an unfamiliar, fast-moving global environment. Covid-19 has changed the way we live and work already, with far-reaching impact. Leading with compassion and caring for our workforces and communities is more essential than ever.

Virtually all companies are still determining how we change the way we work, short- and long-term. But speed is of the essence, as our workforces and communities try to function and perform while struggling to cope with what is happening in their daily lives.

We are helping CHROs, CEOs and boards navigate the leadership challenges in this new reality. Our latest study highlights what workers need from leaders in basic physical, mental and relational areas. These needs apply at all times, but they are magnified in crisis. Leaders who rise to the challenge will help their people develop human resilience - the ability to adapt and engage through difficult times.



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The crux of it: Trust

Distilled to one essential message: Your workforce is looking to trust you. And it will trust if it believes leadership cares for each individual, their community and humanity as a whole. But beyond caring, leaders must show they have a plan. You don't have to know everything, but you do need to be transparent about what is driving decisions. A leadership team that looks ahead proactively, and responds rather than reacts, goes a long way toward helping people in volatile times.

The ability for leaders to address people's physical, mental and relational needs is the foundation of trust. While all of these needs have equal importance, there is an order in which they make the biggest difference.

The basics: Physical needs

At a time when many usual freedoms are being restricted, people need help feeling they are empowered to do what is necessary to keep themselves and their families safe and well. Each organisation will have its own nuances. In a company with people mainly in physical locations, concerns might include no-contact service and wearing protective equipment.



Source: Andrea Flacquadro© from [Pexels](#)

Everyone might be worried about employment and a paycheck during the crisis. Asking early and often what people need or are concerned about will help your leadership team to determine your best actions. It comes down to feeling safe while working, the most basic of human needs. And beyond safety, to leaders supporting their teams' well-being.

The next level: Mental needs

In this new reality we're all living through, teams need flexibility and permission to work differently. Consecutive hours of uninterrupted work may not be feasible, as many people deal with disrupted elder care and childcare, difficulties securing essential supplies at home, and potential healthcare issues. Managers have to evolve work rules for more flexibility, based on emotional intelligence and people's individual needs. Educating managers on this sooner rather than later can help empower their teams to adapt.

Consistent, transparent and clear communication from leadership at all levels is essential to supporting productivity and mental health. In a vacuum, employees will create their own versions of the story, which can cause fear and confusion. And these are times for leaders to gain hearts, minds and engagement.

Top of the pyramid: Relationship needs

These days, many people join companies because they share values and a larger purpose. In times of crisis, those values and that purpose need to shine through brighter than ever. Why? Because they are the basis for workers' sense of connection and of belonging to something bigger than themselves.

As citizens of the world realise their shared humanity in new ways during this pandemic, your people will look for the same. And as companies emphasise concern not just for their own people, but also for the community, and humanity as a whole, workers are provided a stable connection to something bigger than the turbulence they're experiencing.

As a new reality is playing out in the broader world, people want to understand their new work experience. Instead of letting this happen organically, be proactive. Ask people to co-create with you a workplace reality that better fits the new world we're in. Leaders who can practice followership, elevating their most digitally savvy workers to lead the way, engender trust and truly modern leadership.

We know this is overwhelming. We encourage you to prioritise your own well-being, so you are better able to help others throughout your company. And then bring empathy, compassion and wisdom to those you lead.

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