**Section 3**

Effective Leadership During COVID-19

As a business leader or manager, you have the opportunity to play a central role in shaping your organizational response to this pandemic. Leaders and managers have the potential to promote organizational efforts and address individual employee concerns that reduce stress and promote healthy coping and resilience. During times of crisis, certain leadership behavior goes a long way to ensure that employees feel appropriately informed and supported. The following leadership actions will help your organization navigate this difficult time effectively so that all employees and the entire organization grow stronger during COVID-19 and beyond.

1. | Communicate Clearly and Often

Share important information and resources. Provide clear guidance on protecting health and safety. Employees are counting on their leaders and managers to provide credible information and to be honest when they do not know answers to questions. Frequent, predictable communications that employees can easily participate in or access will go a long way to reducing distress, fear, anxiety, and despair. These should be characterized by transparency, authenticity, empathy, and optimism.
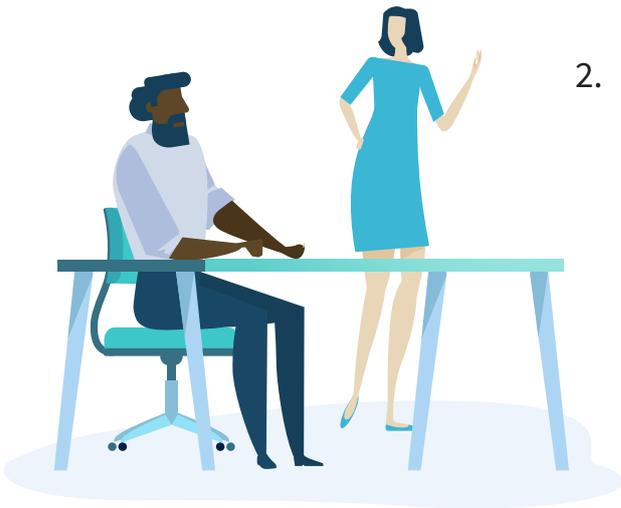
2. Promote Open Two-way Communication

It is important that employees not only hear from their supervisors, but also know they can express their fears and concerns to supervisors at this time. Maintaining contact and interaction with others through video calls and group chats - both to complete work and for more informal exchange - relieves anxiety and builds a sense of community. Creating space that gives employees opportunities to speak out about their mental health concerns can help people get support early.

3. Normalize Employees' Heightened Anxiety and Stress

It is important to convey that feelings of stress, worry, and fear are normal during this time of uncertainty. We should expect these among our employees, our coworkers, and ourselves. Although these may impact us and our work environment throughout the pandemic's unfolding, these mental health concerns are common and can be effectively managed.

4. Remember and Remind Employees that Mental Health is Important for Everyone

Mental health is a specific dimension of health for each of us – in the same way that we talk about cardiac health, for example. It is important to understand that our mental health status changes – sometimes we feel stressed and fearful, sometimes joyful and optimistic. Mental health problems like depression and anxiety are common. Many factors including work, relationships, finances, physical environment, caregiving duties, family, and health influence how well we feel both physically and emotionally, and this changes over time. It is important to remember and remind employees that COVID-19 has introduced many new and different stressors to each of us that are taxing our coping skills and ability to be resilient throughout this period, and some employees will have significant mental health concerns that will call for more focused care.

5. Make Mental Health a Normal Part of Your Conversations

Talking about mental health is difficult for many people due to stigma, and this is especially true in the workplace. Yet we know that this is to the detriment of employees' well-being and organizational success. COVID-19 has the potential to serve as an entry point for leaders and managers to begin conversations about mental health in the workplace. By actively showcasing your workplace as an open, safe environment to discuss mental health concerns, and as a place where employees can get support during the pandemic and beyond, overall mental health will improve.

6. Facilitate Peer and Team Support

Leaders and managers have many competing responsibilities that have been complicated even further by COVID-19. Encouraging the development of online and - where practical and medically-safe – in person peer support groups and teams can greatly enhance work group cohesion and individual coping skills. Peer support groups and teams can be organized around shared interests (e.g., book groups), athletics (e.g., running groups), common experiences or characteristics (e.g., women in leadership, LGBTQ employees), and professional development and skills building (e.g., public speaking courses). These networks provide opportunities for employees to connect and look after each other in ways that can be a huge comfort. Once established, such internal staff networks can often serve to alert leaders when an employee may need additional support or attention.

7. Promote and Model Flexibility

Because we cannot predict the future of COVID-19, our daily routines will continue to be impacted by this pandemic, including in ways that we cannot fully anticipate. COVID-19 is likely to have a fluctuating course, with possible cycles of viral transmission that will require flexibility and responsivity. When people aren't sure how they should behave they look to leaders as role models. Employees will follow the example of leaders they respect. When you model flexibility in response to changing policies and practices, employees will likely follow your lead.

8. Promote and Model Self-Care

The disruptions to personal routines, restrictions on activities, and change in work processes on top of the elevated stresses associated with COVID-19 put many people at risk for neglecting self-care behaviors, such as getting regular exercise and healthy sleep. Social activities and clubs are cancelled. Leaders and managers can model and share creative strategies in this regard. With your visibility, you can model the healthy behaviors you are promoting in your workforce.