
EAP Tips on Supporting Your Team While Working From Home



This pandemic has created an unprecedented time in work. The reality is that living through a pandemic has limited the choices in our life.

Our teams didn't create a work from home plan to implement, the pandemic arrived with no warning and we are making the best of it. Leaders and team members can feel unprepared for a new way of doing their work, in the midst of a global health crisis. Let's explore some considerations in our ongoing navigation of this new way of working.

Transition:

It's not business as usual. Nothing feels usual, and just as we settle into one way of being, we are in a new phase and things shift again. As a team leader it can be difficult to manage the information overload created by this ongoing change. It's important to keep team members updated on changes and how it will impact them and their work specifically.

Diversity:

Recognize that each team member has different strengths and struggles. What might have been a benefit for someone working in the office, has potentially created more struggle when working from a distance. Outgoing and social team members who were energized at the office might be feeling disconnected with isolation. Conversely, introverts may be finding a working from home groove that is very productive. They also have varied other demands on their life that may not have been an issue prior to the pandemic.

Some employees will want to run back to the office, glad this experience is behind them, while others will flourish in this new way of doing things. Some may want regular team contact, while others may feel more productive with less group contact. Neither is good or bad, just a testament to the varied abilities on our teams.

Ask open ended inquiries:

Ensure you check in on a regular basis. Given that this is a time when things around us are changing quickly, things are no doubt changing rapidly for your team members. Remember to explore the positive and the negative.

For example, "Can you tell me what has been going well for you working this way for the past few weeks?" Follow up with a "Tell me more..."

Also, "I'm wondering what you have been struggling with during this phase of work?" Again, follow up with a "Tell me more..." as well as "Any suggestions about how we can problem solve this?"

Making time for this connection on an ongoing basis can give team members an opportunity to feel heard as well as provide leaders with valuable insight on ways they can support the team and improve functioning.

Remind team members of their supports:

While checking in and supporting your team members, you might hear some information from that which is beyond a leader's role and abilities. There are resources that you can offer. If you are getting a sense that people are struggling emotionally, with their mental health, are stressed and not managing and coping as well as they would like, offer them the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

A supportive way to offer EAP is to validate what you are hearing from them and suggest EAP as a benefit for them. For example, "Bob, you are telling me you are struggling right now and feeling (stressed, frustrated, anxious etc) and that makes sense given all the change and unpredictability. I would like to support you with that, and one way that I can is to suggest EAP. It's a service for employees. The counsellors with EAP are skilled at supporting people when they are feeling (stressed, frustrated, anxious, etc). I will get you the contact information, and you can let me know if you need any more information."

The reality is that stress caused by uncertain times and radical changes will likely impact more of your team than Covid-19 will. The way our daily lives, routines and coping strategies have been upended means that EAP can play a crucial role in helping team members manage this change and implement strategies that will see them through it. The key is to reduce the stigma and misconceptions about reaching out for help. Remember that we don't have the in person prompts that support our communication, and demonstrate our authentic empathy and concern. Therefore, it's even more important to validate, and gather feedback to ensure our message is communicated effectively.

Remember it's a marathon, not a sprint. Just as we could have never predicted the realities of living with a pandemic, we can't predict how things will continue to evolve. Some aspects will impact different team members in different ways and at different times. With such great diversity, we can be a support to our team members through these unprecedented times.

Helpful articles:

The New Rules for Remote Work: Pandemic Edition from Harvard Business School

<https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/the-new-rules-for-remote-work-pandemic-edition>

Contact Information:

Employee Assistance Program

40B Burns Avenue

Charlottetown, PE C1E 1H7

Telephone: (902)368-5738, Toll Free: 1-800-239-3826

Fax: (902) 368-5737

Website: <https://psc.gpei.ca/employee-assistance-program>

Email: eap@gov.pe.ca