



Working Solutions

*Coping With Global Uncertainty
A Publication of Your Employee Assistance Program*

Managing in Uncertain Times



Remember when employees retired from the same company in which they started their first job? Remember when owning stocks meant personal financial security? Remember when our country boasted of more allies than enemies? Things have changed, and one thing is certain — we are living in uncertain times.

We are in the midst of searching for a new "normal", and that struggle touches people in the workplace. With questions about what tomorrow will bring, more and more employees are showing signs of stress and distress. This can result in decreased productivity and increased disruptive behavior in the workplace.

Employee Stress: Some Signs to Watch for

Key work-related signs of stress or distress include:

- Nervousness
- Agitation
- Irritability
- Excessive lateness or absences
- Aggressiveness
- Poorly prepared or incomplete work
- Frequent physical complaints or illnesses
- Lethargy
- Marked changes in personal hygiene
- Withdrawal
- Fearfulness and dependency (e.g., hanging around you or making excessive requests to meet with you)
- The smell of alcohol and signs of potential drug use
- Indecisiveness
- Confusion or forgetfulness
- Bizarre, alarming, or dangerous behavior
- Depression

You Have a Responsibility to Help your Employees through Difficult Times

You can have a profound effect by acknowledging your awareness of signs of stress and distress, and by showing concern for an employee's well-being. An attitude of sincere interest and caring is most important, as is a willingness to approach an employee if you suspect difficulties.



When approaching an employee...

- Be clear and direct. Voice your awareness of changes, using specific examples.
- Let him or her know that you are willing to listen and that you want to help.

If the employee wants to talk...

- Find a private, calm area, and choose a time when you can give your full attention.
- Let him or her discuss feelings and thoughts. Reassure when appropriate, but don't dismiss concerns by saying things like, "It's not so bad", or "Things will be okay."

- Listen compassionately.
- Acknowledge his or her feelings and fears without supporting misconceptions.
- When appropriate, briefly share similar experiences or feelings you have had.
- Be accepting of tears as a good way to release emotions. Have a box of tissues within arm's reach.
- Avoid overwhelming the person with information or ideas, and don't offer advice. If an employee is interested in generating solutions, coach him or her in problem solving techniques.
- Be honest about the limits of your ability to help. Refer the employee to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), or ask if there is a friend, family member, clergy, community agency, or healthcare provider who might offer further help. Offer reassurance that seeking help doesn't mean that he or she has a serious problem.
- Take care of yourself. Helping your employees through difficult times is draining work. Utilize personal resources, supports, or the Employee Assistance Program for yourself.

Empowerment Can Reduce Stress

Because stress and distress often stem from feelings of powerlessness, it is important to find ways to empower your employees. Here are some tips for cultivating empowerment:

- Knowledge is power; so keeping employees informed about what is going on is one of the best ways to empower them.
- Make sure employees know of the organization's missions and goals. Then connect the tasks you ask employees to do with those missions and goals. This provides a sense of purpose and belonging.
- Prepare employees for anticipated changes.
- Before announcing anticipated change, predict how your employees might react and feel. If you can anticipate, you can modify your announcement of the change to minimize or address their concerns, or to prepare whatever is necessary to meet their reaction.
- Let employees know about change ahead of time. Discuss with them what will happen, when it will happen, and how it will affect them. If possible, solicit ideas for instituting the change from them, and incorporate their workable suggestions into the change plan. Be honest with them about the positive and negative aspects of change, and help them to problem-solve around the negatives ahead of time.

Create a Safe and Sensitive Work Environment

- Address work-related and environmental safety. Find out what your organization has in place to ensure safety, and reassure employees of such measures.
- Create an environment that encourages open discussion. Model honest communication, and operate on an "open door policy". Find ways to let employees know that you are willing to listen to them. Create opportunities for employees to communicate with you both individually and in groups.
- Above all, communicate to employees that they are your most valued resource in the workplace and that you are sensitive to their needs.

Source: WPOI, 2002



WAP provides comprehensive EAP services to meet the needs of employees and their families.

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