

# 2008 Manager Toolkit

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We're pleased to introduce a Manager Toolkit of materials to help you manage your work and your life. Your employees can turn to LifeWorks for help with just about anything. And you can turn to LifeWorks, too. From performance and productivity issues to team building and time management, we have resources that can help you 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Discover how LifeWorks can help you be a more effective manager and have more productive employees.

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## Twelve Ways to Be a Better Manager.

Studies show that an employee's direct supervisor has the greatest impact on his or her performance and loyalty to the company. Every manager will benefit from reading this comprehensive booklet filled with informative tips, talking points, and action steps on how to succeed as a manager. The booklet starts with a quiz and includes chapters on communicating effectively, managing people conflicts, teamwork, diversity, managing across generations, coaching and career development, stress and overload, and motivating and retaining the best people. A must read for both new and experienced managers.

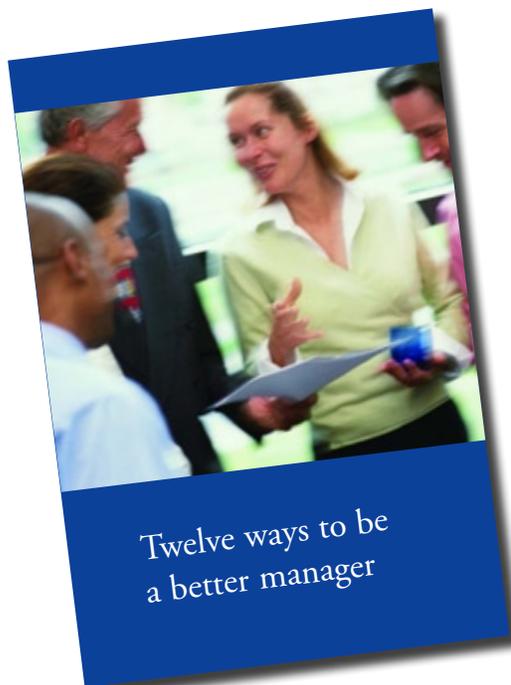
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## Your Role as a Leader in Building Team Resilience

“Good managers build resilience,” says Arlene Johnson, a vice president at WFD Consulting, and an expert on workplace resilience. “And taking action to build resilience makes better managers.” In this article, you’ll read about the important role you play as a leader in building team resilience.

### Your role as a manager in building team resilience

Employees are more likely to be resilient and practice resilience in a work culture that nurtures it. For example, an important part of personal resilience is taking action to solve difficulties. People are more likely to do that if they are in a team setting in which they feel they have a measure of ownership and control.

Similarly, a key component of resilience is seeking support as needed and learning from difficulty. That’s much more likely to occur if a manager encourages personal connections and emphasizes growth and learning among team members.

In big and small ways every day, there are steps you can take to foster individual and team resilience.

### Five resilience builders

#### 1. Encourage individual and team problem-solving.

By encouraging employees to get involved in problem-solving, you’re not only solving the problem, you’re teaching the team to act resiliently, to take action to solve problems.

- Involve team members in finding solutions to work challenges.
- Encourage employees to problem-solve without you.
- Encourage suggestions from all employees.
- Be open to new ideas.
- Encourage employees to find new, more efficient ways of delivering results.
- When your group faces a problem, step back together to take note of what you’ve all learned. That will help when the next challenge arises.

#### 2. Acknowledge and show that you value people’s personal responsibilities.

- Make yourself aware of your company’s work-life programs and encourage employees to take advantage of them. Be sure all employees know about the many resources available through the program that provided this publication and know how to contact the program.
- Demonstrate that you value people’s work-life responsibilities by incorporating team members’ important personal commitments in the team’s

planning calendar — graduations, religious holidays, other important occasions — so that team meetings and project planning can take these dates into account.

#### 3. Strengthen social support and connections within the team.

There is mounting evidence that shows that people with greater social connections live longer, suffer less depression, stay healthier, and remain more resilient than those with few social connections. The Gallup Organization found in a recent study that one of the strongest predictors of a committed employee is having a good friend at work. It’s important that in addition to caring about doing a good job, team members also demonstrate caring for each other on a personal level.

- Make time for camaraderie, friendships, and fun on your team as an investment in the team’s effectiveness. Social occasions and parties can be effective, but little things also go a long way. You might schedule one day a week to have lunch together or an hour a month for bagels, coffee, and conversation.
- Build humor and fun into the hard work.
- Plan team-building activities. These might include outings, workshops, retreats, or other opportunities for people to get to know one another, appreciate one another’s strengths and work styles, and build team spirit.
- Build connections between team members who may never see one another. For example, it’s a good idea to build in time at the beginning of conference calls for check-ins and casual conversation so that team members get to know a little about one another and have an opportunity to build connections.

#### 4. Provide opportunities for all employees to learn and grow.

As a manager, you play a key role in providing access to learning opportunities.

- No doubt your company offers training programs and opportunities for professional development. It’s your job to provide flexibility and to offer encouragement so that employees take advantage of these programs.
- Performance management is another avenue for providing employees with opportunities for growth and development. And it’s here that you as a manager have tremendous impact. If you have periodic discussions about individuals’ goals and plans, take the time to explore with employees the next steps for growth, and make suggestions for how employees can achieve their goals. They will see that their desire for growth, training, and development is being acknowledged and supported.

#### 5. Promote health and energy.

In addition to modeling resilient attitudes and behaviors yourself, there are many ways that you as a manager can promote team health and energy.



- The simplest and most straightforward thing you can do is make team members aware of everything the company offers in the way of stress management, time-management courses, health facilities, nutrition counseling, and health and wellness programs. Talk about how important you think these things are and encourage people to make use of them.
- Schedule meetings and allow flexibility so that people can make use of these programs.
- When you have team functions, provide food options that reinforce healthy eating habits.
- Be intentional about encouraging people to take care of themselves as they also pursue business results.

*"If you invest effort in building your team's resilience, there will be payoffs in the short term," says Arlene Johnson. "But the biggest payoffs are in the expansion of capability and energy for the long term. Remember, small actions can make a big difference. You don't have to do everything all at once. But resolve today to do at least one thing that will build greater resilience in your team."*

The content in this article is based on a January 2006 presentation given by Arlene Johnson, a vice president at WFD Consulting. Ms. Johnson has over 20 years of experience working with business organizations to identify and address workplace issues and assist in developing strategies for effective change. WFD Consulting ([www.wfd.com](http://www.wfd.com)) provides research and consulting services to dozens of companies in the U.S. and globally on how to build a resilient work force, implement flexibility, and create an inspiring and engaged workplace.

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## Reducing Employee Absences

As a manager or supervisor, you are responsible for consistently meeting your department's productivity goals, but unexpected employee absences can seriously undermine your efforts. Fortunately, you have more control than you may realize over the rate of employee absence in your work group and over the lengths of those absences when employees are forced to take time off.

Recent data from the research firm CCH, Inc., indicates that a broad range of factors affect an employee's decision not to come to work and that personal illness is the cause only about 40 percent of the time. Some surveys estimate that family problems, employee personal problems, or stress are responsible for almost 55 percent of employee absences.

The good news is that absenteeism rates have declined in the last few years and that 50 percent of employees take, on average, no more than two days a year of unscheduled leave.

Still, all unscheduled absences affect productivity and morale and, with some studies finding 12 percent of employees taking nine or more days off as unscheduled absences, managers need to try to reduce these types of absences whenever possible.

### Your employee's perspective

To better understand where you can make an impact in reducing unscheduled employee absences, first put yourself in your employees' shoes. You wake up on a workday morning with a bad headache or a really stiff back. Do you go to work or do you stay home? It's a personal and somewhat subjective decision, part of which will be based purely on your medical or psychological condition, but part, too, on dozens of other factors.

The employee might ask himself a number of questions, including the following:

- Is my illness infectious and could it spread to other team members or customers if I go into work?
- Am I taking medication for my condition that makes it unsafe for me to commute to work or handle work responsibilities?
- What will my day be like if I do go in?
- Will I be productive and accomplish what has to be done?
- Will I be able to take a break if I need one?
- Do I feel that my customers rely on me and will be affected if I miss a day?
- Do I feel that my co-workers will be affected if I miss a day?
- Do I feel that I am respected at work and that my skills and talents are valued?
- When was the last time I missed work?
- Will I be penalized for missing work today?
- Will I be able to rest quietly if I stay home, or will distractions at home prevent rest?
- Do I look forward to seeing my manager and co-workers, or would it be a relief not to see them today?

### What you as a manager can control

Absence and attendance are driven to a great extent by personal feelings about work. Some of these an employee brings to the job in his or her "attitude" or "work ethic." But many of those feelings are driven by conditions at work, including things you can control, such as

- how you manage, relate to, and support the people who report to you
- how you coach, provide feedback, and develop your employees
- whether you acknowledge or reward employees' contributions
- whether you trust and respect your employees
- how clear you are about work-performance expectations and the fact that you count on and value dependability in team members



- how clearly the time-off policies and procedures for the company are communicated to employees
- how much flexibility is available to vary the standard work routine
- how team members support each other and work together
- whether workloads are reasonable
- whether employees have the tools and equipment they need to do their work

### What you can do to reduce employee absences

- Clearly communicate your own expectations regarding attendance on an ongoing basis. Make sure that your employees understand how much you and the team rely on them to do their work. Talk with candidates about your expectations and reinforce with newly hired employees the value you place on their dependability. Review policies regarding sick days, vacation, and personal days so that your employees clearly understand how time-off benefits are to be used. Encourage employees to tell you if they have problems that may require some work-schedule flexibility so that you can work with them to find solutions.
- Reinforce positive employee actions and attitudes. Reward employees with excellent attendance in a variety of ways from recognition to assigning them projects you know they enjoy. Make sure that your employees know that their dependability is part of what you evaluate during your annual review process. Give employees positive feedback when they make the effort to work with you to solve work schedule conflicts so that work productivity is maintained.
- Monitor workflow and employee stress levels. Develop strong working relationships with your employees so that they will come to you when there are problems at work. Make sure that your employees have the tools and resources they need to accomplish their work goals. During times of overload, carefully monitor how work is distributed and how much overtime employees are working. Keep on top of interpersonal relationships among team members to ensure that conflicts are handled in a respectful and productive way and that frustrations don't grow.
- Initiate counseling and coaching early. Showing genuine concern when employees are absent also sends the message that their absences are noticed. Follow up with employees who have been absent by expressing concern about their illness, mentioning that they were missed, and inquiring about how they are feeling. Express your concern with employees early on if you see a problematic absence pattern beginning and ask for input from the employee on how she will work to prevent a problem from developing. At this stage, you can point out, "I would hate to see this get in the way of your success on the team." Many employees will feel there is a strong incentive to resolve the situation quickly.
- Highlight resources and tools available to employees. Make sure that your employees know about the work-life

programs and employee assistance program (EAP) that your company provides to help individuals deal with personal circumstances that might be affecting attendance. Encourage employees to attend company-sponsored programs that address work-life balance.

- Offer work-schedule flexibility whenever possible. Work-schedule flexibility is one of the most powerful tools a manager has to combat unscheduled employee absences. Know what options you have as manager in your organization to help employees manage their personal or family responsibilities as well as maintain excellent attendance. Whether it is helping an employee shift work hours to handle a child care issue, allowing him to take a half-day of vacation to take an older relative to a doctor's appointment, or permitting someone to work from home on a day when a sick child is home from school, the more you are open to coming up with solutions in these situations, the more frequently employees will come to you when these situations arise, rather than "calling in sick."
- Create a positive work environment. In a work environment where employees are respected and trusted, where good work is recognized and rewarded, where opportunities for learning and growth exist, and where the work itself is satisfying, most workers want to come to work — or at least the negative aspects of work don't keep them away. This sort of environment breeds employee commitment to work, to the team, and to the organization. And in a very healthy way it encourages quick returns after illness, injury, or other life events that require employees to take time off.
- Develop a managerial style that builds employee motivation. Many of us, even as we try hard to be good managers, inadvertently act in ways that dampen enthusiasm and drive employees away from work, rather than motivating them to give their best effort and "go the extra mile." Sometimes we do it with the best of intentions: In the interest of fairness we discourage flexibility. We worry about intruding and don't find out about important events in our employees' lives. We shy away from criticism and don't give employees the guidance they need — or we criticize too harshly and discourage initiative. Read Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman's book, *First, Break All the Rules*, to better understand how a manager's style can enhance employee motivation and to get an overview of research that links high employee motivation with low employee absence rates.
- Handle special situations proactively. There may be times when you manage an employee who has a serious illness or chronic condition. These special circumstances can be challenging and call for your compassion, flexibility, and creativity. Work closely with your human resources department, your EAP, and your manager to understand what options you have to support employees in this circumstance as well as maintain your team's productivity.



Do good management practices always lead to higher productivity and lower absence rates? Not by themselves. But when combined with sound company absence policies and organizational support for work-schedule flexibility, they can produce very positive results.

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## Managing Through Pressured Times

Many factors contribute to pressure in the workplace, including change and reorganization, tight deadlines, understaffing, overwork, and the rapid pace of work today. Employees and managers alike may feel under pressure from time to time given these conditions. While some work pressure is good — it can motivate us to push ourselves and reach toward higher goals — too much pressure can adversely affect our health, well-being, and productivity. This is true for both you and the people you manage. Managers who recognize the pressures people are under and who make efforts to ease these pressures in the workplace have more productive and committed teams.

### How pressure and stress affect employees

Begin by becoming familiar with the signs of pressure and stress in yourself and others. The signs include

- an increase in work-related complaints
- negative comments about co-workers, management, or customers
- being less focused and taking longer to complete tasks
- making more mistakes than usual
- being irritable or losing your temper
- an increase in physical complaints
- a rise in absenteeism

### Take care of yourself

Before you can help employees manage feelings of pressure and stress, you must first take care of yourself. Flight attendants always advise parents to put on their own oxygen masks before helping their children put on theirs. The same logic applies here: You'll be a more effective and engaged manager, and a better role model, if you take care of yourself. Here are some suggestions:

- Develop relationships with people whom you can turn to for support. These might be colleagues, friends, mentors, family members, as well as a counselor or therapist. Pressure can build up and be harder to manage when you try to handle it on your own.

- Be aware of how many hours you are working. Plan your time so that you can accomplish your work goals while making time for yourself.
- Be aware of the symptoms and signs of stress in yourself. Then be deliberate about managing these feelings. The signs of stress include:
  - trouble falling asleep or going back to sleep once awakened
  - fatigue
  - depression
  - feeling nervous, anxious, irritable, or on edge
  - trouble concentrating
  - overeating, or having no appetite
  - withdrawing from family or friends
  - tearfulness or frequent crying
  - tense muscles
  - stomach pain, upset stomach, or headache
  - drug or alcohol abuse
  - lower productivity at work
- Get exercise and find ways to relax. Both are excellent ways to reduce feelings of pressure and stress.
- Take advantage of the programs and benefits your employer offers to help you reduce stress.
- Seek professional help if you are feeling under a lot of pressure or if symptoms of stress persist. Contact your doctor or the program that provided this publication. Or you might talk with an on-site nurse or doctor if this service is available in your workplace. Talk with your health care provider if you are concerned about any aspect of your physical or mental health.

### Ways to manage work pressure

Here are specific ways to manage work-related pressure:

- Be aware of people's workloads. Avoid giving people more work than they can handle. It's easy to fall into the trap of offloading extra work, especially to your top performers. Eventually, the pressure and overload will take its toll on people, productivity, and morale.
- Know how long your staff works. A manager should know who's pushing himself or herself too hard. If someone's hours seem particularly long, watch and keep a record for your own use only. It's not micromanagement to make sure that your valued producers don't burn themselves out. If people work late consistently, take the time to discuss this.
- Make sure that work is appropriately and fairly distributed. Some people are adept at getting less than their fair share of assigned work. Others can't say no, even when they are already overloaded.
- Help people prioritize tasks. Perhaps assignments with a lower priority could be eliminated to focus on the most value-added work during pressured times. Perhaps a tight deadline could be extended. Partner with and coach employees to come up with solutions to manage job



demands and reduce stress. It's OK to say, "Put that on a back burner for now."

- Manage upward for relief. At times, it can be hard to balance the needs of your group with your need to support your own manager. But it's well worth the effort. When your group is asked to do too much, negotiate for resources. Perhaps part of a new project could go to another group; maybe a support department, like finance, could help with the numbers. Can you get a temp or have someone from another area assigned to you temporarily? Be prepared to quantify the problems you see for your area and to provide specific examples such as, "Last month we had a 20 percent increase in workload. If we're going to do more work, could we look at our project list and decide what can go on a back burner?"
- Give people plenty of recognition for work done well. Show that you appreciate everyone's hard work. People need to feel appreciated, especially during challenging times. Give public or private recognition — at meetings, and by sending e-mails to employees and the team calling attention to people's hard work and good efforts. (Remember to copy upper management when appropriate.) Positive feedback always counters the pressure.
- Communicate often. Sometimes in a high-pressure environment, it's easy to stop meeting with people both as a group and individually to keep them informed and listen to their ideas. If you make meeting with people a priority, however, the payback in morale and productivity will outweigh the cost of the time you spend.
- Help employees maintain a sense of control. Encourage people to set concrete goals each week. Especially during pressured times, we all need something positive to focus on — goals we can achieve and feel good about. Help break projects down into small steps. Say, for example, that someone is starting a product-development initiative. Together, choose a first step. "This week get the introductory memo to the group written and sent out," or "This week begin benchmarking activity." This results in a concrete achievement, something to cross off the list at the end of the week. Also, to the extent that people can have input about their assignments and how they're carried out, they'll feel a greater sense of control.
- Work at building trust. Be as open and candid as you can be and tell the truth whenever possible. Honest leaders inspire a greater sense of teamwork and their employees have more positive work attitudes. If you are honest and straightforward, employees will trust you and the organization. Employees appreciate a direct, "I don't know" answer when it's the truth. It's better than giving a vague or an untruthful answer.
- Share what you know with employees. Use staff meetings to share information that is given to management. Give frequent updates, especially during times of change, so that

employees won't feel you're keeping information from them.

- Help people keep moving forward. For example, if an employee talks with you about all the objectives she did not accomplish this year, you might say: "Well, it was good to review last year's challenges and learn from our experiences. Now think of all the great things you have accomplished and concentrate on putting a plan together to get back on track to finish what's left on our list."

### Offering support

During pressured times, it's more important than ever to offer support to employees and to be responsive to people's needs and concerns. Here are ways you can offer support to people during pressured times:

- Encourage people to take short breaks. Even a 10-minute break away from a stressful or tense situation — to get a few minutes of fresh air or to practice deep breathing or relaxation techniques — helps.
- Offer your support in big and small ways. Research shows that support from one's manager is a key driver in reducing employees' feelings of pressure and stress.
  - Ask what you can do to help.
  - Be available. Create an atmosphere where people feel comfortable enough to drop by your office to ask a question, talk, or express a concern.
  - Make sure people know you are available for coaching and advice.
- Let employees know that there's an end in sight. If you know that the workload will lighten up or that this period of change will be over by a certain time, give your employees this information. We can sprint for a long time if we can see the light at the end of the tunnel.
- Talk about the pressure employees are feeling. Acknowledge the pressures people are under. You might say, "We are all going through a difficult time. We'll find solutions together."
- Give employees the support and training they need to handle difficult customers and to get through challenging days at work.
- Focus on building relationships. Friendships and social support at work take the pressure off for all of us. Encourage team activities that are not connected to work or performance, such as potluck lunches or quarterly celebrations. If employees complain that they don't have time, tell them you consider it important and value people's participation. But don't force anyone to participate.
- Encourage people to pay attention to their physical and emotional health. Without being intrusive, remind employees of the importance of getting regular exercise and of taking care of themselves. Give people permission to make time for exercise or to go to a quiet space for relaxation. During casual conversations, you can also talk about health in the news. "Did you read the study about the health benefits of walking?"



- Make sure employees see you take time to de-stress and to exercise or take time out for lunch or a walk. Talk about the things you're doing to protect your own well-being. If you go to a gym, talk about it. If you go hiking with your kids, talk about it. Then ask people if they have any interesting plans for the weekend. This allows you to set an example and to get people thinking about their own need for balance and rejuvenation.
- Watch for signs of burnout. Signs of burnout might include a loss of interest in or enthusiasm for work, as well as an increase in health problems such as headache or backache. If you have concerns about an employee, your human resources representative or the program that provided this publication might be able to help.
- Help people maintain their perspective. It's easy to lose focus and can be difficult to plan ahead when you're under a lot of pressure. Remind employees to step back and regain perspective from time to time.
- Remind people to enjoy their lives outside of work. When times are difficult, it's especially helpful to say something like, "Well, this weekend, I'm going to focus on being with friends. That's what helps me feel better."

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## Managing from a Distance

Managing employees from a distance is quickly becoming a normal part of a manager's role. You may have employees who work from home, travel as part of their jobs, work at other sites, or work at a client's location. You may work from home yourself, from the road, or in an office distant from your employees.

New technologies make it easier than ever to work as a team even when you're not physically together. But dispersed teams create new challenges for managers. How can you manage your employees' performance when you can't see what they are doing? How can you foster teamwork when your team can't spend time together? How do you know when a remote work arrangement just isn't working out?

The secret to successful long-distance management is to apply those skills and practices that make for good in-person management with even more diligence and rigor.

## Staying connected

Communication is probably the biggest challenge to long-distance management. When you work in the same location as your employees, you can rely on informal conversations, chance meetings, and quick check-ins, all of which happen naturally in the course of a workday. But when team members work together from a distance, communication has to be more intentional. Without planned phone time together, people can go for days or even weeks without talking.

- *Master communication tools.* Make sure you and those team members who work at a distance understand how and when to use the communication tools available to you. Talk together about the situations in which you might use the telephone, e-mail, conference calls, video conferencing, overnight mail, and other communication tools. Telephone calls, for example, are far more effective than e-mail when clarification and discussion are needed. Cell phones or instant messaging are great ways to get in touch with people right away, but they also interrupt and pull people away from work that may be more important.
- *Let people know you value communication.* In performance appraisals and performance feedback, be sure to praise those who keep you and others appropriately informed and give clear suggestions to those who don't.
- *Schedule regular one-on-one meetings.* Work out a schedule of meetings with each person who reports to you. Weekly meetings may be enough if your employees have clear tasks and priorities that don't change frequently. Some employees may be fine with a meeting every other week, while others may need daily check-ins. Having a regular meeting on your calendar serves as a communication reminder and safety net. Even when one of you is very busy, you both know that you have a time set aside for questions, updates, and a review of priorities. Knowing the time is there on the schedule can also keep you from interrupting each other unnecessarily at other times.
- *Use group meetings for discussion, not just for reporting information.* Group meeting time is valuable, not just because of the employee hours taken up but also because of the opportunity to foster participation and involvement. Don't use group meetings to give out information that could be sent by e-mail or delivered in print. Distribute agendas in advance. Use meetings to discuss alternatives, seek reactions, brainstorm, or engage the team in other ways. In effective meetings, everyone contributes and no one person talks at length without inviting reaction and discussion.
- *Make good use of conference calls.* Conference calls are such a fundamental tool for working together from a distance that it's worth making a special effort to use them effectively. Send any handouts or visual presentations well in advance of the meeting so that everyone has a chance to print them out or get them set up for viewing. Make



sure everyone is introduced at the start of the meeting and that when the line is opened for discussion the people on the phone are given special opportunities to join in. (Otherwise those who are together in a meeting room can dominate the conversation by relying on visual cues of when to jump in.) You might place a card by the phone with the names of the people who are calling in. Some teams even set up individual name cards with pictures of the people participating by phone if they don't have videoconferencing.

- *Plan for and make very good use of in-person time with remote employees.* If group meeting time is valuable, face-to-face time with remote employees is even more so. When business brings you to a city where a team member is located, schedule in-person time together, including time for discussion of work and informal time just to talk in a relaxed way. As your budget and time allow, bring remote team members together for specific project work and for activities that can help build and strengthen the team. Don't schedule conflicting meetings that pull you away or distract you when remote team members travel to be together in person.
- *Make time for personal communication.* Part of working together involves sharing personal information — vacation pictures, family stories, news of a good book, or interests outside work. This happens naturally when people work in the same space. It needs a little cultivation when people work at a distance. Make the occasional phone call just to say "Hi" to an employee and to see how he or she is doing. Mail birthday cards. Don't be so hurried in your one-on-one meetings that you forget to create opportunities to talk about the rest of life. Be aware that some people are very private and would prefer to stick to work and others may become inappropriately open about disclosing personal information.
- *Don't overcommunicate.* One of the advantages of telework is the opportunity for uninterrupted work. Be thoughtful not only about sharing important information, but also about not sharing what's unimportant. Choose the "cc" list on your e-mail messages carefully. Plan meetings and teleconferences so that everyone is there who is needed for a discussion or decision but also so that nobody is forced to listen at length to information that is not relevant to his or her work.

### Managing performance from a distance

Whether in person or from a distance, good management involves

1. setting clear expectations
2. providing the tools, information, and training or coaching needed to get the job done

3. checking in to see that tasks have been completed to expectations and to offer additional coaching or "obstacle removal" when needed
4. judging performance by results

When managing from a distance, managers need to be especially diligent in following this process and to be very deliberate in making time for the communications and check-ins required at each step. People who work together in the same space can get away with not adhering strictly to the process, as slips and oversights can be corrected in quick informal conversations.

- *When setting expectations and goals with employees, work to find measurable results or outcomes* that you both can look at to confirm that the work has been completed or that the employee is being productive. Make sure you focus on outcomes that are meaningful to the business. The number of hours spent at a desk, for example, is not an outcome that is important to the business. Work produced, deadlines met, customers satisfied, and revenue generated are meaningful business outcomes.
- *Take the time to be sure the employee understands those expectations,* has a clear sense of how to approach the work, and has the information and the skills needed to complete the work.
- *Find ways to orient and train new employees from a distance.* Some teams use a "buddy" system, pairing a new employee with an experienced employee who works at the same location (or in the same kind of remote location). Some set up organized files of training documents on the company intranet or in another shared-access directory on the network. Face-to-face time at the beginning can help create a connection, making remote conversation easier later.
- *Review progress toward the agreed-on goals and results at regular check-in meetings.* The frequency of check-ins will vary with the nature of assignments, individual needs, and your own comfort with the person's performance.
- *If expectations are not being met, find out why.* Don't let the problem slip by without discussion. It could be that the employee didn't understand the expectations or didn't have the tools or training to do the work. Or it could be an indication that the employee doesn't have the skills or the motivation to do the work required for the job. (You may need to travel to have face-to-face meetings about serious performance problems. In that case, discuss the problem with your manager and possibly your human resources representative into the loop early on.)

Be clear about expectations, creative and thoughtful about training, reliable in having regular check-ins, and consistent in judging performance by measurable results. These are the fundamentals of good performance management, whether you manage a one-location work group or a dispersed team.



### Supporting healthy work-life boundaries

People who work from home can sometimes have trouble drawing a line between work and the rest of their lives. As a result, many remote workers fall into unhealthy habits of overwork, checking and responding to messages on nights and weekends when they should be “recharging” to have energy for the next day or week of work. If you manage people who work from home or who work in different time zones, be mindful of how your actions and the example you set could contribute to the stretching of work-life boundaries into the burnout zone.

- *Don't schedule meetings beyond the limits of a reasonable workday or workweek* — and be sure to factor in time-zone differences when you're deciding what's reasonable. Better yet, have an open discussion with your team to agree on meeting times that are acceptable to everyone.
- *Don't call or e-mail employees beyond work hours* except in genuine emergencies. You are a role model for your employees, and your own round-the-clock work behavior sets an unhealthy standard for them to follow. Making direct requests to employees outside of normal work hours also sends a signal that you expect work to take precedence over personal life at all times. If you prefer to work nonstandard hours, be sure to explain to your employees that this is a personal choice and that you don't want them to copy your work habits.
- *If you work outside normal work hours, save your phone calls and e-mails to send to your team at the start of the next workday.* Most e-mail systems offer a way to save messages to be sent later.
- *Encourage efficient work during regular work hours,* judging performance by results rather than face time or extended-hour availability.
- *Send a message through your actions that it's OK to turn work off* and limit your accessibility outside normal work hours.

### Building a team

Good teams have fun together, share work efficiently, deliver good work to the customer and company, and continually look for better ways to get the work done. On strong teams, team members know each other's passions, strengths, and weaknesses. Team members care about and trust each other.

When all members of a team work together in one location, good teamwork often evolves naturally from people's daily interactions. But not always. And good teamwork almost never happens naturally when people work together from a distance. It needs to be encouraged and carefully built. Here are some ways to do that:

- *Schedule regular team meetings.* These can be a combination of teleconferences, video conferences, and in-person meetings, depending on where your employees are, the equipment available, and the money budgeted for travel.

- *Plan the agenda to cover topics that require engaged discussion.* Limit the time spent on straight presentation of information (unless it is new information that team members need to discuss in order to fully understand). Instead, encourage your team to identify issues that are best resolved through team discussion, and use meeting time for these kinds of problem-resolution or process-improvement discussions.
- *Allow time during meetings for informal talk.* Time a team spends talking about non-work issues isn't wasted. It's needed to build the people connections that hold a team together.
- *Find ways to include distant team members in social activities.* Plan “virtual” lunches where remote team members are connected by phone. (Some teams enforce a rule of no work talk during these lunches to push people into the kinds of conversations that build new connections.) Plan to have conference line connections at team birthday parties, baby showers, or other celebrations.
- *Make special efforts to reach out to employees who may feel excluded.* Check in more frequently with employees who show signs of feeling outside the team circle (by holding back at meetings, for example, or by making comments about not getting important team news). Encourage other team members to reach out to distant team members to help them feel included.
- *Be creative.* Some teams set up a shared site to post family and vacation photographs. Others rotate the role of facilitator at team meetings to give different people a chance to take center stage. Encourage employees to come up with new ideas to strengthen the team.

Managing well from a distance requires you to act in ways that make you a better manager for all employees. Clear, planned, and thoughtful communication is critical to long-distance management. It's also appreciated by employees who work with you in an office. In the same way, managing for outcomes is a good way to manage all employees, not just those who work at a distance. And building effective teams among remote workers requires a manager and team members to become more conscious of how they work together — another plus for you and all of your employees.

While it may seem like extra work at first, the steps you take to overcome obstacles to communication, performance management, and teamwork will all push you to hone your skills as a manager. Managers who become good at managing from a distance are simply becoming good managers.

Written with the help of Lynne Gaines, B.A. and Advanced Human Resources Certificate, Boston College Graduate School of Management and Bentley College. Ms. Gaines is a human resources (HR) manager in Waltham, Massachusetts. She is a nationally published HR writer and the former editor of the *Levinson Letter* for managers. Her HR experience spans 25 years in financial services, higher education, and publishing. The development of this publication was funded by the IBM Global Work/Life Fund.

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## Managing an Employee with a Chronic Health Condition

An essential part of every manager's job is knowing how and when to support an employee who has a chronic health condition. About 40 percent of American employees have a health concern that has lasted for at least a year. Twenty percent have two or more health concerns that have lasted for at least a year. Some of these employees have physical illnesses, such as heart disease, that limit their ability to perform certain kinds of tasks. Others have health concerns that are a natural part of the aging process, such as joint, knee, shoulder, or back conditions.

To provide appropriate support for employees with chronic conditions, you will need to understand company policies and related legal and privacy issues. For this reason, it's important to work closely with your human resources (HR) department or representative to support your employees while also protecting their privacy.

### Understanding chronic conditions

A chronic condition is a health concern that has lasted for a long time — typically, a year or more. Common chronic conditions include diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and arthritis, which is the most common chronic condition people have after age 45. No two people are affected in exactly the same way by a chronic condition. Some of your employees may have the same health concern but very different symptoms and needs. For this reason, managing employees with chronic conditions begins with understanding each employee's unique health and work concerns.

- *Listen to and get to know your employees.* Spend time getting to know your employees and their skills and abilities. This will help you be aware of a health concern early on, before it becomes a serious productivity issue. For example, one manager noticed that his long-term employee, who had always been a high performer, was behind in finishing her work in her scheduled shift. When he brought this to her attention, the employee said she was running late because she had started to experience joint pain in the morning.
- *Understand the skills required for jobs performed by your employees.* For example, is frequent bending or squatting required to perform the job? Is heavy lifting required? Be familiar with the specific requirements and challenges of each employee's job.
- Show concern for employees with health conditions. Research indicates that people with chronic conditions tend to perform better when managers show concern for their well-being. Let employees with health conditions know you value their work and want to help them stay productive.

- *Avoid making assumptions.* Don't assume you know what an employee with a chronic condition can do or would like to do. Don't assume that the employee needs an accommodation unless the employee expresses that adjustments or changes are needed. Also, employees' abilities may change as they gain strength or new treatments become available.
- *Don't pry into the specifics of the employee's medical condition.* Listen sympathetically but don't ask medical questions. Focus on understanding what the person's abilities and limitations are in relation to his job duties. Then be sure not to discuss his health issues with others, except to the extent it's necessary with your own manager and HR.
- *Always keep the lines of communication open.* To help someone with health concerns stay productive, you may need to have many conversations about the kind of support that would be most beneficial. Keeping the lines of communication open also makes it easier for your employees to raise their concerns with you. Determining how to reasonably accommodate an employee with a chronic condition should be an interactive process.
- *Protect employees' privacy.* The Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA) protects the privacy of individuals' personal health records by protecting the security and confidentiality of health care information. Touch base frequently with HR so that you stay up-to-date on company policies about chronic conditions and disabilities and the legal and privacy issues that these involve.
- *Always contact HR if you have questions about health or productivity issues regarding an employee.* Your HR department or representative can help you find the information you need to handle the issues you may be facing as a manager.

### Providing support in the workplace

As a manager, you need to support all of your employees. But you have extra responsibilities if a member of your team has a health concern or disability. With some exceptions, employers are required by law to provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. Accommodations are changes or adjustments that help employees perform the essential functions of their job or receive the benefits and privileges open to people without disabilities. These accommodations may include the following:

- acquiring or modifying equipment or devices
- job restructuring
- part-time or modified work schedules
- reassignment to a vacant position
- leaves of absence



In some cases, you may want to provide accommodations for people who have temporary conditions. A workstation adjustment for a sore wrist, for example, may prevent full-blown carpal tunnel syndrome from developing. Your HR representative can tell you about your organization's policies on this.

### Steps to take when an employee's chronic condition is affecting productivity

When an employee who has a chronic condition is a high performer, there is nothing you must do as a manager beyond being supportive, as you would be with any employee. However, if you have reason to believe that an employee's chronic condition is affecting productivity, take the following steps:

- *Involve HR from the beginning.* Schedule a time to meet with HR to review the situation. Your HR representative will be able to advise you and help you develop a plan.
- *Work with HR and your team of supervisors to ensure that the employee is treated with fairness and respect.* The goal is to try to work with the employee to help her stay in the work force and remain a productive and valued member of the department.
- *Consider offering additional support to the employee.* You might offer support through retraining, a modified schedule, or in other ways.
- *Encourage employees to seek assistance from their health care provider.* Many health plans and medical plans offer free and confidential long-term chronic-condition management programs for conditions like diabetes, asthma, or heart disease.
- *Seek support for yourself as a manager.* Contacting HR is a good first step in finding the support you need as a manager. Support is also available through the program that provided this publication.

### Five common health concerns and ways to offer support

Here are five common health concerns and ways to offer support:

- *An employee with a back problem has trouble bending down, making it difficult for him to complete necessary tasks at work.* Solutions and support: Observe the employee's work habits and determine if the employee is working smart and using proper procedures. Trainers can be hired to teach proper bending and lifting procedures. Your company may work with such a person or have its own occupational health staff. Your HR representative could advise you on this. Together, you might decide to have the employee go through retraining to make sure he is using all the tools available to him and following proper procedures.
- *An employee gets tired because of a condition that reduces energy.* Solutions and support: Offer a modified work schedule.

For example, consider shifting the employee's hours or offer a reduction of work hours. Perhaps it would help the employee not to work the a.m. shift.

- *An employee is not performing up to standards because of failing eyesight.* Solutions and support: Sometimes all that is needed is over-the-counter reading glasses for close-up work and reading improvement. Or perhaps the employee could use a vision exam. Some medical plans cover vision exams; encourage the employee to call her plan's member services for more information on coverage. If the employee does not have vision coverage, encourage her to contact the program that provided this publication to inquire about free and low-cost eye exams in her community.
- *An employee who suffers from major depression has difficulty concentrating or maintaining stamina.* Solutions and support: As a first step, talk with HR about how to recommend that the employee contact the employee assistance program (EAP) or the program that provided this publication to speak confidentially with a consultant. Consultants are trained in screening emotional challenges and can recommend EAP sessions, resources, or a longer term treatment plan. Also, medical plans provide mental health benefits; the employee can call his plan's member services for more information.
- *An employee has arthritis in her hands, which makes it hard for her to do her work.* Solutions and support: Offer an alternative position in a different department that may be less physically straining, if the business allows.

### Monitoring the situation

Chronic conditions change over time. That's why it's important to monitor the situation when an employee has a health issue. Here are ways to do that:

- *Follow up with your employee.* Find out how well any changes you've made are working. Don't hover over the employee or ask for health-related information beyond the job-related facts you need, but continue to show your support and willingness to help with any difficulties that may arise.
- *Focus on performance, not on health issues.* When your employee does well, praise his work without referring to his health. Similarly, if there are problems with his performance, don't assume they result from health issues. Instead, ask open-ended questions that will help you understand the cause: "I notice that you weren't able to complete your workload in your assigned shift twice last week. Why do you think this happened?"
- *Make adjustments if needed.* Keep in mind that some people may require only temporary adjustments or accommodations at work. Others may need additional accommodations as a condition becomes more severe. Make adjustments as abilities change. Encourage your employees to take on new challenges if they would welcome them, and if they would play to their strengths. Let your



employees know what they would need to do to receive new responsibilities.

- *Notice how changes are affecting other employees in your department.* If other employees seem resentful of what they see as “special treatment,” you may want to talk with your manager or HR about how to clear the air while protecting your employee’s privacy. Sometimes an issue arises when co-workers think an employee is exaggerating a health issue to get special treatment. Alternatively, you may want to watch for signs that other employees are “covering” for an employee with a health concern. This may be a sign that support measures aren’t working as well as you had expected.

When you manage an employee with a chronic health condition, you may face many challenges. At times, you may need to plan for the future without knowing exactly what the future holds for this employee. This requires flexibility and help from HR. Your efforts will be worth it and will send the message that your organization is a place where people with all kinds of abilities matter and make contributions.

This information is provided to supplement the care provided by your physician or mental health professional and is not to be used as a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician or another qualified health or mental health professional if you have questions about a medical condition or plan of treatment.

Written with the help of human resources consultant Lynne Gaines, B.A. and Advanced Human Resources Certificate from Boston College Graduate School of Management/ Bentley College, and Darcy Hurlbert, M.P.H., a solutions consultant at Ceridian Corporation.

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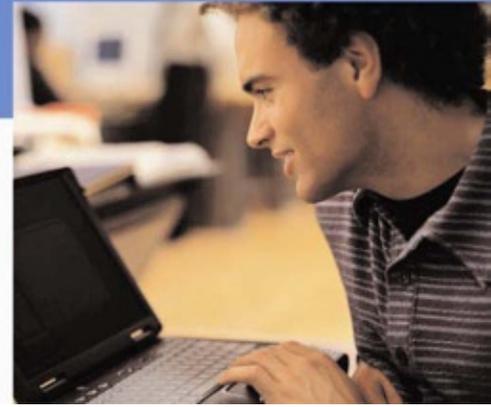
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