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**Leadership and wellbeing**

As the current situation evolves, we all have to change the way we do things and adapt at a quicker pace than most of us are comfortable with. This is a difficult time for everyone, but when you are in a position of leadership this can be especially challenging as people look to you for answers, guidance, direction and reassurance.

Whether you manage a small number of people, larger teams or departments the pandemic is having a profound impact on leaders as well as the staff you support. With no instruction book it can sometimes feel like we simply don’t have the answers people are looking for. But, it is important to remember that we are all experiencing this in real time, and we are all learning from day to day.

This edition of Workforce Matters is specifically for managers and leaders with a focus on the importance of looking after yourself and your wellbeing, while effectively managing and leading staff.



While there may not be an instruction book for the pandemic, there are well established theories, good practice and guidance around how to manage people and lead during times of change and crisis. It is also important to focus on the professional skills and experience we all have and consider how we can use these to maintain our own wellbeing.

**Acknowledge reality**

Everyone in the team is likely glued to the news and is aware of the speed with which the pandemic is unfolding. It is important that people recognise that decisions and guidance may change as the situation evolves. It is also important to make sure that people recognise this is not due to lack of planning or confusion, but a reflection of the need to respond to the changing needs of the services you provide, our residents and government advice.

By acknowledging the changing situation it enables you to manage expectations and prepares staff for the possibility that on-going changes are likely. Your commitment to keeping people up to date in an honest and open manner reinforces trust during these difficult times. It is also useful to engage your team in designing new approaches to working so they feel a part of the solution rather than a victim of it.

Taking people on this journey as participants rather than passengers is also an essential tool to utilise. Involving people in developing solutions and establishing direction makes them feel valued, useful and gives people a sense of joint purpose. As leaders we may have an excellent strategic view and see things that our staff members may not, but the same goes for our staff. People on the ground are the ones who know where the pot holes are, and no one has a monopoly on good ideas.

**Communication is key**

Communication is a key aspect of supporting staff groups in situations like this. Many people may be working in different environments, on their own or doing work they are not familiar with. Keeping people in the loop and reducing the sense of isolation is essential. If staff have access to the facts then rumours and unwanted behaviours can be better managed. Regardless of the size of your team there are several key actions you should remember when communicating:

* **Include everyone** - Make sure that the communication lines are always open. Search and actively promote progress reports and project updates. This is especially important when it comes to remote personnel.
* **Listen and show empathy -** Communication is a two-way process and if you don’t listen and don’t encourage dialogue with the other party, no job or person can survive for a long time. Listening shows respect and allows you to become familiar with extraordinary problems that you may have to solve as a manager.
* **Define objectives and expectations** - Managers should provide clear and accessible goals for teams and individuals that define exactly what is required for a particular project and ensure that all of the team is aware of the objectives of the project, the department and the workplace as a whole.
* **Send your message clearly** - Make sure your message is clear and accessible to the intended audience. To do this, it is important that you communicate clearly and politely – to convey your message plainly without confusion or offence. Remember people's anxieties will be heightened so how you say things in normal circumstances may not be appropriate at the moment, make sure you give constructive and positive feedback to help them feel engaged and valued.
* **Choose your medium carefully** - Once you’ve created your message, you need to make sure it’s in the best possible format. While face-to-face communication is the best way to build trust with employees, it is not always an option. Take time to decide if the information provided on a printed copy works better than an email or whether a general note is sufficient.

It is particularly important for managers and leaders to be consistent in their messages as people will notice inconsistencies which can impact on their trust and confidence. This includes agreement about the management style to be used across the team or organisation. These are harder to establish in bigger organisations, but it is vital as part of the change process. Neglecting this will result in policies or procedures taking longer to embed, which is a luxury we don’t have in the present situation.

**Be flexible**

We are no longer in a business as usual situation so it's important our approach to how we work reflects this. As people work in different ways, sometimes different hours and possibly in different areas we are expecting flexibility from our staff. It is essential that this is a two way expectation in order support change, anxiety and morale.

Services need to be maintained and people supported, but we also need to make sure our staff (and leaders) are in a position to do this to the best of their ability. If a person needs some time out, that’s fine. If they need to work around child care, or caring needs it is better to understand what this looks like and how it can be accommodated than stick to a rigid schedule.

It's also essential to strike a balance between trusting your team to get on with their work while providing them with support and supervision. Set clear expectations, focusing on results rather than monitoring hours worked. Without trust, working relationships can deteriorate and well-being will suffer. Flexibility like this may not be the norm, but it will be repaid many times over.

**Use those resources**

As we have already touched on, there is no instruction book for this situation, but there are many resources managers and leaders can use to support your own actions and the teams you manage. Many professional bodies have produced updated guidance and frameworks that can be used to support your staff and decision making.

[Ethical Framework for adult social care](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-ethical-framework-for-adult-social-care/responding-to-covid-19-the-ethical-framework-for-adult-social-care)

[Social Work England](https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/coronavirus/)

[British Association of Social Workers](https://www.basw.co.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-basw-updates)

[Skills for Care](https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/About/News/COVID-19.aspx)

[Nursing and Midwifery Council](https://www.nmc.org.uk/news/coronavirus/)

[Royal College of Occupational Therapists](https://www.rcot.co.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-0)

[Mind Tools](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/covid-19_support_pack.htm?trackingtag=hp_qc&utm_content=hp_qc)

**Being difficult or just scared?**

In an ideal world, every member of staff would be hardworking, proactive and make a great contribution. However, these are difficult times for everyone and people are reacting and trying to adjust to an unknown situation. It is important to be mindful that what happens outside the workplace can sometimes slip off manager's radar as we focus on keeping things going inside the workplace. People may be affected by emotional, caring and financial difficulties brought on by the crisis in their personal lives.

Some things you can do to minimise and address such situations:

* **Address the issue** - Sometimes it feels easier to ignore an issue and hope that it will improve on its own. However, this isn’t the right approach to take as if left too long, the situation could deteriorate further and could have a damaging effect on the workplace or other members of staff.

If left unresolved, the issue may result in others thinking they are not valued or their problems understood, this will just cause more unproductivity and tension in the long run. Also don’t forget the person may not realise that an issue or their behaviour is obvious to others. As a leader or manager its important your ability to read your staff's behaviour and see changes is always on your mind.

When talking to people utilise your skills, listen closely and read between the lines. Working remotely means you won’t always be able to gauge body language or tone to sense what people are thinking or feeling. Home in on what’s not being said and ask questions to clarify your interpretation. You could also consider video conferencing or face time calls so you can see someone’s face and pick up on facial cues.

It’s likely that there’s a specific issue behind their behaviour and the person might just need a person to talk too, extra support or some specific help. Tackling the problem head on means that you can rest assured that you did everything in your power to make the situation right.

* **Make a plan** -Start by speaking to the person to find out what the issue is. This will help you to understand what needs addressing, in situations like this it may be something very different from the obvious.

Then you need to come up with a plan, and this does not always mean you alone need to find the solution. Work with each other, ask what would work, what ideas the person has, and explore how the plan might work and how you can review things going forward.

* **Be consistent** – It is essential to be consistent with your expectations. Don’t be relaxed on some occasions, but strict on others. Staff need to know where they stand and what’s expected of them.

As with all issues relating to performance or behaviour don’t forget your organisations' HR teams are still available and will be able to provide advice and guidance.

**Know what we can, and can't do**

Sometimes change is hard for people and whatever area you work in we are all used to being very guided by processes and routines. People adapt to changes in these differently and while some people are more open to doing things differently some people find it hard to deviate from the tried and tested way of doing things.

Priorities, consequences and ways of getting things done are changing, and they will continue to change in the coming months. Some people may need extra support to shift their priorities around what we can do and what we can't do in the current circumstances.

**Leave no one behind**

We all know the impact isolation can have on people's physical and mental health. At the moment we have a situation where people could be doubly isolated. Not only has work life become isolated, but social life has been paused too.

When your usual team structure and location is disrupted it can have a significant impact on the wellbeing, motivation and morale of your team. We are often used to seeing people and being able to react when we see them under pressure, acting out of character or struggling with something. When we don't have those visual and physical indicators, it's is easy to assume that people are OK and just getting on with things.

While some people may adapt well this will not be the case for everyone. You may also have team members who are self-isolating, potentially unwell or caring for others who are unwell. Make sure you always include these people in conversations and communications.

Make time for social conversations, as part of normal working and these are natural parts of the day and increase rapport, reduce feelings of isolation and ease communication between people working from home.

[Freeconferencecall.com](https://www.freeconferencecall.com/global/gb) can be used by large numbers of participants. It is easy and simple to use; you can create a free account with the service using your LCC email address, and they will automatically email you instructions on how to host a conference call.

**Making difficult decisions**

Local authorities and the wider health and care workforce are faced with difficult decisions every day. However, planning for and responding to COVID-19 will undoubtedly require making difficult decisions under new and exceptional pressures with limited time, resources or information. These changes to the way we make decisions and how we support people will be difficult to reconcile with our own values, ethics and sometimes in conflict with the reasons we work in this field.

The Department of Health has produced a framework that intends to serve as a [guide](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-ethical-framework-for-adult-social-care/responding-to-covid-19-the-ethical-framework-for-adult-social-care) for these types of decisions which managers and leaders should become familiar with so you are able to support staff.

**You are not on your own**

Although this is last on the list, it is one of the most important things to remember, YOU ARE NOT ALONE! Times may be difficult, but our lines of accountability are still in place and support from peers, senior managers, strategic leaders and our teams remains.

The types of interactions we have may change and the problems we need to resolve will also be different, but the relationships support and guidance needed is available, and should be used. Everyone is learning how to find our way through this, so no one is expecting anyone to have all the answers.

**General COVID-19 advice**

**NHS Information:**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

**Government Information:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

**World Health Organization (WHO):**

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

**Mind**

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

**Rethink**

<https://www.rethink.org/news-and-stories/blogs/2020/03/managing-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/>

**Shine**

<http://www.lincsshine.co.uk/>

**Taking Care of Yourself When Managing Others**

<https://www.ckju.net/en/dossier/manager-health-and-wellbeing-taking-care-yourself-when-managing-others/26106>