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COVID-19: GUIDE FOR LEADERS, HR AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATORS

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The COVID-19 pandemic is creating unprecedented challenges for organizations of all shapes and sizes.

Now more than ever, communicators, HR and company leaders play a critical role in keeping people informed, engaged and productive in an increasingly remote work setting.

Brilliant Ink has gathered the following resources to help you navigate these challenges.

GENERAL TIPS/GUIDANCE

1 LEAD WITH HUMANITY:

Remember, your employees are people first. These are uncertain and confusing times for all of us, and leading with a people-first approach will always be most effective. Try to avoid overly corporate language and choose a more natural, human tone. Balance business-continuity details with advice for managing the inevitable stress and anxiety that comes with a situation like this.

2 OVERCOMMUNICATE:

With the situation changing rapidly, it's important that companies communicate frequently and across all available channels. Provide regular updates in real time and keep in mind that as more and more employees are working from home, they may be turning to individual colleagues for guidance and support – and if you're not providing sufficient details, a rumor mill is bound to grow. Push out updates and tap into managers to share information with their individual teams.

3 ESTABLISH A "SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH":

Although it's important to use many channels to reach employees, there should also be a "single source of truth" within your organization – in most cases, your company's intranet. Ensure all other communications – emails, text alerts, etc. – link back to that single source of regularly updated information about policies, meetings, travel restrictions, etc.

4 CREATE SPACE FOR TALKING AND CONNECTION:

During uncertain times, especially with mandated social distancing, people will naturally crave more space to talk and connect. When leading small-group meetings, allow space for casual chatter. Consider establishing social pairings to give employees a chance to connect virtually when they've lost the organic opportunities to talk casually in the office.

5 DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL WELLBEING:

The current state of the world is chaotic and at times, frightening. What's more, working from home can create feelings of isolation. Ensure you're balancing business communications with emotional check-ins with your people. The CDC has some useful resources to consider.

TIPS FOR REMOTE WORKING, COLLABORATION & PRODUCTIVITY

1 **BRING YOUR TEAM TOGETHER (VIRTUALLY) TO BRAINSTORM AND AGREE ON HOW YOU'LL COMMUNICATE AND INTERACT.**

Encourage teams to discuss how they'll interact daily, and agree on details like how individuals will indicate they want to speak during a video call, how they'll manage technical difficulties, etc. Establish ground rules for video chats – staying focused and present, but also being prepared for the unexpected, as appearances by children could become more common as schools close! And because it's more difficult to pick up on non-verbal cues during a video conference, you may need to call on individuals to ensure everyone is making their voices heard.

And while it's helpful to continue with "business-as-usual" communications – as this can often be reassuring to employees – proceed with caution. Make sure you're not sending out communications that seem tone deaf, ignoring the current situation and the unique challenges it brings.

2 **CONSIDER ALL COMMUNICATIONS OPTIONS (PHONE CALLS, EMAILS, VIDEO MEETINGS) BEFORE SHARING IMPORTANT INFORMATION.**

Sharing information that applies to a large audience is best done via email. Short, simple communications can happen via texting or other instant messaging tools like Slack or Lync, but keep in mind that this type of channel can easily lead to misunderstandings. When decisions are being made or sensitive topics are being discussed, always opt for phone or video communications.

3 **ENCOURAGE USE OF VIDEO WHENEVER POSSIBLE.**

Maintaining face-to-face connection is important and will ease the transition back to a more traditional work environment. Some teams even find it valuable to do "heads-down" work while on video together to encourage a sense of connection and camaraderie.

4   PRACTICING EFFICIENT MEETING HABITS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER, AS MORE INTERACTIONS ARE HAPPENING VIRTUALLY.

Come to all meetings with a clear objective, share it at the outset, and recap outcomes and next steps at the meeting conclusion.

5   REMIND LEADERS THAT VIDEO CHAT IS AN IMPORTANT FORM OF PUBLIC SPEAKING.

Just because they may not have the same opportunities to speak to large groups of employees, company leaders can still share meaningful messages via video. Encourage them to embrace video communications during this period of remote work, and share advice for effectively addressing people via this channel. You can find some great tips here.

6   TRUST YOUR PEOPLES' JUDGEMENT, BUT DON'T SHY AWAY FROM SHARING TIPS AND TRICKS FOR REMOTE WORK.

In some organizations, working from home is common, but for others, this is uncharted territory. While you never want to "talk down" to your people, there are likely opportunities to share advice in a meaningful way. We love these working from home (WFH) tips, and this advice for leading a team that is suddenly working

7   ASSUME POSITIVE INTENT.

With school closing and people making major adjustments to their daily lives, be prepared for drops in productivity. Many employees are not accustomed to working from home on an extended basis, and some will be juggling children at home as well. Encourage leaders to practice patience and to assume people are doing their best to stay on top of work responsibilities.

COMPANYWIDE COMMUNICATIONS EXAMPLES

Coinbase is making its planning and employee communications publicly available.

ADDITIONAL IC & HR RESOURCES

COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS

- 10 Words Leaders Should Avoid When Discussing Coronavirus With Their Employees
- 10 Best Practices for Communication Management of COVID-19
- Coinbase Planning and Response to COVID-2019
- Lead Your Business Through the Coronavirus Crisis
- Coronavirus: Employers Should Plan, Not Panic
- 5 Steps To Prep Coronavirus Messaging for Key Audiences
- Coronavirus + the Workplace: Tips for HR and Business Leaders
- Employee Communications and the Coronavirus: What You Need To Know
- 8 Questions Employers Should Ask About Coronavirus

WFH RESOURCES

- Make Working from Home Actually Work
- How to Work from Home Like a Boss in Case Coronavirus Forces You to
- Best Productivity Tips for Working from Home
- How to Run a Great Virtual Meeting
- How to Lead a Team Who is Suddenly Working From Home

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