



The 3 Ts your employees need as we approach a #newnormal

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Many businesses are measuring how we are faring right now by how many people we have been able to retain, how much of our pre-pandemic business we still have, and how much output we are seeing from our teams compared to pre-pandemic times.

If your business has adopted new work arrangements such as flexible working, remote working etc., output is not the least of your preoccupations.

Just a thought: what would preoccupy you if you were in your employees' shoes? This is a period of major disruption, not just for the scale of business and the way in which business is conducted, but also personally for each of your employees. Where we once gently nudged our employees during informal conversations, staff meetings and performance reviews to be 'adaptable' and 'flexible', these are no longer 'nice-to-haves' but are now critical survival skills.

If indeed one intends on thriving professionally and personally during times such as these, one needs to be able to understand what has changed, why, and develop behaviours and mindsets that allow you not to be swallowed whole by uncertainty, misinformation and panic.

What then is the employer's role? Become diligent about supplying the 3 Ts.

Talk

Whatever is not communicated is created, and so the best way to stem rumour and misinformation is to provide your people with timely, honest information on the current state of affairs. What is the outlook for your business? What is the outlook for jobs within the business? What are the immediate priorities? What are your expectations of your employees in supporting those priorities? What changes can employees expect? What is the business goal: revert to pre-pandemic operations, or challenge itself to do things

differently? How will you involve employees in deciding on the goal? How often can your people expect to hear from you? How can they ask questions and get answers? At a time when many of our people are functioning fully or partially outside of the traditional office environment, talking to them is more important than ever before. Engage via phone, engage virtually, but engage fully and frequently.

Tools

Where employers have opted to utilise alternate work arrangements for their teams in an effort to reduce potential virus exposure in highly interactive environments, or simply as a 'test drive' of introducing flexibility to their operations, your people need the tools to make either of these successful. This includes the basic physical equipment needed to execute their responsibilities such as laptops and mobile phones, but potentially, financial support for acquiring those things that are taken for granted in the office such as a reliable internet connection and an ergonomically-sound chair or work surface.

How can you begin to compare output under alternative work arrangements if key tools at the employee's disposal in the traditional office for performance of day-to-day duties are not reasonably available outside of that office? Where financial support is not feasible, particularly during times where revenue streams are not predictable, creative solutions exist such as loaning staff furniture suddenly available from unused offices. The time has passed for limiting software access or the locations where such software can be accessed if it can mean enabling employees to be as productive outside the office as well as within. If we have learned nothing else, we have learned that this is an opportune time to try something new. Not ready to commit to measures such as these? Involve your employees in a conversation about the potential benefits of an experiment for a particular period. Select a timeframe that allows you to assess the costs and benefits of such new work arrangements both from the employer and employee perspectives.

Tolerance

If 2020 had a mantra, it would be 'Stay flexible'. Now more than ever, our teams need to be able to count on reasonable levels of flexibility from their employers. Employees are home schooling, toggling blended approaches to schooling children of different ages within the same household, adapting to blurred lines between personal time and on-the-job accessibility, trying to cope with new reclusive realities that directly oppose the 'social' culture of our country, as well as managing the anxiety of an uncertain future. Is it still as important that employees prove themselves to be 'present' within a tightly defined eight (8) hours of work as opposed to delivering communicated expectations by agreed timelines? Probably not. Your employees need the space and framework to deliver, not just keep up appearances, and in ways and timeframes that allow them to balance competing pulls on their energy and focus. Increased tolerance and understanding on the part of employers will engender increased engagement, reliability and loyalty from your employees.

Unprecedented times call for unprecedented approaches, provide unprecedented opportunity and can yield unprecedented results. The 3 Ts might just be a first step in transforming our approach to work, balance and productivity.

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