

Managing Your Workforce Through Disruption

By Samantha Schilke

As a Certified Clifton Strengths Coach, I was given access to this Gallup conference hosted by Dr. Justin Harter, Chief Scientist of Workplace Management and Wellbeing at Gallup. He shared data-backed strategies for managing through disruption. In times of crisis, organizations have the power to drive people forward. Consider sharing this with your leadership team.

1. **Share leadership vision and direction.** It all starts with leadership.

Employees always need trust, compassion, stability and hope. This is intensified in times like this with COVID-19 outbreak continuing to spread uncertainty and fear across the world. They need to know that their leadership has a clear plan.

Be proactive with planning and work to communicate effectively and quickly. As plans continuously evolved in this daily shifting landscape, simply communicating that you are actively working on a plan can be a comfort to your employees.

Establish a COVID-19 Task Force that watches the news and tailor responses and messages to specific geographic regions of your company. Communication and planning should be a daily roll-out at your company right now. Most full-time workers report some worry about the coronavirus affecting them but have confidence to get their work done. The focus for employers should be on keeping the gap between worry and confidence small as the situation continues to evolve.

Right now, 83% of full-time employees, 18+* approve of the way their employer is handling the response to COVID-19. **With leadership, this crisis is creating a rally affect similar to what we saw after 9/11.** Additionally, this approval rating for organization leaders is ahead of approval ratings for leaders in government, hospitals and the CDC right now.

2. **Equip your managers – organizations are experienced by your employees through your managers.**

Supervisors and managers are key conduits right now. With work and life more blended than ever before, employees' direct managers are keeping them informed and translating the leadership message. With 70% of how your employees feel being influenced by their direct manager, managers are your biggest asset or liability during times like.

Encourage managers to check in with their team often and highlight what is really important about the work they are doing and how they are serving their customers and community. They need to focus on meeting basic emotional needs and should tailor their approach in communication to the individual as much as possible.

Also, share do's and don't's of public messaging. What to say and not to say to clients, employees and direct reports.

Connecting to others is a basic human need and is emphasized with social distancing making some people feel very isolated. Encourage your managers to become coaches with their direct reports and focus on relationship building and connection with the Mission, Vision, Values of the organization.



3. Engage employees and empower your people.

Self-control and autonomy are basic human needs and are hard to find right now. Help your people find confidence to do their work. People handle challenging times differently. How can your employees help the company in ways outside of their current roles?

Employee engagement is also a huge driving factor of sustainability during a recession. Organizations with stellar engagement held their own in earnings per share during the last recession. Highlight the mission and purpose of individual jobs to drive engagement. Set clear expectations and make sure employees have the materials and equipment they need to do their jobs. Most importantly, focus on giving employees the opportunity to do what they do best.

Data shows a majority of people believe a recession is coming but very few think it will affect their household. Prepare your employees for an economic downturn with financial wellness courses to mitigate this. People can see a downturn coming for the country, but not themselves personally.

4. Successful remote work needs transparency and compassion.

In the time of remote working and social distancing, we need to change how we approach working together and building relationships. The line between work and life is completely gone in a crisis like this and employees need to know that the organization cares about their wellbeing.

Use transparency to build trust and stability through clear expectations set quickly, regular communication and strong feedback loops. Express compassion through the local managers and individualize work as much as possible through strengths. Make sure to continue to outline and build new processes to promote productive remote work. Sharing best practices between branches and teams is a great way to stay connected and build a community at work.

5. Embrace the opportunity to be agile.

Agility is defined as the ability to rapidly change or adapt in response to changes in the market. With changing situations and consumer behavior expected for the foreseeable future, what could your company be doing differently?

Gallup is an American analytics and advisory company based in Washington, D.C. They do work on three levels. On a societal level where they poll people worldwide and gather data. On an employee level where they support organizations through performance management. And on an individual level when they focus on the individual person and how they can maximize their potential. They are well known for the Gallup Q12 Employee Engagement Survey and Clifton StrengthsFinder.

**Data and conclusions in this article are from a study done by Gallup from March 13-18 that surveyed 2,824 full time employed adults who were 18+. Numbers continue to be tracked every day and the trends listed above are in accordance with the changing numbers.*