



Kansas State Council of SHRM, Inc.  
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## KS SHRM COVID-19 WEBINAR DISCUSSION

May 6, 2020

### Topic: Strategies for Supporting Organizations & Employees

#### Guests:

- Stacey Winter, LCMFT – CEO, EMPAC
- Terri Sitrin, LCSW, CEAP – EAP Crisis Manager, New Directions Behavioral Health

#### Questions answered on the call:

1. Please address employees who may be reluctant to return to work after being allowed to telecommute. After engaging in the interactive process, then what? What are some ways to calm staff and provide reassurance upon returning?

*Employees are happier with flexibility. Let them know the plans up front and reassure them they are safe and that you care. As you give them that info, they'll feel more confident. Expect anxiety, but hopefully people will calm down after a couple days. Be very clear about expectations (masks, gloves, etc.) and if you're providing them. Encourage clear and consistent communication. Communicate ad nauseum and fill those messages with hope and positivity and value. If there is flexibility in allowing some form of a telecommute, then offer it.*

2. Please address the challenges in the differences between employee experiences (i.e. an employee whose work has not been interrupted vs. and employee who has been working from home). How do you navigate the different employee populations?

*Crisis can bring out the best or worst in us. Encourage one another in offering grace and recognize that everyone experiences things differently. Show appreciation, kindness, value and respect and that will help them to feel supported. Besides sending regular communications, send a small gift to remote workers at home just to let them know you are thinking of them. For those working in the office, offer some flexibility in the rules (provide special snack, relax dress code, etc.). It is important to check with the employee because they are having different home experiences along with the different work experiences. Try to understand what they are anxious about and assure them they're appreciated.*



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3. Now that we know work-from-home strategies work, how do you think it might impact organizations with employees wanting the option to work from home permanently, especially given the fact we don't know how long COVID-19 will be impacting public health? Do you have any tips for companies to navigate those situations, since telling people it's not possible is no longer a viable argument?

*Encourage your company to look at the data and recognize it may still work, even if it's not full time. That may appease those folks knowing they still have that piece of flexibility. As people get back into the groove, make the normal work environment fun (snacks to welcome them back, etc.). One participant shared their company provided a return to work kit that includes training and what you need to know in this workspace during the pandemic. Another participant noted they are returning to their office in phases, and employees must attend a zoom training and sign-off on temporary COVID-19 policies electronically prior to returning. They provided a packet to each employee on day one which includes: mask, one-page reminders on social distancing, handwashing and how to wear a mask. They are requiring a log be kept each day for in-person contacts. The logs are kept on a paper notebook at each workstation.*

4. How is everyone “speaking the language” the public wants to hear. The public we all serve is so very skittish about being out in public and going about their business so how are you talking to them as well as what are the physical cautions you’re taking to help the public feel comfortable to come back in to your business?

An example was given for a restaurant in Texas. Upon reopening at 25%, the patron noticed a man in a lab coat cleaning the restaurant continually. Those kinds of visuals made her feel safer and communicated that the restaurant was taking this seriously. Make sure the staff is wearing face masks and gloves to provide a good visual to show you’re serious about safety. Communication needs to come from a variety of levels and not just HR. Make sure the message is consistent at all levels. An example was provided about a plant that experienced a mercury spill. Upon employees’ return to work following the spill clean-up, management conducted a meeting with top brass to help them all feel connected and assured, then management met in smaller groups with employees to address any concerns or questions. Encourage people to work with each other because support networks are important for resilience. People often feel better when they see upper level management pitching in and working beside them, too.



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5. How do you get leaders who are not the "feel good", or as they define it "touchy-feely" to buy in to what we're talking about? Note: they are not bad leaders...they are just "all business, all the time" and don't, themselves, care for/ need the "feel good"/"we care about you" outreach. I'm talking folks who don't celebrate their own birthdays or others, holidays, etc.

That's tough and I hear that a lot from HR people. There are some leaders who aren't very good at showing compassion and there has to be some coaching with those people. HR is the best to share this concern because they are doing it out of kindness and are aware of how employees perceive this person. Help leaders get connected to resources (Author Patrick Lencioni is mentioned as a good resource). Help them craft emails or limit their exposure in being in front of people. Leaders that lack emotional intelligence in that respect usually know it's a challenge for them. The more they do it, though, the more they'll get it.

6. I learned the term "allostatic overload" yesterday. I love that what you both have shared today will help with these feelings we're all experiencing.

*That's a really good point. People are overwhelmed with feelings right now and that's not a good position to handle stress from. Be sure to find tools that work for your and be good to yourself. Offer grace to yourself. Give grace to yourself by engaging your empathy circle – people that care enough about you to give honest feedback and mutual accountability.*

7. What are some connection strategies for the workplace?

- *Recognize every person's experience is different (single person at home alone vs. a big family at home together)*
- *Individual conversation*
- *Technology: Zoom games/check-ins/challenges, Virtual hours, private Instagram or chat groups*
- *Make things fun*