

COVID-19 And Employee Communications



This is an article from 2020, reflective upon the COVID-19 pandemic, but the principles and strategies mentioned are still applicable for HR directors looking to navigate employee communications during a public health crisis or the spread of infectious illness within their workplace.

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Most of the world was vaguely aware of a new virus called COVID-19 when 2020 began but none of us could have imagined the seismic shift we have all experienced during the last several weeks. The rapidly increasing cases close to home and the World Health Organization declaration of a global pandemic has created a blur of rapid-fire news developments, confusion and fear.

Many businesses have moved to a remote work model over the last week or so. There have been technology requirements to be addressed, protocols about paper mail to be developed and workflow procedures to be amended. Things moved so quickly that leaders were acting on instinct and in a reactive way, with no time to really develop and execute a plan.

We are now in it for the long haul. While no one knows what the timing and trajectory of this crisis is, things aren't going to go back to "normal" any time soon. As employees adjust to their new reality during the coronavirus outbreak, they look to employers to provide clear and consistent messaging regarding not only the day-to-day, but what's coming next. So now – we plan.

Put Your People First

Establish a Core Team

A team of key people in the company should be established and roles defined for all. The team should be comprised of both decision-makers and those who can execute actions, such as a representative from the facilities or physical plant area and one from the IT group. One person in the group should be designated as the chief communicator; this person must be involved with all discussions and should be the "one voice" of the organization both internally and to the outside world.

Effective Leadership Communications

Regular communication does not mean constant communication in small ad hoc snippets.

A daily email to everyone, at approximately the same time each day, should share both required practical information such as technology updates and tools as well as information on what is going on company wide. Including encouraging and uplifting content is also important to keep spirits high.

Emergency Communications

All employees should understand that if they are diagnosed with the virus, or if someone they live with is, that they must immediately advise a designated contact person so that a review of contact points can be done and instructions about isolation can be shared. In order to ensure that information can be shared on an urgent basis if necessary, a What's App or text group should be created.

Remote Working

Working remotely is new for many people. Getting the IT system set up and appropriate equipment set up is the first step but learning to be productive will take time. Consider sharing remote work FAQs or best practices with employees.

Staying Connected

Many of us have gone from spending 40 or more hours of work with a group of people to not seeing them anymore – literally overnight. The collegiality and camaraderie of the workplace, needed more than ever in these uncertain times, has disappeared. Once again, technology can be of great assistance. Zoom lunches, Skype coffee dates and perhaps even an adult beverage at the end of the day over FaceTime will help to keep people connected.

What's Next?

It is quite safe to say that no one knows exactly what will transpire and when – there is a seemingly infinite number of variables at play in this situation. But as with everything in business, establishing a solid foundation of purpose, organization and communication is an essential step toward recovery.

Crowe Soberman has established a dedicated [COVID-19 Resource Hub](#), highlighting areas of business operations that will likely be impacted by coronavirus. Please do not hesitate to reach out to one of our professionals for support during these challenging times.

We are in this together.

The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.