



MAPIEN

Leading your people through COVID-19

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Leading your people through Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Frequently Asked Questions

The disruption caused in response to COVID-19 is globally unprecedented. Part of the challenge facing organisations is in understanding how to support their people during this difficult time. At the moment, we see three main industry and market pressures:

- Those in essential services are overwhelmed with work and pressure,
- Those, like many in hospitality, who have had work disappear virtually over night, and;
- Those facing a new world where the type of work is relatively unchanged, but they have to work in completely new ways (e.g., everyone from home).

Here is a guide to help you deal with problems right now and in the coming months.

Right now

How do I tell my people what's going to happen, when I don't even know?

In short: Tell people you don't know.

It's OK to tell people you don't know what is going to happen. Just be up-front. The *worst* things you could do right now, in order, are: lie or make something up; go quiet and not tell your people anything; or tell people 'everything is going to be OK' unless you're absolutely sure of it.

If you don't know what's going to happen, the *best* thing you can do right now is: be upfront, tell them things are changing and you're not sure what's going to happen; tell them what you and/or the executive leadership team are exploring as options; and commit to giving them regular (minimum weekly) updates where you update them, even if the update is just to say you still don't know what's going to happen.

How can managers rapidly transition to leading a remote workforce?

In short: regularly check in with everyone, be absolutely clear on the challenges they're facing *individually* and strategies they have in place to maintain their productivity.

There are lots of challenges here, but also some opportunities. One of our Senior Consultants, Jason Wessel, wrote a [blog post](#) about this recently. In short, managers should focus their effort on the following 6 principles for managing a remote workforce:

1. Regular, scheduled contact;
2. Structure clear goals and lifelines who can help achieve them (i.e., short-term defined deadlines);
3. Create a strong sense of meaningful value;
4. Maintain strong psychological safety;
5. Embrace flexibility, with boundaries;



6. Share stories and foster a sense of connectivity.

The key theme to regularly check in with everyone and make sure you're absolutely clear on the challenges they're facing individually and strategies they have in place to maintain their productivity during this time.

Everyone is stressed. What do I do?

In short: Understand the stressors, and either reduce them, or increase support to help people cope with them. Ideally both.

People are stressed for different reasons. The first step is to understand what the specific stressors on your organisation are.

We have a Wellbeing Risk Assessment that can quickly help you identify these stressors at both team and enterprise levels. Please [contact us](#) if you would like to find out more about it.

Most stress comes from an imbalance between job demands and resources. Too many demands and not enough resources, and it becomes extremely difficult to manage day-to-day.

The full list of demands and resources we find most useful are listed below.

Demands (increase pressure)

- Pace and amount of work
- Mental load
- Emotional load
- Physical efforts
- Change in tasks
- Ambiguities about work
- Uncertainty about the future

Resources (reduce pressure)

- Information
- Communication
- Participation
- Relationship with colleagues
- Relationship with supervisor
- Remuneration
- Independence in the work

To make a tangible difference, you need to understand which demands you can decrease, and resources you can increase. Of course, effectively increasing those resources is a challenge in itself. The bulk of our work in Organisational Development is to support organisations to do this well.

One of my people is really struggling with these changes. How do I talk with them?

In short: Take time to listen to them. Only then should you set goals and action plan. If they need more support, refer on.

Some of us are better placed to manage rapid changes than others. That's no fault of anyone, that's just life. A single mother will face more challenges right now than an empty nester with a partner working full time.

As a leader, having these conversations can be paralysing. Particularly in the moment when you don't know what to say. If you only do one thing, make sure you listen deeply. Try to understand what they're going through. A lot of the time, that is enough.



Two simple models to help you have difficult conversations:

REAL

When having an emotional conversation: **Recognise** the situation and reflect on what you believe to be the cause. Stay calm and **Empathise**. Try to gain a better understanding of what's going on for them. **Ask** more about what they are experiencing, what they need, and what they would like to see happen. Then **Listen** deeply for needs and opportunities.

GROW

If it's appropriate, then you might think about moving from listening to working towards something more productive.

Do that by defining a **Goal**. That is, what do they really want to be working towards right now? Talk about their **Reality**; where are they on that goal right now? Can they rate their progress? What are their **Options/Obstacles** to achieving the goal? **Where to from here?** What is their most immediate next step?

OR

If you really don't feel equipped to have this conversation, or you find they need more support than you can give, consider passing on details to your EAP, or suggest they make an appointment with their GP to access sessions with a psychologist under the mental health care plan. Remind them that to book a longer appointment and tell their GP what the booking is for, as they will have to conduct a mental health assessment as part of the booking.

One of my staff is a victim of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV). How can I expect them to work from home?

In short: Communicate your concerns for their safety. Expect disruption. Make sure you have resources at hand.

These types of situations are among the most difficult you will ever face in your career. There is nothing easy about them, and certainly no easy answers here.

Sadly, there are already reports of increased rates of DFV from around the world where areas have locked down from COVID-19. Services in Australia are expecting a tripling in incidents, but many have already closed face-to-face support.

If you become aware of DFV, trying to intervene could actually *escalate* risk. If you're in the position of managing someone affected by DFV, there may be no obvious signs, or you may notice things like delays in responding, frequent unavailability, reduced job performance, and low self-esteem or confidence.

You need to be led by them in this situation. Start by communicating your concerns for their safety. If they are already working from home, you might have to first reach out and arrange a time when they can speak openly. The person themselves is best placed to determine what is and is not safe. Use the REAL model above and put aside your urges to help and your own ideas about what the person 'should' do.

During that conversation, use the REAL and the GROW models mentioned above if you need.

You can find localised supports and resources here: <https://au.reachout.com/articles/domestic-violence-support>



Our team of psychologists can talk to you more about the nuances of these situations.

In the coming months

I'm starting to notice blurred boundaries between work and home-life. How do I manage this?

In short: Choose to either embrace it or set strict boundaries for when you're at work, and when you're at home.

There is controversy in research around work-life balance. Some researchers would argue that pure separation of work and life is not possible. This may be what has led some people to start referring to it as work-life harmony, or work-life blending.

There are two main schools of thought on what you can do about it:

1. Accept that there is a blurred boundary between work and life. Make a list of the pros and cons; when it works, and when it doesn't. Ask the opinions of your colleagues and your family, as they're all affected. If it's not causing harm to yourself or others, you don't need to feel pressured to have strict work-life boundaries.
2. Set strict work-life boundaries. If work is interfering with your home life, or if home life is interfering with work, if that's causing problems, or if you just plain want clear separation, then put structures in place. Set boundaries and communicate them with both colleagues and family.

Everyone is *still* stressed. What can I do?

In short: Reassess the range of stressors and supports. Things will have changed, and you will have to too.

Make sure you properly understand their stressors. There is great risk in assuming you know what your people are going through. It might not be the same as what it was a month ago. Particularly in these rapidly changing times. If you get it wrong, or they *think* you've got it wrong, they will feel alienated and unsupported, only adding to the stress.

Our Wellbeing Risk Assessment is a weekly pulse survey (approx. 4 mins) you can share with staff to generate wellbeing risk report. We do this weekly (at the moment) because things are changing daily and we don't want to overwhelm people even more. The benefit of relatively frequent measurements is that we can easily plot trends for you to stay on top of the curve, if not ahead of it.

It is **free to use**, so please do [contact us](#) to find out more.



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