

Leading in Difficult Times

Communicating Effectively

Increase frequency

- Communicate frequently, both formally and informally. Establish regular check-ins to provide updates and support.
- Recognize that things are changing on a daily, even hourly basis – keep your team informed. Without adequate and timely information, people resort to gossip and rumors.
- Repeat and reinforce key information using multiple channels (i.e., face to face, email, team meetings) to help increase understanding and retention.
- Be sure that people can reach you. Let employees know how they can get a hold of you for updates and questions.

Be clear and fact-based

- Before forwarding or sharing key information, slow down and read it thoroughly to ensure you understand it, and that the information is clear, accurate and relevant.
- Use facts to describe ‘where we are’ and ‘how we are doing’. Your team needs to know the facts in order to actively engage in improving the situation.
- Provide the context for actions and decisions – explain the ‘why’ (i.e., this is what we’re doing, and this is why we’re doing it). Without the ‘why’, people resort to their own stories or narratives.
- Create a shared understanding of the situation, and a unified response, using these 4 questions:
 - What happened (the facts)?
 - What do we do now (focus on the future, not the past)?
 - How is this going to affect us?
 - What role/authority/decision making ability do we have in this situation?

Don’t forget the basics

- Listen - pay attention to what your team is telling you.
- Respond - even if you don’t have the answers.
- Don’t make promises you can’t keep.
- Always tell the truth.
- Use your ‘indoor voice’.

Attend to emotions

- Be aware that a leader's emotions are contagious. Even in extreme crisis, a calm, can-do attitude keeps people going.
- Make it okay for people to talk about how they are feeling. When people feel safe to share their emotions, they can process things better, and are more resilient and committed.
- Recognize small victories and indicators that things are improving (i.e., rays of light).
- Express empathy by showing interest in what the other person is saying; acknowledging their pain; showing gratitude that the person opened-up; and sharing words of support and encouragement.

While there is no script for empathy, here are some examples of supportive statements:

- *Examples:*

"I hate that this happened."

"I can see how that would be difficult."

"Thank you for sharing with me."

"I'm glad you told me."

"How are you feeling about everything?"

"What has this been like for you?"

"I want to make sure I understand..."

"You are brave / strong / talented."

"How can I help you?"

"What do you need right now?"

Source <https://medium.com/@lauraclick/31-empathetic-statements-for-when-you-dont-know-what-to-say-edd50822c96a>