

FAQS FOR MANAGERS
COMMUNICATING DURING TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY AND ECONOMIC VOLATILITY

CARE staff are facing uncertainty and upheaval—because of the overall economic environment, the impact of the economic downturn on families and concern about CARE’s financial picture. Managers have an important role in helping staff navigate these uncertain times. These FAQs will help you communicate with your staff.

Q: MY STAFF HAVE LOTS OF QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE BUT I DON’T KNOW ANYTHING MORE THAN THEY DO. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

People have an unquenchable thirst for information in times of uncertainty. It is impossible to over-communicate. While there may be no new information to share, there are several things that you can do to help employees when the future is uncertain.

- Share and repeat any information that you do know. Inform them of the processes that are being used to make decisions about the future and when there might be additional information to share.
- Acknowledge their anxiety and need for clarity.
- Never make up information and try to avoid speculating.
- Create the space to for staff to ask questions--even if there is no new news to share, employees will appreciate the time and space to ask their questions and air their concerns.

Q: I PREFER TO GIVE NEWS AND INFORMATION BY EMAIL SO I CAN CHOOSE MY WORDS CAREFULLY. IS THIS OKAY?

While email is one vehicle that can support communication in this time of uncertainty and change, it should not be the only means of communication. Email can be seen as impersonal and it does not help facilitate an environment where employees can ask questions, air concerns, or supply feedback. Staff meetings, one-on-one discussions and “check-ins”, suggestion/question boxes are some additional ways of increasing two-way information flow

Q: WHAT KIND OF EMOTIONS MIGHT MY STAFF BE FEELING RIGHT NOW? HOW CAN I RESPOND?

There are five emotional reactions to change that typically occur: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Below are some responses that will help you manage through the emotional response to change or uncertainty.

Emotional Response	Employee Reaction	Suggested Manager Response
Denial	Believes that the problem has corrected itself and will be over soon	Review the business case for change
	Displays apathy and numbness (e.g., “I don’t care what happens” or “It doesn’t matter to me”)	Emphasize that change will happen
	Rationalizes the change away	Allow time for the change to sink in
Anger	Attempts to sabotage the change effort	Acknowledge legitimacy of anger
	Tends to “shoot the messenger” – shows particular anger at you for delivering the message	Distinguish between feelings and inappropriate behavior.
Bargaining	Withdraws from the team	Redirect the blame from other people to the business reasons necessitating the change
	Tries to “cut a deal” to spare him/herself	Focus on how the individual or his/her team will benefit from the change, if possible
Depression	Suggest other concerns to redirect problem solving away from change	Keep problem-solving on the root cause
	Expresses a loss of control over the work environment	Provide a series of specific next steps and follow up frequently
Acceptance	Absenteeism increases	Reinforce positive actions the individual can take to adjust to the change
	Expresses ownership for solutions	Use the individual as a coach or mentor for others
	Focuses on achieving benefits promised by the change	Provide recognition for his/her efforts

Q: I'VE NOTICED THAT SOME OF MY STAFF ARE REALLY ANXIOUS AND UPSET AND IT'S STARTING TO AFFECT THEIR WORK. WHAT CAN I DO?

- Continue to increase the amount and quality of your communication with them
- In staff meetings, group discussions, and individual conversations, normalize people's emotional reactions to the current environment. Many of us are feeling anxious, unsure and fearful. This is perfectly normal
- In a private discussion, empathetically observe the impact their anxiety and fears are having on their work. It is appropriate to establish your performance expectations even when people are having difficulty
- Consult with your HR generalist for input and coaching
- If appropriate, remind your employee about the range of services available through Horizon Health, our Employee Assistance Program. Horizon offers counseling, legal, financial, and other work-life services on a free or discounted basis. Any CARE employee or their dependent(s) can contact Horizon at 1-800-865-3200 or at www.horizoncarelink.com (password: care; login: eap).
- Horizon Health can also help you, as a manager, in this situation. Supervisors at CARE can consult with Horizon Health about behavioral health matters affecting their staff. Call 1-800-865-3200 and ask to speak with a Management Consultant.

Q: HOW DO I COPE/KEEP MYSELF IN CHECK WHILE TALKING TO MY EMPLOYEES?

Everyone reacts to stress – any event that causes you to react or change – differently and each body sends out its own set of “red flags”. By noticing how you react to stress (in your body, your thoughts/feelings, in your relationships, and in your spirit), you can manage it in healthy ways. As you think of all of the different ways you react to stress, think of ways you can help manage those reactions. Try to maintain a routine; exercise, eat and rest well; communicate with friends, family; keep a sense of humor; and take one day at a time.

SMTs and leadership teams are encouraged to make time in their meeting agendas for managers to discuss with each other their concerns and support each other. For many of us, preparing talking points ahead of time can also help you focus on your employees' needs.

Q: ANY OTHER SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW I CAN KEEP MY STAFF ENGAGED?

There are many different ways that you can help keep your staff engaged. Below are just a few ideas:

- Offer the time and help create the environment where employees feel safe discussing their feelings and thoughts about what is going on.
- Encourage communication.
- Encourage employees to remain productive.
- Recognize employees for their accomplishments, teamwork, leadership, etc.
- Act quickly on complaints/concerns raised by staff
- Make every effort to enhance flexible work arrangements (e.g., flextime, telecommuting) so that staff have the freedom to both get their work done and take care of their personal or family needs
- Organize a community activity – employees may feel value in helping others.