

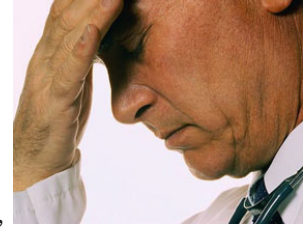
PRIORITY COACHING

Developing exceptional leaders, extraordinary teams

Leading Anxious Employees

I'm not going to recount the dismal news for you. I'm sure you have heard enough. But I do want to talk about what you can do to help your employees move forward during these challenging times.

Why are people so anxious? They are worried that they will lose their jobs, lose their income, lose their homes, lose their dreams, lose their retirement. The bottom line is that we *fear* loss and fear loss of control. When we *think* we do not have a firm hand on our destiny, anxiety is a constant companion. For some people, the anxiety is at loudspeaker level. For others, it is white noise. These huge worries take a toll on physical and emotional health and on our relationships. For some people, it is very difficult to focus on work when they are so anxious.



As a leader, what can you do to help your employees and your business? Notice that I said “do” because there are very specific actions a leader can take to guide his/her team through difficult times. More than ever, this is the time to use the skills you have learned in your leadership classes.

1. Be visible. Walk around and talk to people. Make a habit of it. Yes, I know you are worried about the budget and have planning to do and reports to hand in and numerous meetings to attend. But your people are anxious and they have trouble concentrating when they are worried. They want to know where their leader is. If they don't see you, they wonder what you are doing and planning. Notice the message President Obama constantly gives: we are in deep trouble *and* we will get through this together.
2. Ask your employees how they are doing *and* listen to their answers. Your employees will have a chance to share their concerns. You will have the opportunity to learn what they are truly worried about and perhaps be able to allay their fears. Remember that we have multiple generations in the workplace now and they are experiencing this difficult time differently. Our youngest employees have never faced a financial downturn before so they have little experience to call upon. Our employees who are parents are worried about schools, medical expenses, and college funds. Our employees close to retirement are re-considering their plans.
3. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Even if you have nothing new to share, tell your employees that you have nothing new to tell them. In the absence of information, people make things up.
4. Circle the wagons. Get the team together. Have daily huddles, weekly check-ins, perhaps schedule an all-day meeting. More than ever, this is the time for team members to collaborate and support one another. Priority Coaching offers the **Renewing Teams** in Changing Times program that helps teams re-connect, re-charge and re-focus.
5. Plan for the future and keep busy. Yes, we may have fewer clients, less employees, different work—what are we going to do differently together to be successful? What opportunities are out there for us? This is the time when our most creative, energetic, optimistic employees stand out from the crowd. This is the time to use all the leadership skills you have learned.

These are five action steps that will reap enormous benefits for your employees, and your company. But what about you, the leader? Who will support you? During these stressful times, it is crucial that you take care of yourself and that you establish a support system.

- Talk to someone. Call your coach or confidential adviser. Put together a group of trusted associates and talk on a regular basis. Some people become increasingly isolated during challenging times and deprive themselves of the feedback and encouragement others can provide.
- Bring your executive team together. Review your vision, mission, and strategy for the future. Re-commit to your values statement. Support one another.
- Take care of your health. As Dr. Larry Ohlhauser, author of The Healthy CEO, said at a recent meeting I attended, “you are the CEO of your own health” and you need to remember that you are a role model for your employees. This is the time to get enough sleep, go to the gym, and eat in a healthy way.

Let's continue to have conversations about support, collaboration, re-invention, and opportunity. As Albert Einstein said, “In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.”

Sharon Dougherty