



Ask Employees How You Can Help. It's a Great Way to Show You Care.

Description

How are my employees doing these days, really? What issues are they struggling with? What can the company do to help? In the past six months, most leaders have probably asked themselves these questions. But here's an even bigger question: Have you asked your *employees*?

My wife, Rishy, and I employ 177 people at the Studer Family of Companies. Their well-being is important to us. We don't always see them on a regular basis, and even if we did, they might be hesitant to talk about how they are really holding up. We recently sent out a survey to all employees. Inside the same email, I included [a video](#) explaining the reason. The idea was to a) show employees we care, b) get a better understanding of what's going on in their lives these days, and c) ask what we can do to help them in these incredibly difficult circumstances.

COVID-19 has brought major stress to all of our lives. For many people, how and where they work have changed drastically. Some face financial stress due to a spouse losing their job. Others are struggling to balance work and help kids with online schooling. Others must run errands and otherwise care for elderly parents who can't risk leaving home. Underlying all these issues is the fear of the virus itself and uncertainty around how long it will disrupt our world.

No wonder mental and emotional health issues are on the rise! Even if people haven't been diagnosed, many are struggling silently. This includes the group of high-functioning employees that mindfulness and meditation company Headspace for Work calls the "working well." They're the folks who won't seek help and may not even be aware that they need it.

Paying attention to the emotional well-being of employees has always mattered, but it's even more crucial now. In their 2020 Mental Health Trends Report, Headspace revealed survey results indicating that 68 percent of workers age 35-44 were "stressed" or "extremely stressed." And 45 percent said in the two weeks before they took the survey, stress had caused them to lose up to two hours of work time each day.

Are we doing a good job of supporting the emotional needs of our employees? Maybe not as much as we could. The Headspace survey found a gap between what employees want from their company in

terms of mental health support and what the company offers. Less than half of respondents think mental health and emotional well-being is a priority for their employers.

My main point is that business owners and leaders need to reach out to employees and *ask* what they need from us. Yes, they might need help with mental and emotional health issues. Or they might need something simpler, like a better internet connection at home, or a more flexible schedule, or more or fewer work hours. (If we can fix something that's causing people stress, we automatically improve their mental health.)

The point is, we can't just assume we know what employees need from us. People's lives are very different. So are the struggles and challenges they face. Some people are just better equipped to handle stress than others. There are no one-size-fits-all solutions. And while no employer can fix everything for employees, we have a responsibility to do what we can.

Most of us say we care. This is how we operationalize that care. A few tips:

- 1. Send out a quick survey to "take the pulse" of your workers.** Ask questions around their awareness of company help with mental and emotional well-being and also more practical issues. Do they have the resources they need to do their job efficiently? Are there issues around balancing work and childcare/homeschooling? Etc. Include an open-ended question in case they have additional needs/questions. (Click [here](#) to see the 13-question survey we sent to our employees at the Studer Family of Companies.)
- 2. Make it clear you care.** The fact that you're asking these questions shows your concern, but don't stop there. Tell them you care in other meaningful ways. I made the video because I felt it was warmer and more personal than just sending out a survey. Don't be afraid to say words like, "We love you and want to help you in these tough times."
- 3. Don't say it just once.** The survey is a starting point. Reinforce the message at meetings, on the phone, and in person (with safety measures in place, of course). Make sure they know your door is open and they can approach you at any time.
- 4. Don't overpromise.** Let them know you will help in any way you can, but also be clear that you may not be able to fix everything. Say, "We may not be able to do everything, but we'll see what we *can* do."
- 5. If you *can* meet a request, *do*.** It's not always easy to do things like shift schedules or buy new equipment. Do it anyway, if you can find a way to make it work. This is a great chance to make deposits into employees' emotional bank accounts. They'll be grateful and will also be more likely to help you and others in the company in the future.
- 6. Be sensitive to employees' mental and emotional struggles.** People may need time off for counseling or more intensive help. There may be more disruptions to the workday. Give grace if possible. Be aware that there is a stigma around these issues. People may need you to reassure them that it's okay to access the EAP or seek help in other ways.

Also, be on the lookout for those employees who may be covering up their mental and emotional struggles. It's better to approach them and risk upsetting them than to ignore an issue that could

potentially lead to devastating consequences.

A lot has been written around the notion that people bring their “whole selves” to work. When employees are dealing with extreme stress or suffering from anxiety or depression, they don’t leave these issues at home. It’s not possible. Their struggles come to work with them and impact their performance and workplace/customer relationships. We can’t just take the “good” parts of our employees (those that benefit the company) and ignore the rest.

In a way, COVID is forcing many of us to view our employees as whole people, perhaps for the first time. Why not use this time as an opportunity to invest in their overall well-being? When the pandemic is over, we will have built deeper relationships with them. That will pay off in many ways for the company—but even more important, it will mean we’ve made a meaningful difference in someone’s life.

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