
Thrive

Supporting the wellbeing of your people in uncertain times

by GAYNOR PARKIN

Leading well and supporting your people when the world is changing rapidly around you brings new and unprecedented challenges.

We all know that there is no “right” way to navigate these unpredictable times. We also know that when operating during uncertainty we can feel unsure where to focus, what to prioritise, and when to act. When we are in survival mode, our brains are designed to focus in on threats and limit thinking outside the box. We can counter this by showing curiosity about what is happening, being open to new thinking, and slowing down our instinct to respond immediately.

Now more than ever, it's important to **check in**:

- Consult with your people regularly – ask them: what do you need, to feel safe, and to be able to work effectively? How can we best support you?
- Be clear on work priorities – what is realistic to focus on right now?
- Agree on day-to-day plans – what do we want to achieve today, tomorrow, next week?

Demonstrate strong and flexible leadership:

- Review priorities and plans on a set schedule – be responsive when the situation changes and make proactive changes.

- Support autonomy (a sense of control) – encourage and allow people to have as much say as possible about what they need/how they work.
- Negotiate smaller goals if individuals or teams are feeling overwhelmed.
- Discuss and agree on work routines – shorter work hours may be helpful to encourage more recovery time as well as more flexibility around work.
- Actively encourage and model time for recovery breaks – and do it yourself.
- Monitor for signs of distress or anxiety – provide a listening ear and/or refer to your EAP services.

ENCOURAGE AND MODEL SUSTAINABLE RHYTHMS

In turbulent times, it is easy for wellbeing habits and behaviours to fall by the wayside. We may find ourselves forgetting to eat, cutting down on sleep, being distracted from the ones we love, and running on adrenaline. While this might feel doable for a day or two, operating like this for longer can cause severe consequences for our bodies and brains – without us even realising. With the effects of COVID-19 likely to continue into the medium term, with the lurking chance that they may ramp up further, we need to act as if we are in a marathon, and not a sprint. This means thinking of enduring and sustaining our performance – and our psychological resilience – rather than quick fixes.



Establish a sustainable rhythm for yourself and encourage your people to try to do the same. Assume events are going to continue to unfold for some time and start to schedule self-care routines and psychological resilience strategies to keep you and your people at your best:

- Set work “sprints”. Yes, maintaining psychological resilience through uncertain times is like steady marathon training, but regular “sprints” are part of that training, where you work hard and push yourself for short periods.
- Slow down, disengage the brain and body, and centre yourself.
- Eat well, move your body, and savour the chance to breathe.
- Invest attention, energy, and time into the relationships and activities that matter to you, at home and at work.
- Think about the events of the last week in relation to your values. What has been working for you, what hasn't? How are you balancing short and long term priorities?
- Exercise self-compassion. Acknowledge the bigger picture, the things that are out of your control, and celebrate your successes.
- Sprint again.

STAY CONNECTED WITH YOUR OWN SUPPORT NETWORKS

During this time of extraordinary demands, it's important to keep plugged in to the people and support that bolster you so you have the energy and psychological resilience to support others. Again, schedule time for this and prioritise in your calendar. Talk with your support network about how they can best provide that support – talking may work well for you or you may prefer connecting over a walk or run, or you may just want company (even if this is virtual) while you work through priority lists and plans. Test out who and what type of support feels more useful and plan for more over the next few weeks and months.