

## Supporting an Essential Service for Employees - HR

*In this series, we will share tips in 3 blogs. In this post, we will talk about mental health and wellness as it relates to Human Resource Professionals. Stay tuned for the next post about layoffs and financial impacts.*

COVID-19 has taken the world by storm. Non-essential services are shut down, schools are operating online only, and social distancing has gone from being a buzzword to a reality. With the incredulous infection rates of the new COVID-19 strand, businesses are bound to a new set of rules to play by. Many of these rules are not necessarily legalities either – they are common sense.



However, these rules can put HR professionals into tough situations. The crude reality Human Resource professionals are having to deliver to staff in layoff impacted industries is that it's not business as usual. While employers truly want to keep their most valuable assets employed, the financial reality simply doesn't allow it. This leaves HR with the uncomfortable message to convey.



Fawad Khan, Senior Partner at [WITS Consulting](#) has been hearing directly from HR professionals on the frontlines of that message. "HR Managers are usually those with the answers for staff in times of need. In these unprecedented times, unfortunately they don't have all the answers. Nobody does," he says. "We keep reminding and empowering these leaders to continue to be empathic, continue to listen, and continue to be informed about the latest support measures in the business community. Oftentimes, we are that conduit to information for them, and will continue to be. We are supporting HR professionals with policies and best practices to navigate the common questions around benefits, unemployment and support mechanisms for staff."



### MENTAL HEALTH

With this, HR professionals need to also support their employees, specifically in terms of the mental health issues their employees may be facing. Mental health concerns of the novel coronavirus are exacerbated by the uncertain landscape of both the business as well as the general world. When coupled with an insecure job market and potential for temporary layoffs, it is expected that uneasiness and anxiety will arise.



Dr. Qureshi, Partner Psychiatrist at [Texas Behavioral Health](#), shares what workplaces can do to maintain the wellness of themselves along with their employees. "Most people will have increased levels of anxiety and mood problems during the coronavirus pandemic. This may affect their performance at work," he says. "HR professionals need to take their time for daily mindfulness practices.' Take a moment to pause, breathe, check-in with yourself for restoration and resilience."

So as a business professional, more specifically, those in the field of working with people: what does this mean? It means that we need to be honest with ourselves, be supportive of one another, and get creative – from a distance.



Technologies such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, and Skype are not only becoming increasingly popular, but they're also common applications that can be used to communicate with other people. Additionally, many of these apps are becoming more accessible, as companies are reducing or even eliminating costs for certain pools.

Using these tools to connect with people for business or professional purposes is just one benefit. However, maintaining a social collectivism and camaraderie should also ease the mind and hearts of people living in such an unprecedented time. Professionals can use these online tactics to stay connected and even re-establish a sense of normalcy, all while maintaining social distance.

So what are some things that HR Professionals can step up to the plate and deliver? Here is a practical list of practices:

### Employee Relations



#### MINDFULNESS

Introduce Apps such as Calm or Headspace to reduce anxiety levels of staff



#### CONNECT

Use a chat platform to stay connected with colleagues



#### POLICY

Have a solid work from home policy, especially around communication

### General Health and Wellness



#### WASH

Wash your hands frequently – for at least 20 seconds



#### COVER

Use tissues when you cough or sneeze and dispose of them immediately, use your elbow if a tissue not available



#### AVOID

Do not touch surfaces and then your mouth, eyes or nose



#### DISTANCE

Practice social distancing by not shaking hands, hugging, etc.



#### ISOLATE

Stay home if you become ill and prevent the spread of the illness

It is not time for us to be complacent or panicked. Rather, it's time to set an example and inspire others with a sense of hope, and safety in these trying times. Together it can be done.