

## Transforming the Legacy of Lockdown Helping Organisations to Build Back Better

Most of us remember hearing the announcement of 'Lockdown', we'd seen it in China and watched it creep ever closer until the day it was confirmed here.

As a solution, Furlough was seen as an innovative way of protecting business, jobs and incomes. This meant some people would be furloughed, others would work from home, a few would go in to the office but for fewer hours; we were assured it was only a temporary blip before we got back to normal. The trouble is, we haven't got back to normal and nobody's quite sure when we will.

The reality is that Lockdown has fragmented workforces and created pockets of low morale in managers and staff. This report is about what I've uncovered whilst working with your staff and some recommendations on how best to support everyone through the challenge and reinvigorate them to their former levels of performance and loyalty.

These are the main areas ones I've noticed that are causing problems:

**Mindset:** I'm sure you won't be surprised, but most people are more than a touch fed-up with being - as they see it - so limited in what they're allowed to do. Lockdown has disturbed the way business functions and brought to the fore areas that were, quite likely, already under pressure. More than that, it has created an environment of unwavering uncertainty. For most people, their quality of life is in direct proportion to the level of uncertainty they can comfortably live with. Employees are necessarily dependent on the organisation for whom they work and largely powerless to influence the outcome. This lack of control is contributing to the crisis they are experiencing.

**Morale:** Listening to the news or social media is enough to depress anyone, with its incessant messages of the *job crisis to come once furlough ends!* We hear that many companies *will not survive furlough* and all it's doing is *kicking the can down the road*. Never mind that some industries have done amazingly well; this one-sided message of doom is having a major effect on people who may already be worrying about the likelihood of their jobs being preserved; especially when they don't hear anything to the contrary from yourselves.

**Social Interaction:** Employees go to work with a spring in their step when they enjoy social interaction with colleagues and receive feedback on how well they're doing. They get a sense of achievement by being given a task, or a goal, and achieving it. Whether people are working from home or on furlough, they're currently missing social interaction with colleagues and also management thanks and praise for a job well done. Without clear guidance on how to achieve, some employees are floundering.

**Self-worth:** Employees are undoubtedly anxious to prove that they're worth keeping on. For those on furlough this relies purely on trust, but for those who go in to the office, it's leading some to go beyond their remit in order to demonstrate worth. The trouble is that because it was only temporary, managers haven't provided a new remit for these times and are leaving people to do their bit without guidance. When they're not as busy as they could be, this is causing staff to have ideas and implement ideas that subsequently meet with management resistance. Also, some are anxious to see parts of their job being delegated to other people and fear they might not be reinstated to them once they return.

**Inappropriate worry:** People have enough to worry about without worrying about things that shouldn't concern them. For example, whether the organisation will survive financially or that the organisation is

doing what it's supposed to do. These are speculative worries based on a lack of clear direction. The effect, though, is to feed the anxiety and the behaviours mentioned above.

### What can Employers do?

Employers can turnaround this Sword of Damocles hanging over staff with a bit of action in 3 areas:

**1 Re-engage:** It's useful to remember that many staff are existing in a vacuum and making sense of the world as they see it. It will help enormously if you can find a way to communicate to all staff that the company is on-track to come through the crisis, and give them a message of hope for better times to come.

**2 Re-enthuse:** This is about reaffirming that employees are still contributing to the wellbeing of the organisation; whether they're attending work or on furlough. Thanking them for their loyalty and praising their patience or actions [as appropriate] will increase their sense of self-worth, and willingness to comply with the changes you are implementing.

**3 Re-inspire staff:** This is to do with showing that management is keeping a watchful eye over the business and demonstrating how you intend to come through the challenge and make the business stronger. Ideally, this should be a high-level plan delivered by a suitably senior person and it should cascade leadership.

The increase in confidence, and peace of mind these steps will generate, will ensure staff are on-side and ready for action when the new normal arrives.

### What's the best way do it?

This is all about management communication and a bit of understanding about what it's like to be cast adrift from your post. You could always consider using a webinar to communicate online with staff. One called *Thriving during Lockdown*, or some such name, based on the lines of the Government slogan *Build Back Better* could be an idea.

It could take staff from the initial shock of the pandemic and the fracturing of the service you provide, to showing how you're facing the future and what it's looking like for them. By seeing that it's no longer about just getting through but is about coming out the other side, managers and staff will be infused with a wider sense of hope. It will rekindle their love and pride in the Charity they serve.

Demonstrating a well thought out route for the company will allow staff to relax on the things they can't do, and look forward to joining the push for a brighter future.

Please contact me if you have any questions and let me know how I can be of further assistance to you.

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