

Maintaining the Human Touch: HR Leaders Discuss Best Practices for Employees on the Field

Corporations are disrupted, but the people within them have not gone away. While most may be working from home or organized into split shifts, the employees in the productions sites, logistics centers, retail stores, and many others are still in their workplaces and now have new and pressing needs brought on by the crisis.

About 30 senior Human Resources Leaders gathered via video call on April 1, 2020, for a discussion on how to manage the new and pressing needs of employees not working from their homes, and especially the critical mandate of HR to maintain their health, productivity, and engagement. The discussion points out that it is a diverse and critical role that calls on HR leaders to consider new strategies to meet the challenge.

Managing Employees Still Working on the Field

While a large percentage of office workers have been relocated to home offices, essential factories such as those producing food and medicine, logistics centers, and retail stores need on-site employees to maintain their production or service.

“Food manufacturing has to continue despite the crisis,” said one HR leader. “Creating new shifts, allocating employees in new ways and providing employees with online education on how to be safe at work and at home allows production to continue,” she added.

As the crisis wears on, the differing demands of blue and white-collar workers emerge as a key challenge for HR leaders. One leader described the split – with 80 percent of the company’s white-collar employees working from home while a 24/7 manufacturing process demands employees working in shifts to keep the factories running. “A special incentive scheme is introduced for them,” he said of the factory workers. Also, on site

lunch menus have been reconfigured to emphasize nutrition and vitamins during this stressful period.

HR directors have also reached out to workplace leaders for additional support. “We have been acting hand-in-hand with the union,” said one. This has helped the company keep track of and isolate workers who may be infected or have family members with symptoms.

Getting More Personal

Indeed, HR leaders say they’ve had to pay far more attention to the lives of their employees than ever before. One reported a process of sorting employees into two categories: those who have children and those who don’t. “It effects working hours and effectiveness,” she explained. Another leader reported initiatives to show extra care for employees who are mothers and/or have chronic health issues.

While HR takes on these new responsibilities, other programs that would normally be under the HR purview are pushed to the back burner. “All mid- and junior-level recruitment operations apart from supply chain have been terminated,” said one.

But new responsibilities have emerged. HR leaders say they are more engaged in day-to-day responsibilities to drive employee morale. “I called 20 field managers and thanked them for their resilience in this period as a part of internal communication plan,” said one. “We will send cakes to branches as a thank you gift and also distribute Ramadan Packages sooner than the planned time.”

Advice to Others

HR leaders offered these tips for leading the workforce through challenging times:

- Prioritize employee health and safety above all else
- Introduce split shifts and meal arrangements for plant employees or others who must report in person to work – this helps minimize physical interactions
- Apply different incentive packages for employees who are actively on the job, such as manufacturing employees and sales representatives
- Show care to employees and their families, listen to them and over-communicate until the end of the crisis, and maybe beyond

For more information, contact:



Ayşe Güçlü Onur
Istanbul
ayse.guclu@egonzehnder.com



Engin Guven
Istanbul
engin.guven@egonzehnder.com



Murat Yeşildere
Istanbul
murat.yesildere@egonzehnder.com



Burcu Bıçakcı
Istanbul
burcu.bicakci@egonzehnder.com



Demet Türker Gündüz
Istanbul
demet.turker@egonzehnder.com

Covid-19 Micro-Website

We have launched a micro website where this and other informative pieces are posted. This site will be regularly updated: [click here](#) for further details.

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