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## Week 1 of Lockdown

# What managers can do for their people

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This article was written March 30, 2020

### First things first!

That according to Gallup's largest poll on what followers most need (from their leaders), their needs are Stability, Hope, Compassion and Trust.<sup>1</sup> These are perennial needs – they were here before Covid-19, they will be here afterwards, and they are needed now. There are many ways to deliver these needs in a Covid-19 world and this article will give 4 specific ideas.

### Second, a point to clarify...

The concept of leadership has taken on multiple meanings in recent times; personal leadership, positional leadership, transactional vs transformational, etc. Some attempts contrast leadership with management and in these comparisons management always comes off second best and the thing not to do. As a generalization this is misleading, management is vital. What's needed is to differentiate between the two tasks and be sure to deliver on both fronts. For the purpose of this article, leadership refers to tasks such as the setting of vision, strategizing a way toward it, making key over-arching decisions, and communicating all this to the rest of the workplace. Management on the other hand refers to the tasks of relaying and distributing expectations and helping people get what they need to do good work. As a metaphor, think of the manager's role as a broker of a win/win deal between what the organization needs and what the individual staff member needs.

For many SME's the owner is the sole member of Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and is also the sole member of the Senior Management Team (SMT). My advice is that when you're wearing the leadership hat, do it well, and you're wearing the management hat, do that well also – just be conscious of which hat is needed when.

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<sup>1</sup> Rath, Tom and Conchie, Barry. *Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams, and Why People Follow*. (2008)

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And just to come back to the confusion between the concepts of leadership and management once more, consider this; *where managers do their bit well, they will be counted as “a leader” by their staff*. If that happens to you, that’s because you’re someone who gives them stability, hope, compassion and trust.

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**Leadership and management represent different needs to a workplace, don’t conflate these, do both well.**

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## And you may be interested to know...

Research indicates that working from home is more productive and people like it.<sup>2</sup> The implication is that coming back into regular work may need some thought as staff could be keen to continue at home part time. In my mind it’s a little like what homeschoolers tell us, that once they settle into their routine they can do the work in half the time.

This also means that some of the practices you build now will be worth keeping, certainly *ALL* of the practices I recommend here work in both environments. Actually, the pressure on managers to deliver at this time can help you to craft some great practices for a post Covid world.

In this first week, there is a whole lot of urgent things to sort; cashflow, relationships with suppliers and customers, trimming non-essential activities, information to be made sense of, etc,– and taking time to deal with all this urgent stuff is okay, your people can handle the disruption. Gallup research shows that staff engagement is most affected by internal measures not external forces so wise managers ought to get onto the front foot as soon as possible.

Finally then, after having established your modus operandi – to be the broker of the win/win deal between staff and the organization – most of the things I have to say here fit under the heading “communication, communication, communication.” Managers should expect to require more time to do this well, there’s no catching up over the water cooler anymore.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/283985/working-remotely-effective-gallup-research-says-yes.aspx>

Similar studies have been conducted in Japan

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# So what specifically can managers do for their people?

## 1. Checking in; 3 bases to cover

### 1. Personal welfare.

Do the obvious; checking in with people as to their personal welfare – a given but needs to be said (and by the looks of social media this past week, this has been done well). But again, know that ALL THE GREAT MANAGERS CARE, not just in times of crisis. This is the first great management practice to keep 😊

### 2. Practical needs

Check to see if they have all that they need practically to do their work; desks, computer peripherals, light, etc. You may be surprised what checking in here can do. And keep asking over the next week or so as things will change. The noisy kids for instance could become more – or less – of a problem.

### 3. Personal needs

Ask what your people need personally in order to do great work. You don't have to guess! Cover the bases with this question;

- What information about the business do they need?
- What social time do they want with colleagues (expect people to care about each other)?
- How often for feedback on their work?
- How should we do recognition?
- Any training needs?
- And so on!

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## **Checking in, 3 things;**

***How are you going?***

***Practically, what do you need to do great work?***

***Personally, what do you need to do great work?***

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## 2. Ensure expectations/outcomes are properly understood

The truth is, it was never enough to simply set what-you-thought-were-clear-expectations, you needed to check that they were understood. Misunderstanding is rife, however it has more potential now for harm. Stephen Covey<sup>3</sup> reframed speaking and listening to “understanding each other” ... don't just say your piece and expect its understood, check for understanding.

## 3. Prepare to individualize.

This comes back to the broker concept and is a foundational way of thinking for managers; to help staff meet workplace expectations in a way that works for them (ie; most productive). This follows on from the above

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<sup>3</sup> Covey, Stephen. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People; Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. (1989)

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point about asking what staff need personally “to do great work” – and the point that all great managers care. Strive for a win/win; here are the expectations/outcomes, what do you need to get there?

Some balk at individualizing because it demands more time to set up and monitor and more mental resources... and they don't really care. The truth is, not all people are great managers. In truth the resources needed to individualize come back to the workplace later through a more engaged workforce which in turn leads to higher productivity, profitability, customer metrics and sales.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. Be open

Be open about what's happening in the business and what you're doing about it, even though your plans may change (read: *will* change). This may mean meeting with your SLT to work out what you're happy to share and what you're not. In uncertain times, making decision is hard and your own uncertainty over your decisions can plague you. Being open may feel vulnerable to you but according to Brene Brown, this is a good thing to lead with. The reality is that if things aren't clear people will chat about things behind your back – they're just trying to figure out what's going on. The problem is that very often these conversations undermine leadership.

There are a number of resources coming out at the moment to help you make decisions, I personally have been involved in a webinar and written a Covid-19 Continuation of Business Plan. There is an emotional element in making tough decisions however and I will be creating a resource for navigating through this shortly.

## So the four things were

1. Check-in with people; how are they, and what do they need practically and personally
2. Ensure expectations/outcomes are understood
3. Prepare to individualize
4. Be open

All the best team, you can do it, talk to me if you need help 😊

Kind regards, Steve Parker.



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<sup>4</sup> Buckingham, Marcus, and Curt Coffman. *First, Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*. (1999)

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