



HOW TO COMMUNICATE DURING COVID-19

ADVICE & SUPPORT ON
COMMUNICATING
THROUGH UNCERTAIN
TIMES

YOUR PEOPLE ARE YOUR BUSINESS.

As COVID-19 is given pandemic status, there is a lot of uncertainty out in the world. Looking after our people and navigating this challenging time is at the forefront of many employers' minds.

We can't predict what is going to happen in the next few weeks, but we can plan ahead and make sure we are proactively communicating with our teams, providing support and reassurance when we can.

This guide will:

- Get you thinking about the the questions you need to be ready to answer
- Give you advice on the best ways to communicate during uncertainty.

Poor communication during challenging times can erode trust, cause unnecessary anxiety and have a huge impact on productivity.

MAKE A PLAN

1. CREATE AN ACTION TEAM

Having a group of people working together to prepare and respond to Covid-19 will help you tackle the uncertainty. An Action Team is typically made up of people from your Comms, HR, IT, Facilities and Legal teams who can help support you in decision making e.g. who is providing equipment, if employees are able to work from home, are you closing sites etc.

In your business, this might be a small senior leadership team, or even just you, but allocating different team members to oversee particular areas will mean that all areas can be covered, and nothing is missed.

2. QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF...

You may have a well-practiced business continuity plan, but if not, here are some of immediate things you'll need to consider:

- Who will update the team on global developments and the company's response to them?
- Who will make sure that external stakeholders are kept up to date on your course of action and how it may affect them (eg suppliers, customers and, where relevant, the public).
- How will you manage workloads, will deadlines need to change, what is realistically achievable?
- Have your customers expectations and priorities changed? Will this impact your productivity?
- What work can be done remotely or at other sites?



- What is your order of succession: ie plan what tasks can be carried out by different people in the company if someone is off sick and what support and training they may need.
- Can you put a flexible working policy in place and communicate your expectations.

4. KEEP YOURSELF UP TO DATE

The government are saying that this is a marathon, not a sprint. Keeping yourself and your people abreast of the advice will save lives and help protect your business.

ACAS currently recommends that you: :

- Make sure everyone's contact numbers and emergency contact details are up to date.
- Make sure managers know how to spot symptoms of coronavirus and are clear on any relevant processes.
- Make sure there are clean places to wash hands with hot water and soap, and encourage everyone to wash their hands regularly.

GETTING THE COMMUNICATION RIGHT

1. COMMUNICATE PROACTIVELY

Your aim should be to provide CERTAINTY, CLARITY and CONSISTENCY.

We are where we are, so if you haven't already, start communicating proactively with your team.

Answer the questions in section one and demonstrate that you have thought things through. Keeping people in the loop will reduce worry and anxiety and help you manage any additional questions.

2. KEEP COMMUNICATING

We know it's human nature to fill in the blanks. How we fill in the blank is affected by our values, attitudes and beliefs which forms our interpretation on things.

Therefore you need to manage your teams' interpretation of what's actually going on. Minimise the blanks and grey areas as much as possible by ensuring that communication is regular and cohesive. Make sure that leadership, management and all channels of communication to the team are united and aligned, giving one clear message in a congruent way.

Let people know where and when they can find out information and stick to this.



3. YOU'RE NOT EXPECTED TO BE A MEDICAL EXPERT

Refer to official sources of health information when you are communicating. Your job is to lead your people, not to become a COVID-19 expert.

There are some great official resources that you can point your people towards.

[Public Health England's website](#),
[The dedicated NHS website](#)
[Health Service Executive](#)
[The World Health Organization](#)

4. GIVE CERTAINTY ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

We don't know what will happen, but we can give certainty that we will communicate throughout it. This means statements such as:

'We'll update the intranet daily',- and then make sure you do it.

Even if the update is 'there is nothing new to add', you're still providing an update.



5. CREATE TWO WAY COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

We don't want to just broadcast 'at' our people, but have a two way conversation that provides clarity and reassurance.

Your employees will want to know what is happening in real-time and need opportunities to ask questions..

6. MONITOR CONVERSATIONS

If employees are asking questions through a shared mailbox, or customers are asking via social media, make sure you're monitoring and joining the conversations.

If there are recurring questions, you know that you've not explained something clearly enough! Knowing what is being said is critical.

Understand the concerns and react appropriately.

Have a dedicated person to monitor the two-way channels, responding with agreed information and knowledge of who can provide real-time feedback.

7. LISTEN AND RESPOND

Dedicated channels for crisis communication need to be interactive and responsive. Employees and customers will be going through a flurry of emotions so will need reassurance of the situation.

8. DON'T FORGET YOUR THIRD PARTIES

8. Your business is more than just those in the office, These people can be anyone from delivery drivers to catering staff to your cleaning team. Keep them in the loop with a page on your intranet or website.





HERE TO HELP

Keeping our people safe and our businesses running is the priority.

If you're struggling with getting through the everyday business and are looking for extra help and support, here are a few ways we can help:

- CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLANNING AND EXECUTION
- WRITING FAQs AND COMPLICATED MESSAGES
- COMMUNICATION COACHING
- INTERNAL COMMUNICATION
- COMMUNICATION PROCESSES
- MONITORING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

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