

# MANAGING YOUR TEAM:

## Keeping Them Engaged through Uncertainty

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**I OVERHEARD TWO GENTLEMEN TALKING IN A PARKING LOT EARLY THIS WEEK. ONE GUY SAID, “I JUST PLAYED MY FIRST ROUND OF GOLF THIS SEASON, I’VE BEEN WAITING SO LONG AND IT FELT SO GOOD. THE NEXT DAY, THEY ANNOUNCED THEY’RE SHUTTING DOWN ALL THE COURSES. I CAN’T UNDERSTAND IT – GOLF IS SUCH A SOLO GAME. WHY CAN’T THEY LET ME PLAY BY MYSELF?”**

**IF ONLY WE COULD... WE WOULD.**

My golfer’s experience and frustration isn’t uncommon right now. We’re living in unprecedented times. No one on the planet could have anticipated a month ago that we would have closed down everything except essential services and be practicing the new art of social distancing.

Businesses are challenged to retain customers, create confidence in their services, respond to community needs and manage their teams.

The world of work has been turned upside down. Job security and incomes are under attack. Businesses are facing closures, unexpected layoffs, having staff work from home, deploying staff into other roles, forcing vacations, delaying hiring staff, and potentially losing their best employees to other jobs when the recovery starts.

In this time of great uncertainty, how do we ensure that we retain, nurture and inspire our teams?

Before we answer that question, let’s understand what we need from employees. Ultimately it’s three things:

- 1 We want them to be passionate about their work
- 2 We want them to be committed to our organization
- 3 We want them to do their best work every day.

In short, we need them to be engaged. Studies have shown that having highly engaged employees generates 30% more profits; you’ll grow your business three times faster, and you will retain employees longer, reducing your turnover costs.

Our goal over the next few weeks is to keep your team as engaged as you can, despite the uncertainty we see today.

You may be facing several challenges with your staff – you may have laid off some employees, you may have others who are doing more work than ever, and you may be delayed in bringing others back for the season. One of the challenges for golf courses is the diversity of employees, from golf pros to general workers, and from restaurant servers to customer service and office staff. Recognizing their unique needs and tailoring your messages will have more impact.

Your goal through this process is to distinguish yourself as the employer of choice, both for the short and long term. Since you may be facing a number of scenarios, here are some tips to manage each situation.



## ENGAGING STAFF WHO ARE STILL WORKING

You may have some staff who have taken on additional duties during this period. They may be doubling up on duties, or they might be working staggered shifts to help with social distancing.

Being present for them and engaging with them – virtually or personally (if you keep your distance) is critical.

One of the strongest reasons for leaving a company is a lack of appreciation, so a simple sincere thank you goes a long way.

Ensure you go out of your way to acknowledge them. Using gift cards is a low cost way to say “Thank You”. They are tangible and have an impact after you have presented them. Even more effective is when you tell them to take their spouse out to dinner on the company. Engaging spouses and family members gives you extra impact, particularly if you have to ask people to work additional overtime hours.

Don't underestimate the power of a personal note. In an age of technology, a handwritten card in an envelope has much more impact than a thank you email. It's tangible and people share it with others. They keep them at their work stations. The cards are seen and noticed by others.

Share openly about the challenges the course is facing. Honesty and transparency, as well as being your authentic yourself, will increase trust. You can also ask for their suggestions. This is a great time to be listening and you can engage them in dialogue and creating solutions.

## MANAGING REMOTE WORKERS

Managing remote working staff or virtual teams requires different tactics to keep staff engaged and productive. Here are five tactics to maximize productivity:

### #1 - Create a Steady Rhythm

Keeping your team together while controlling the rhythm of work is essential. Set up a regular meeting pattern so there are clear expectations and connection points for everyone.

- A daily check-in meeting within each team (quick, less than 10 mins just to say hello and feel like you are connecting and to make sure there is nothing blocking each person from achieving their goals).
- A weekly meeting within a team or a weekly one-on-one meeting between a team leader and each person on their team. This weekly meeting is a way to store up issues and minimize the back and forth email that takes place during the week and handle it all in one meeting.
- A weekly all-hands meeting for the entire company. This should be short, usually 10 minutes to feel like your all part of the same team and to get on the same page.

### #2 - Consistent and Engaging Communications

Active communications is critical. Staff may feel disconnected and disengaged, despite on-line tools and support. This may be a new way of working for them, so providing structure and support will develop productive working habits.

As a manager, you need to:

- Clarify tasks and processes, not just goals and roles – ensure staff know what they are accountable for – what deliverables are required, when, and how often
- Create your own Communication Guidelines – when to call in, how to escalate issues, how to handle difficult issues.

Depending on your needs, have agreement with your team on how to use the right communication tools:



- **Email** – For quick interactions. You can also replace most email communication with other tools such as project management tools or chat programs.
- **Chat programs** – Skype or Google Hangouts are great for quick instant messages where you need real-time interaction.
- **Video chat** – Some types of communication should only be handled over with voice. Any kind of emotional issue such as performance problems should be handled over the phone. Video chat would be even better as it gives you more visual cues of what is going on with the other person. It can feel isolating and abnormal to chat only with text and adding video makes your remote company feel more “real”.
- **Project management tools** – These keep your communication a lot more organized and so that you are able to reference it and refer to it later on. Or perhaps when people join the company they can see the previous discussion points.
- **Inspire via Video** – create a short video using your phone – It's very easy to create a video of yourself on YouTube using your phone.

### #3 Time and Productivity Management

Here are some basic concepts as you schedule and communicate with staff virtually.

- Allow a degree of flexible work hours but also keep some consistency
- If you are presenting slides over a teleconference, ensure they are visually interesting – people tend to doze off if there's nothing interesting to watch.

#### #4 – Keep Building Your Team

When working virtually, it may take extra effort to keep people feeling committed to their team. They need to know that not only they're contributing true value to the team's common goal; they are also valuable to the team's success in achieving its goal. Keeping your team informed about how the company is doing – have regular news updates. This is particularly important now in this period of uncertainty.

- Having and maintaining non-work related communication – create your own virtual “water cooler” to handle the social or personal discussions.
- Have a chat room open constantly, but be wary chat and email overload
- Get everyone on your team involved in important events and projects – share opportunities for staff; nurture emergent leadership, ask for volunteers
- Be creative during birthdays and special occasions; send gifts with meaning – virtual or real. Acknowledge, holidays – create virtual pot lucks. Have some fun with your teams.
- Sing praises. Sometimes your role as a leader is also to be the team cheerleader. Don't let a ringing phone become identified with bad news; call when there's something good to share too.

### RETAINING AND ENGAGING STAFF WHO HAVE BEEN LAID OFF OR DELAYED HIRING

You may have staff that you've laid off or have to defer their hiring date, so you want to ensure that they remain committed to you and don't accept another job that might start sooner.

As with remote teams, communication will be essential as you want them to come back to you.

You need to create a regular pace of communication, but don't be afraid to think outside the box.

Keep them posted on business updates – let them know what's happening with the course – improvements, new directions, that new restaurant – let them see the big picture, make them feel proud to be part of your course team.

If you're thinking outside the box, send them an advance “welcome” package. Ensure they feel part of your organization. Providing them with tangible items, such as clothing, hats, mugs or other items, can be incredibly powerful, yet relatively inexpensive when compared to the cost of recruiting and hiring new staff. These items will be noticed by their family and friends which further reinforces what a great organization you are.

Under normal circumstances, I'd recommend a pre-season meeting to bring the team together, but we need to find other ways to do this. Consider booking a virtual game of golf or using an online simulator. Arrange period call-ins to update them using Skype or Zoom or Google hangouts. Keep in touch.

### FINAL POINT - BE YOURSELF

More than ever, staff are looking for honest and transparent leadership. Be straightforward in your messaging, but don't be afraid to share your concerns too. After all, we're all human.

Employees have amazing long memories. How you treat them now will have a significant impact on your short term and long term Human Resources goals. Everyone will remember how their boss spoke to them; how they were treated. We're in this for the long game, so this is the time to play your best to win.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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