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ENGAGING, INSPIRING, AND TRANSITIONING YOUR STAFF DURING COVID-19

On Thursday, April 16th, 2020, PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan announced that, contingent upon government and health official sign off, the PGA Tour would officially resume play with the Charles Schwab Challenge in Fort Worth, Texas on June 11th to 14th. The announcement came with an unfortunate aside; the 2020 RBC Canadian Open, scheduled for that same weekend, has officially been canceled. While the news confirmed what many of us were fearing, the official resumption of play on the PGA Tour is certainly an encouraging sign for the golf industry.

The PGA of Canada has been closely monitoring how the federal and provincial governments have attempted to cope with the serious employment consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Canadian jurisdictions have taken different approaches. In some respects that is understandable, but it has led to uncertainty and confusion for many of our members, particularly in regards to maintaining employment relationships with their staff.

What is certain is that the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the commencement of the 2020 golf season and has had a profound impact on the industry. The federal and provincial governments have encouraged everyone to stay home where possible and to take precautionary measures such as social distancing and frequent hand-washing, and have mandated the shutdown of certain businesses, including golf courses, in most Canadian jurisdictions. As employers in the golf industry grapple with the financial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing an unprecedented downturn in operations. With this in mind, we at the PGA of Canada thought it would be prudent to offer our members some guidance on measures to take with your staff.

ENGAGING AND INSPIRING STAFF

We are aware that our members have implemented certain cost-cutting measures, such as temporary layoffs and reduced hours of operation, and we are aware that there may yet be further measures introduced. It is important that we are transparent and honest with our managers about the current situation, and it is important that our managers are open and honest with their staff. Managers should be encouraged to listen to employees and offer support, while also acknowledging the changes and providing relevant information without creating panic. Before, during, and after these measures are implemented, communication is key. Failing to communicate in a timely fashion, or avoiding sharing information with employees may ruin any trust that existed and derail attempts at a return to normalcy and productivity.

Members are reminded to ensure that all contractual and legal obligations are complied with when we are effecting temporary layoffs. As this pandemic continues and staff members remain on temporary layoff, certain legal entitlements, such as notice of termination, may begin to apply. Members are also reminded to review eligibility for government-provided income replacement plans, such as the newly-enacted Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, as qualifying for one of these programs will likely impact any decisions to temporarily lay off staff members.

During these uncertain times, managers will play a vital role in encouraging employees to stay focused on what they can control, instead of what is outside of their control. This should increase motivation and productivity, as employees will focus on finding creative solutions and on their own professional development.



Following layoffs, certain employees may find that their workload has increased significantly. These employees, and their managers, will need to find ways to modify processes and redistribute the work. Everyone should be involved in finding solutions and the impact of the layoffs on employees, workloads and relationships should be openly acknowledged.

Developing trust and communication with employees is very important at this time. Managers should be open to discussing with employees why layoffs were necessary and how, in some cases, layoffs may be to the employee's benefit, including through access to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit ("CERB"). Employees remaining in active service should be encouraged to develop new skills, which in turn could make them more valuable team members and more marketable in future employment opportunities. This may also create a heightened sense of job security and self-esteem in the employees. Managers should however be reminded not to make promises or predictions that may not come to fruition.

Management should also ensure that it has resources in place for employees who have difficulty with the changes. An Employee Assistance Program is a great resource, especially when employees understand its confidential nature. It is important to help the employees realize what an Employee Assistance Program has to offer, such as general counseling, assistance with work/life issues, financial planning and other useful resources.

To truly benefit from the various cost-cutting measures, it is imperative that we invest energy in the employees who remain working. If we do so, we will aid recovery, fuel productivity and boost morale, all the while inspiring employee growth.

TRANSITIONING LAID-OFF STAFF SMOOTHLY

When we eventually do enter into the recovery period following the COVID-19 pandemic, it is expected that hours of operation will increase (depending on the season) and many, if not most, employees will be recalled from layoff. Employees returning to work could feel some resentment towards management, and may feel that they were unfairly targeted for layoff as a result of prior personality conflicts, mistakes, or other reasons unrelated to COVID-19. Management should be sensitive to these realities and the potential for low morale during the recovery period. Communication will again be key, and open and honest information sharing will aid in re-establishing relationships and re-developing trust with the returning employees.

Managers should meet with each of their returning employees in order to address the reasons for the reduction in the workforce, to ensure that the employees know that they were temporarily laid off through no fault of their own and to set expectations for the employees going forward. Many employees will not be ready to put the layoffs behind them immediately. Managers should resist the temptation to isolate themselves and should instead be directed to communicate with their employees, remain visible and show genuine interest in the employees' mental states. Managers should also remind returning employees about the Employee Assistance Program, if available, and the resources it has to offer.

Because of the uncertainty that surrounds this pandemic, it is impossible to predict when our members will fully resume operations. However, when laid-off employees are eventually recalled, it may be prudent to offer them refresher training on certain aspects of their jobs and on any changes that were made while they were away from work.

As noted previously, returning employees may inevitably feel some resentment towards management. Accordingly, it is imperative that our managers are reminded to strictly adhere to the established performance management protocols and to document every incident that occurs. When a portion of a workforce is returning from layoff, emotions are high, employee misconduct is more prevalent and employers are commonly more susceptible to Human Rights-related issues. Management should exercise extreme care in these emotionally-charged times, and should be reminded that documentation is often our best defence against baseless claims.

We all must do our part in maintaining a safe and healthy working environment, and must follow requirements in respect of social distancing, sanitation and disinfection. May everyone stay well, and may these circumstances end soon.

