

Managers need to adapt to coronavirus conditions. Here are some ideas from the Greater Good Science Center for how to do that.



## How to Be a Remarkable Boss During Lockdown

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, I have received hundreds of emails offering advice, tips, and tools for managers leading teams in this new era of work. One thing is clear: Now is an important time to be extra mindful and intentional as leaders. And there has never been a better time to enact practices that are at the core of the Greater Good Science Center's mission to support a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society.

Among all the advice streaming through my inbox, five particular practices stood out. They have always been essential management skills, but their interwoven practice now holds outsized potential for impact: support of emotional expression, presence, inquiry, listening,

and self-care. I offer them as an opportunity to expand our mindset of leadership as we learn to grow, respond, and improvise with and beyond the coronavirus into our new future of work.

### 1 Support emotional expression

The experience of the pandemic will reverberate in different ways for each employee. You will observe grief, overwhelm, fear, anxiety, hypersensitivity, and much

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### A MESSAGE TO MANAGERS

Often, the employee who needs their Employee Assistance Program the most doesn't think to call for assistance. A manager's referral to the EAP can be an effective strategy for improving an employee's effectiveness, productivity, motivation and morale. A referral to the EAP can also decrease absenteeism, reduce turnover, foster acceptance of change, and reduce stress.



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more. These emotions will change from day to day, week to week, or even hour to hour! I know mine have these past many weeks. Expressing emotions at work has always been a challenge. Many employees fear being overly vulnerable and sharing too much information, only to have it backfire, leaving them embarrassed and perhaps even the target of judgment. But in this time, when the usual lines between work and life have been greatly blurred, emotions are so obviously present. They're in need of acknowledgment and support.

Emotions are natural human responses to one's environment and the expression of emotion is a natural, healthy, and even vital practice. "Our emotional responses shape our experience of the world," says Eve Ekman, senior fellow at the Greater Good Science Center and creator of a popular workshop titled Cultivating Emotional Balance. "Emotions can feel profoundly enriching and painfully unbearable." In both cases, these divergent emotions may be masked in the workplace with a weak smile, or even laughter.

Thus, our role as managers is to discover the emotions within our teams and give them a safe place to be expressed. Most emotions

can be fully expressed within seconds. Unexpressed, they remain lodged in our bodies and can cause long-term harm to ourselves and others.

Providing emotional support does not mean that you need to become a therapist or counselor. It does, however, mean moving beyond the polite "How are you?" to a more meaningful exchange and opening that may ignite their sense of belonging and hopefulness. If more emotional support seems prudent, professional resources are readily available.

### 2 Be exquisitely present

In a recent LinkedIn post, researcher and writer Adam Grant reminds us that loneliness is widespread, especially in American culture. "Americans have fewer friends at work than we did in the past—and we're less likely to have them over for dinner and go on vacation with them than people in many other countries."

Social distancing can easily amplify already-widespread feelings of loneliness. Thus, connection is more imperative now than ever, even as it becomes a creative but constrained endeavor. Freelancers and contract employees know how easy it is to feel disconnected from the workplace—and now, almost all of us who once worked every day in an office know what it feels like to not have a water cooler.

This requires leaders to be even more mindful of our employees—pay closer attention, notice more, build high-quality connections. We must be exquisitely present and create the space for our employees to feel fully seen, heard, and appreciated during these challenging and unusual times.

### 3 Practice embodied inquiry

Being present with our teams is just one ingredient in supporting their thriving. We must also inquire to understand what they value and what they need. This requires skillful inquiry.

Many years ago, I had the privilege of meeting Melissa Peet. At the time, she was the director of integrative learning and knowledge management at the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan. She now runs an organization called the Generative Knowledge Institute.

When I met Melissa, I was intrigued by materials she was creating around generative practices, and particularly a practice she called embodied inquiry. This is the notion that each of us has within us a wealth of resources to successfully navigate change. By asking the

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right questions, we support and “allow the hidden knowledge, aliveness, and intelligence that is embedded in people’s lived experience to come forward.”

Asking questions from the heart gets below the surface level, provoking answers that are energy-producing and intrinsically self-motivating. So, for example, instead of asking for a stale report on work they’ve done, you could ask employees to describe recent accomplishments they are particularly proud of. Or, rather than asking about goals and objectives, you can ask, “What are you most looking forward to learning during the quarantine period?”

You can tell if you are in embodied inquiry when the employee lights up in front of you and you can see the discovery process unfolding before you. In those moments, it is easy to see how important our questions are. “We live in worlds our questions create,” says David Cooperider, one of the founders of Appreciative Inquiry.

### 4 Listen generatively

The necessary partner to inquiry is listening, and both practices flourish under exquisite presence. In tandem, inquiry and listening work to bring out the highest and best potential future for our teams.

When an embodied question is asked, we need to be fully present to hear and support the answer.

This is an unordinary kind of listening. Otto Scharmer, author, MIT researcher, and founder of the Presencing Institute, divides listening into four levels:

- **Downloading:** Transferring information that is already largely familiar, listening only to reconfirm what you already know.
- **Factual listening:** Paying attention only when the information is different from what you know. This new information is added to what is already known.
- **Empathic listening:** Hearing with an open heart. Empathizing and seeing through someone else’s eyes; able to understand and respect the other person from where they are.
- **Generative listening:** This means listening to create, without your personality getting in the way of results. By connecting to your own intuition, you are able to see and support the other person’s highest future possibility.

From Scharmer’s model, it is easy to see how everyday listening does not provide the necessary conditions for another person to become more alive. Empathic and generative listening are high-order practices, a kind of bespoke listening, attuning so well to another that you lose yourself in

their experience, what they are living and struggling with, and able to imagine what is possible for them.

### 5 Take care of yourself

Finally, we managers are not immune to this crisis and cannot support those who work with us without ensuring our own cups are full.

Being present to our teams during times like this takes a certain energy, and we must be mindful to regularly fill our own cups so we can sustain our presence over time. Tend to yourself by being honest about what you are feeling and experiencing; being vulnerable and modeling emotional expression; setting boundaries when needed; seeking out your own support; and practicing compassion.

I am also a big proponent of self-awareness and self-care. Take as much notice of yourself as you do of others, and be sure to reward yourself with activity that nourishes you.

As we look to continue our lives in quarantine or lockdown, and eventually return to social activity and to work, new waves of experience and emotion will capture us and require attention. Being a remarkable boss means being poised for these waves and ready to respond with aplomb. **You’ve got this.**

BY CHRIS MURCHISON | MAY 13, 2020

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