

TIPS FOR LEADERSHIP

Supporting your teams following a traumatic event



Supporting employees after a tragedy is often difficult and complex. The feelings that arise often involve grief, loss, and sometimes fear or even anger. Providing a safe place for employees to seek support and resources they have available to them is important. It's also important to take care of yourself and know that you don't need to solve or fix things. See below for more tips for engaging your teams:

- ▶ **Maintain open lines of communication** by regularly checking in with employees. Ask how they're coping and if there's anything specific they need. Let them know you're available to discuss any concerns. This can be in a huddle or all-hands meeting; however, be sensitive that not all employees may want to discuss needs in a group setting. Make time for individual 1:1 time and rounding if possible.
- ▶ **Share information about available mental health resources** within the organization (Employee Assistance Programs, counseling services) and externally (local mental health organizations, disaster relief agencies). Make sure employees are aware of how to access these resources.
- ▶ **Facilitate opportunities for employees to connect with and support each other.** This could be through virtual support groups, team meetings, or informal gatherings where employees can share their experiences and coping strategies.
- ▶ **Know that your staff may be in different places** in terms of processing this event, or resuming their daily routines or lifestyles.
- ▶ **Be compassionate** while refraining from assuming the role of a counselor. Stay neutral and provide a safe space for feelings of anger or frustration they may express.
- ▶ **Listen carefully** and let them know that all feelings they may be having are OK. Meet people where they are in their concerns or feelings.
- ▶ **Understand that your employees may be less productive** during this difficult period and even months after. Adjust performance expectations if necessary and communicate any changes clearly. Understand that productivity might be affected in the aftermath of a natural disaster and determine if a temporary change in work duties is necessary.

(continues on next page)

- ▶ **Be understanding about employees needing time off for recovery** and to address personal matters (housing, food, clothing, child and elder care, important documents, etc.). Some ways to support this include granting additional leave or flexibility during this period, approving requests to end shifts early, or taking time off without penalty.
- ▶ **Balance hope and resilience with realism.** Validate genuine concerns even if you may not have a solution.
- ▶ **Ask your employees what would be most helpful for them right now.**
- ▶ **Lead by example** by demonstrating a commitment to employees' well-being by practicing self-care and openly discussing the importance of mental health. **As a leader, you too are affected by traumatic events. Do not hesitate to seek support with your organization's EAP, health plan, or community resources.**