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Expert Contributor Article
By Simma Liberman, The Inclusionist



Five Ways Leaders Can Reduce Anxiety and Prevent Panic Right Now



We are in the midst of a disruptive crisis no matter how “positive thinking police” try to spin it. As the Covid-19 quarantine continues with people working from home, with little or no social interaction, some of your team members may start experiencing a deeper level of anxiety. No one knows when or how it will end or what the “new normal” will look like. That anxiety due to seemingly uncertain futures and not knowing how or when the crisis will end, can cause some people to panic, lose focus about their work and disengage from the team. Just telling people not worry doesn't work. When

I'm scared and someone who doesn't get my concern tells me not to worry, I shut down and freak out inside.

With the right strategies you have the power to help yourself, your family and people in your organization to not panic and instead find joy and stay engaged. The actions you take now to increase and sustain connection, community, and inclusion will make the difference between a long re-entry or the shortest one possible. If you want to know five actions you can take immediately, read on.

People are more confident and comfortable with their ability to handle crisis when we feel connected to others and part of something greater than ourselves a community. When we feel disconnected, invisible and unheard we are more anxious and afraid that we won't be able to get through unexpected events that disrupt our lives. That's certainly true for me.

Small actions can make a big difference and have a long-lasting impact. When you use creative ways to make your people feel included in community, they will trust you more and you'll increase your connection to them. Your actions to help others will increase your sense of empowerment and you'll be empowering others to do the same.

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Here are Five Cs to Thrive in this Crisis, Reduce Anxiety and Prevent Panic

1. **Communicate-** Acknowledge their fear and yours. Nothing makes me more anxious than when someone tells me not to be afraid and trivializes my feelings. I want to scream, "LISTEN TO ME!" When people feel validated, they are less afraid, they don't feel as alone, and they can be productive and take action.
2. **Connect-** Contact a set amount of people up and down the ladder of your organization from your executive team to the janitorial staff. Pick up the phone and call. There's a good chance they or someone they know has been impacted by COVID-19. Listen without interrupting. This is a scary time for a lot of people. You can help them be less scared.



Everyone wants to know they matter. They will feel less alone and it will brighten up their day.

3. **Create** an Instagram or a Facebook page for the organization where people can share pictures of what they're doing. Ask everyone to post recommendations for books, movies, TV, games and music playlists. Seeing each other will increase connection to you, each other and the whole organization. (Personally, I love the hysterical Twitter posts on BuzzFeed.)
4. **Community-** Build a community of mutual support. If people are working at home, they can post informal progress reports and ask for help with any challenges they have. It may be an opportunity to get feedback from people with whom they don't normally interact.

Set up Zoom or other remote platform calls at a scheduled time each week where people can see each other. You can even break attendees up into small groups.

Cascade- Ask each person to call at least three more people and tell the people they call to call three more. This will create a cascade of people checking in with each other and break some of the feelings of isolation. Inclusion can happen in many ways. Encourage team members to set up their own group call. This situation is not going to last forever. We will get back to work and move forward. It won't be the same as before. Create community now, acknowledge people's fears and communicate with a sense of calm, and respect. Taking these steps creates a foundation for an engaged, loyal team now and in the future.

As my colleague Charmaine McClarie, who has worked with C-suite executives in some of the top organizations in the world, says, "Now is the time to heighten your humanity with empathy,

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connection and communication on a daily basis.”

We all need connection and you can help me stay connected to you. Every time a client, colleague or program attendee contacts me, ask me for advice and just wants to know how I am, it brightens my day. I want to help brighten yours.

I want to know what you’re doing to create community. Share your best practices with me so I can share them in my next newsletter. Let’s take some time to learn from each other. Let’s be part of an inclusion community across industries, functions and organizations. I look forward to your ideas.