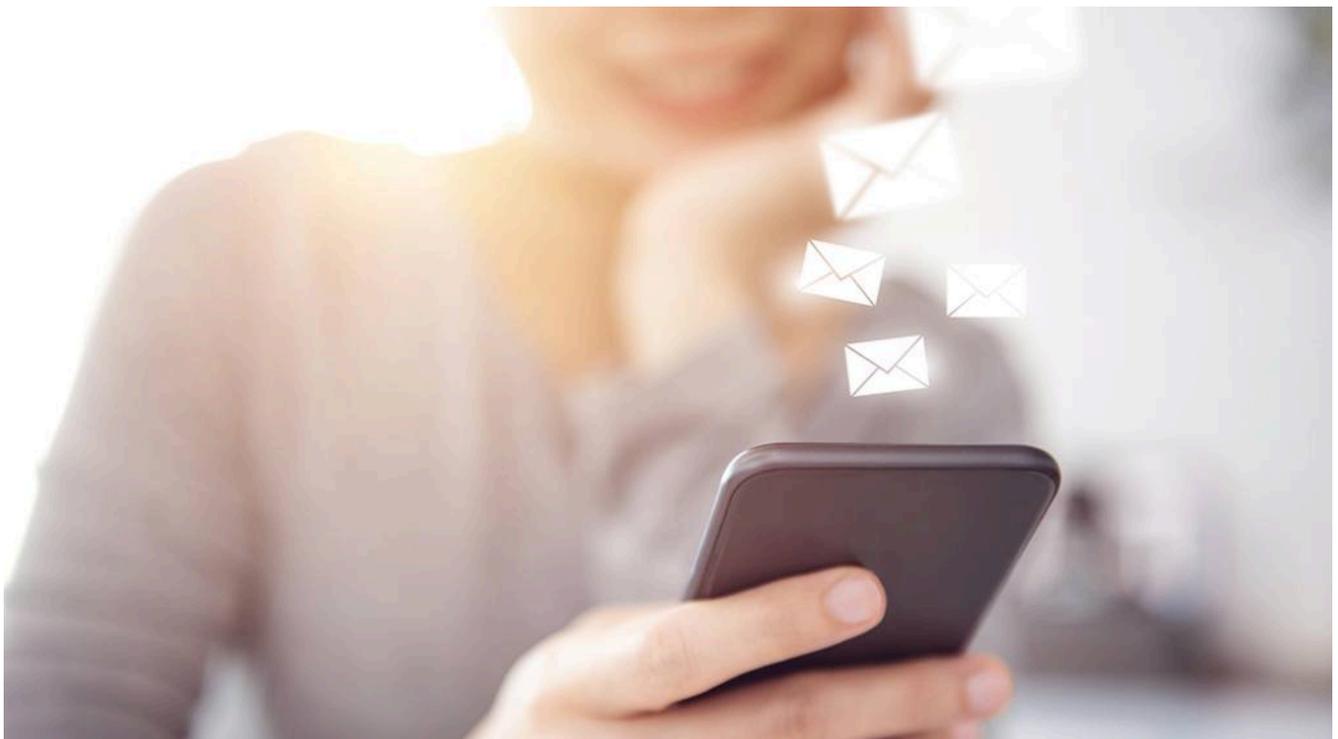


Show them you CARE: managing people in times of crisis

How can leaders and HR professionals mobilize people for common goals when everyone is feeling anxious and working from home? To make remote work feel less remote, IESE's Anneloes Raes presents her CARE model to help manage people well amid a crisis.



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In early March 2020, executives taking an IESE course told professor [Anneloes Raes](#) that what they really wanted to see in their companies were new forms of collaboration, more innovation and creativity, and more flexible work environments. Be careful what you wish for,

because that is exactly what workers around the world have gotten, whether they were ready or not, as the coronavirus pandemic forced radical changes onto everyone's way of working.

If during the global financial crisis everyone looked to the CFO for solutions, during the current crisis people are turning to the CEO and to the HR department — the "people" people — for leadership and guidance in navigating an uncertain future in which everyone is feeling a bit anxious.

"The coronavirus crisis has caught many off guard," acknowledges Raes. "Their first priority has been to keep the business in business so they will still be around when the crisis is over. That has meant making quick decisions on protecting people — not only in terms of their physical health but also in terms of their mental health and emotional well-being. It has also required painful decisions to make immediate adjustments to the workforce, which in some cases has meant furloughing workers."

To help leaders manage people in these agonizing times, Raes suggests the following actions, grouped into what she calls the CARE model. The acronym is intentional, she says, explaining that caring for your people has to be the overarching attitude that informs everything you do. "People are people, not resources or instruments," she says. "We have emotions. We're worried about loved ones. We're juggling family life. If we can connect with our people as human beings, everything will go better."

She also prefaces her framework to add that, in caring for your people, make sure you don't neglect yourself. As the saying goes, before assisting others, put your own oxygen mask on first.

The CARE model

1. CONTROL emotional contagion. Fear and uncertainty abound; people are worried or anxious. These negative emotions will have an effect on your teams. Don't just assume everyone is coping fine and they'll tell you if there's a problem. You need to seek the conversation. Check in with your people and your teams to hear how they're doing. You can't necessarily make the problems go away but you can try to inject some humor and positive emotions to counterbalance the negative ones.

One tip here is to tap into altruistic, transcendent motivations, getting people to focus on the higher purpose or greater good of what they're doing. This is especially important for essential workers who may feel trepidation about being required to work when everyone else

is being told to shelter at home. A manager of a food production company, for example, motivates employees by reminding them of the millions of people who depend on them for food. Give your people compelling reasons to keep going. Because make no mistake: If you don't take care to manage people's emotional states, those emotions will end up managing you.

Raes reiterates her earlier point that managers need to practice some self-care and learn to regulate their own emotions first. "Better to blow off steam with someone you trust before you go and speak to your people," she recommends. "Your teams don't need to see you losing it."

When having difficult conversations, it's okay to acknowledge the fear but don't overshare. You might say: "I know you're afraid. I'm afraid, too. But here is what we're going to do..."

2. ACT and learn: be AGILE in attitude and behavior. You need to act, but you will need to update your behavior constantly as you assess what went well today and what you could do better tomorrow. Manage in action-and-learning cycles. In strategy, this would be called ambidexterity: engaging in execution and innovation at the same time.

In this step, role modeling becomes paramount. Roll up your sleeves and get involved, as in the case of a factory manager who is working on the shop floor alongside the factory workers. This sends strong signals. You also see some organizations being run like an agency, with different teams redistributing their traditional functions to help share workloads.

3. RELY on others: direction and empowerment. Research shows that, in times of crisis, leaders tend to get more directive, and this management approach can last even after normality returns. Certainly, leaders will be called upon to step up and make some very difficult decisions, so it's only natural that you might become more directive. However, if you want creativity and innovation, you need to allow some room for people to take the initiative and bring new proposals that might never occur to you.

This is especially pertinent when you don't see each other face to face, and all your interactions are mediated via screens. Empowering your people to do things on their own, and relying on them to do it when you can't be physically present, is a real test of trust between leaders and their people.

4. ENVISION the future: scenarios and narratives. You can't know the future, but you can work on scenarios with parameters relevant for your company: What happens if we open

in June? What happens if we never reopen? Then, you can start preparing for those scenarios.

You also need to provide a narrative for your people: What is it we are doing right now? Why are we doing that? People need to understand why you're doing what you're doing, to have a sense of what's going on. And then spell out what it means for each individual.

Finding the right balance

The above advice applies in multiple contexts, not just the current one, though Raes admits that forming emotional connection is made more challenging when interactions are online. Even so, "you can show presence, even digitally," she insists. "Obviously, video works better than voice, a phone call is better than email, but even regular email contact has value in that it shows a piece of you in their inbox."

What next? Having gotten used to the new normal, are we all going to work remotely from now on? Raes laughs: "If, before all this happened, people were saying they wanted more remote working, I suspect that, after this experience, we may see a renewed appreciation for co-location and face-to-face contact!"

Kidding aside, Raes encourages everyone to "think about the new insights and competencies you're learning through this, not just in terms of more home working but about trusting people more. What happens when you can't always be looking over people's shoulders? Keep notes of your reflections. Write your ideas down." They will be signposts for people management on the road to recovery.

Watch: ["HR and Leading People in Times of Crisis"](#) with Anneloes Raes and Mike Rosenberg.

For more tips like these, go to www.iese.edu/open where you will find a host of open-access resources, including links to online sessions, to help the business community and others work together to overcome this unprecedented crisis. #NowMoreThanEver



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