COPING WITH COVID-19:
GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

COVID-19 is a large-scale outbreak that has greatly increased morbidity and mortality over a wide geographic area with significant economic and social disruption. As a leader in the response to COVID-19 you have great potential to support dedicated frontline responders while mitigating the spread of the virus and impacting community survivability.

Leadership will be faced with a multitude of priorities, difficult decisions, and constrained resources. Effective leadership is paramount, supporting and navigating your teams through mitigation and evolving courses of action. Adaptations will be made while former priorities and plans are placed on hold for incidental management. Members of your team may require delegation of authority to step into temporary roles that may be unfamiliar to them. Guidance, engagement, and support of your team is a must.

1. Resourcing

Teams can be distressed and frustrated by rapidly depleting resources. Ensure - as far as possible - that ample resources are available through continual restocking. Teams should not be preoccupied by the potential for resource depletion or concerns about personal protective equipment (PPE), such as direction to use PPE sparingly or fears about the adequacy of PPE to protect against the threat. This holds true whether fears are real or perceived.

2. Protect your team

The safety of your team is of the utmost importance. They need to be absolutely certain that their safety and wellbeing is at the forefront of your decision making. This includes both their physical and emotional safety. Exemplified within this is your ability to demonstrate your dedication to proactively protecting your team. Examples include communities that have highlighted their values to protect staff and the public by progressively moving to a work-from-home arrangement for both essential and non-essential staff.

3. Keep your team informed

Teams need to be able to count on you for timely, accurate information. This need increases exponentially as our knowledge of - and the spread of - COVID-19 expands. Teams need confidence that you will keep them fully informed, particularly when the information results in new, safe practice requirements and precautions that are essential to their health and safety.

Maintain effective, collaborative communication. Address concerns and questions as they arise. In challenging times throughout this pandemic, input from the team should be understood as value added, welcomed, and supported. If not already built into your operational cycle, provide regularly scheduled briefings or huddles with your team and conduct regular check-ins. Also be sure to check-in with team members when they themselves - or one of their loved ones - is facing increased stress, whether it is a health concern or a psychological impact.

4. Stay connected, support your team

Team members will be working long hours, contending with physical and emotional strain, and concerned for their loved ones throughout what will likely be a protracted pandemic. Provide rotating breaks and healthy downtime to prevent physical and mental fatigue. Afford autonomy where possible and an opportunity for team members to effect positive outcomes to foster their resiliency throughout this public health emergency.

Ensure that proactive, mental health support is integrated in order to foster continued health and performance throughout the pandemic. Establish resources for immediate, specialized mental health care should a member of your team experience a mental health crisis or otherwise need support.

Engage your team, building relationships and demonstrating you truly value the people you're working with. At the forefront should be team members who are in isolation.

5. Stay abreast of developments

Maintain your forward focus and growth mindset. Stay apprised of evolving evidence, best practices, and progressive developments in the field. Be sharply focused on your target - the preservation of life - while remaining grounded in realistic expectations.

6. For team members directly impacted

Hard lessons were learned from first responders quarantined during the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) emergency. Many were physically isolated, but also emotionally and socially cut off as well. Countless stories have been told of supplies simply left in driveways and on doorsteps with little or no communication with the quarantined individual. Relationships were damaged and hard feelings resonated for years after the crisis ended. As leaders it is imperative that we demonstrate our utmost support for team members effected in the following ways:

- Immediate notifications to team members after a potential exposure
- Timely initial check-ins with first responders in isolation, and ongoing contact throughout isolation
- Ensure that support is made available to the effected first responder as well as their family
- Provide ample supplies needed by the effected first responder and their families
- Express concern directly to team members who have loved ones impacted by COVID-19 and other psychosocial challenges that increase the strain upon them

Distancing doesn't mean isolation. Isolation doesn't mean abandonment.

It is paramount that leaders remain sharply focused on the wellbeing and welfare of their teams. Your teams need you - and they need you to be well. Take care of yourself throughout the pandemic. Running on empty is a survival strategy, but not a sustainable course of action for leaders. Even more so through what will likely be a protracted pandemic such as the current COVID-19 health emergency.

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