EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
ACTION TIPS DURING THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic has required us to change the way in which we work. There are more challenges, but there is also great opportunity for strategic innovation to drive employee engagement. Talk with your team about the workplace issues most important to them.

Here are a few things to consider putting into action. But before you do, discuss how best to implement these things in a way that makes sense for your team.

FOCUS ON ONLY THE MOST CRITICAL TASKS
For some teams, the pandemic has provided new clarity, purpose, and a stronger sense of meaning for their work. Still, it’s easy to fall into the “everything-feels-urgent” trap, but that’s a recipe for burnout. Focus your attention on your college or unit’s top priorities. Now is not the time to begin non-essential initiatives.

Ask your team:
• What are our top priorities? What is absolutely essential?
• Can we make adjustments to the timelines of our projects?
• What is our criteria for determining what’s most important?
• What can we say “no” to?

REDEFINE SUCCESS
Check in on workloads and deadlines so that you can make adjustments and be realistic about what is actually achievable given the challenges and state of the current environment.

Ask your team:
• Which projects or responsibilities are taking a significant amount of time and energy?
• What are the obstacles or barriers (internal or external) to getting this work done on time?
• Can we adjust project timelines?

RETHINK YOUR WORK DAY
Talk with your team about establishing norms that allow for flexibility and selfcare. For example, if you find yourself in back-to-back Zoom meetings, set maximum meeting time to 20 or 50 minutes to allow for breaks between meetings.

Ask your team:
• When do we need to meet via Zoom vs send an email vs make a phone call or send a text?
• What are some agreed upon norms or ground rules we can set for our team? (e.g., cameras on or off during Zoom meetings, email response time expectations)
• How can we maximize our meetings? (e.g., send agendas prior to meetings)
COMMUNICATE FREQUENTLY, CANDIDLY, AND PERSONALLY
Many faculty and staff are experiencing increased workloads, anxiety from the pandemic, and trauma from racial injustice. Make a point to go beyond the standard “how are you?” Give them space to express what they think, feel, and need.

Ask your team:
• What is giving you energy right now? What is draining you?
• How are you balancing your responsibilities and self care? How can I support you?
• How are you taking care of yourself today?

GIVE FACULTY AND STAFF A VOICE
Acknowledge the realities of our world and talk about how to support one another.

Ask your team:
• What can I do to help you?
• How has the ambiguity and frequent changes impacted you?

TREAT EVERYONE AS AN INDIVIDUAL
Some employees are energized by the pandemic, others are overwhelmed by stress and anxiety, and others find themselves with extra time to spare. Listen, learn, and adjust, when possible, to the specific needs and preferences of your employees. Assume that everyone is doing the best that they can. Remember to offer yourself that same compassion and grace.

Ask your team:
• How has the pandemic impacted your daily life, family, and community?
• What has been challenging for you?

VALUE TRANSPARENCY
Share your own struggles and challenges, and allow time and space for your team to share as well. Authenticity and transparency are contingent upon vulnerability. Vulnerability is also key to building trust and security. Much of the future is still unknown and being transparent also means that if questions arise about continued or additional pay cuts or perhaps future layoffs, remind them you’ll be as transparent as possible.

Share with your team:
• Talk about the struggles you’re experiencing and ask the team to share their own.
• Share mistakes you made at work and how you learned from them.
• Tell the team you want to hear their thoughts and opinions even if they differ from yours or the group.
• If you have uncertainty about anything, at least give people dates that you are working towards to be able to give them an update.
CELEBRATE SUCCESS
Despite all of today’s challenges we have persevered, become more resilient, and shown great innovation and adaptability.

Ask your team:
• How would you prefer to be celebrated and recognized?
• What tasks have we accomplished individually or collectively that we feel really good about and why?
• What have you found to be successful in navigating the pandemic?

SUPPORT WELLBEING
Employee engagement and wellbeing have a dynamic relationship. Engaged employees tend to value wellbeing and are therefore more engaged in their work. Encouraging employees to seek wellness, balance, and fulfillment in all aspects of their life will help ensure that employees are approaching workplace challenges with a good perspective.

Ask your team:
• What can I do to support your wellbeing?
• Which aspects of your work support your wellbeing and which do not?

SUPPORT EACH OTHER
Supervisors and leaders have a great deal of responsibility in meeting the needs of their faculty and staff, but they also need support. Be mindful of your own needs and what you need from your unit’s leaders.

Ask your unit’s leadership team to consider and discuss:
• How can we support each other during this time of uncertainty and change?
• A lot is uncertain right now, what are our key priorities and how can we best communicate them to our faculty and staff?
• As we continue to support our teams by helping them focus on key priorities, what’s okay to pause or put on hold for now?