

Thriving Amidst Uncertainty

A global pandemic is a complex, rapidly evolving issue, with new information emerging continuously. The topic is polarising, political and emotional. Opinions are diverse; no group is in the majority and no individual is alone in their thinking and experience. At Steelcase, it's not enough for us to keep the business running during the pandemic, we intend to capitalise on the disruption to solidify our culture and allow our employees to thrive. We are learning a few things along the way, that I am happy to share with you.

Leverage Wellbeing:

Establish a COVID-19 Wellbeing response team with the intention of addressing wellbeing needs in the moment. Here's some ways we approached this:

Keeping employee wellbeing front-and-centre during the pandemic has been one of our guiding principles.

- **Cognitive:** When our employees needed a level of certainty in their day, we launched a daily mindfulness moment. Our live broadcast (which could also be watched as a recording) was leveraged by employees around the world to start their day focused and with a connection to the company
- **Emotional:** As we saw our employees struggling with staying mentally healthy, and leaders seeking guidance on how to have these sensitive conversations, we produced a webinar on understanding and addressing the signs of mental illness. We created brief on-demand wellbeing video episodes on a variety of topics including: understanding how your brain responds to threats, keeping feedback flowing during remote work, resiliency, cognitive capacity and creating psychological safety. Each week we add new content based on what the current needs are
- **Financial:** Pay reductions caused financial worry, so we worked with our vendor to host sessions on budgeting and reducing expenses
- **Physical:** We pulled together resources on staying fit during lockdown, moved fitness classes to a virtual platform, and posted content on healthy eating.

Meeting the wellbeing needs of our people enables our organisation to sustain our energy for the longer-term adjustments we will need to make. By becoming a trusted curator of information, we were able to

limit employees' stress as they sought information, and inspire healthy action.

Expert tip: A Wellbeing team doesn't need to be large. It needs to be focused on hearing and addressing the needs of employees quickly.

Lean Into Learning:

Leverage Learning and Development (L&D) to shift the pandemic response mindset from post-traumatic stress to post-traumatic growth.

Many long-held beliefs and behaviours are shifting. We wanted employees to use their time to reflect on those shifts and understand how they are personally impacted. Instead of viewing the pandemic from a limited perspective focused on challenges and obstacles, we shifted our mindset to position it as an opportunity for personal growth. At Steelcase, we launched a weekly Teach Tuesday series called "Unlocking Your Genius". The series consists of microlearning sessions dedicated to just-in-time topics such as prioritisation, decision-making, productivity and being future fit. We also offered a free learning trial for employees who were ready and able to dedicate time to their professional growth and development. By partnering with a third-party content provider, we allowed employees to access high-quality content on a variety of topics, enabling learning opportunities that were fresh, relevant and personalised. Coupled with a supportive social learning community, we were able to maintain a high level of participant engagement throughout the trial, as well as take advantage of peer-to-peer recommendations and key learnings employees could share with their teams. Opening the door for new learning opportunities communicates to your workforce an investment in learning, growth and adaptation that is always necessary in an organisation, particularly during times of uncertainty.

Expert tip: Support new learning offerings with a virtual learning community to build accountability and increase engagement.

Listen Well And Act:

Ask your employees how they are feeling, listen well and act with their input in mind.

Listening well has been a key input into our COVID response strategy. When it comes to crisis, understanding how employees feel is paramount. None of us has been through something of this scale, so none of us can predict (based on past behaviour) how others are feeling. We need to ask. We used a mix of methods to gather perspectives.

- **Roundtable:** Our CEO holds weekly virtual roundtables to hear directly from employees. In one discussion, a 30-year employee shared that her spouse had

recently passed away and that being forced to shelter in place was particularly lonely. In another, an employee talked about the struggle of trying to parent and stay focused on work at the same time. Others opened up about the loss of a friend or family member to COVID. Each of these discussions brings clarity to the daily experiences and struggles of our employees and builds empathy

- **Touch points:** Our HR Business Partners around the world have been checking in with employees and reporting back weekly. These weekly meetings are a prompt for our on-the-ground HR team to take time to reflect and share useful tools and resources globally
- **Survey:** Our Return to the Workplace team launched an employee sentiment survey to better understand how ready and how urgently our employees want to return to the office. We received nearly 100 pages of open text responses. Many of the comments within the survey were leveraged in designing safe return to workplace experiences and expectations, as well as providing a better picture of how quickly the organisation can expect employees to return.

In each method we've used to seek perspectives, we have learned valuable information that has helped us leverage the voice of our employees in the actions we take. We utilise our internal intranet site to share our findings and how employee feedback has impacted in-the-moment decisions, thus increasing transparency and trust.

Expert tip: Listening well and acting on feedback from your employees is wonderful. Communicating the summarised feedback and how it's being used is even better.



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