

A Road Map for Navigating Difficult Conversations

In a matter of just a few weeks, the coronavirus has become a global crisis, leaving most of us searching for answers for our businesses and our families.

What your company does during these uncertain times matters. Equally important is what your company says. Sharing honest, accurate, consistent messages with employees and customers will help them feel safe and secure. It will help all of us get through this crisis.

But with everything else you're trying to balance, how do you go about effectively communicating with everyone? Whether you choose to send an email, post on social media or create a webpage with relevant information, we've put together a handy list of tips and best practices to make it easier for you.

COMMUNICATING WITH EMPLOYEES

Your internal workforce is your most important audience. If you can help them understand what's happening and put their minds at ease, they can be brand advocates for your business.

Tips

- Communicate at least every other day about your concerns and commitments to keep employees in the know
- Post information regularly in a highly visible location (physical or virtual)
- Speak with honesty and transparency about your and your employees' concerns
- Share how decisions were made about issues like travel, working remotely, etc.
- Don't wait until you have all the answers - provide timely, accurate information as it comes in
- Ask your CEO and top executives to reassure employees by stating the steps your company is taking
 - One idea: Have your leadership record a short video describing what's happening within the company, steps being taken to keep employees safe and to protect the business, and next steps
 - Follow-up with written communications, like emails, texts and social posts.
 - Executives should remain visible and communicate regularly to bolster confidence.



Ideas to Include in Your Messaging

- Emphasize your commitment to your employees' health and safety
- Ask employees to stay home if they are sick and follow guidance from your area public health officials
- Include links to your state's public health department for easy access to the latest information
- Provide a reminder of preventative measures we can all take to keep our communities safe. For example:
 - o Wash your hands
 - o Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
 - o When you cough, cover your mouth with tissues or the crook of your arm
 - o Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
 - o Practice "social distancing" by staying six feet away from others
 - o Stay away from large groups
 - o Seek medical attention if you have cold or flu symptoms
 - o If you have been ill, have the coronavirus, or have been in close contact with someone with a confirmed case, contact HR immediately
- Outline what you are doing as a business to address the virus:
 - o Additional cleaning services, providing hand sanitizer and reminders about frequently cleaning high-touch areas
 - o Rely on credible resources such as the CDC, WHO and state public health websites
 - o <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
 - o <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizationsbusinesses-employers.html>
 - o <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- Assure your team that you will get through this together
- Remind them to reach out to their managers with any questions

COMMUNICATING WITH CUSTOMERS

Talking to customers requires a different approach than when you speak with your employees. Generally, you don't communicate with customers as often (or as easily). Take the opportunity to support them and calm their uncertainty by sharing empathetic, honest and consistent messaging. Ask yourself, "What concerns do my customers have and how can I help them?"

You may not have all of the answers all of the time, and that's ok. Share as much information that you can. The main goal is to help your customers help them feel more secure and let them know that you are in this with them.

Tips

- Choose the right channel to share your message: email, social media, website, etc.
- Keep it simple and focus on what is most important to your customer
- Provide relief for customer's concerns if you can
- Focus on empathy and understanding, not selling opportunities
- Speak with honesty and transparency
- Be inclusive and share how "we" will find our way through the challenging times ahead

Ideas to Include in Your Messaging

- Be honest and empathetic about what's happening in the world and with your company
- Acknowledge your customer's challenges and concerns given the global situation
- Provide an update about how your business is operating
 - Are you and/or your employees are working remotely?
 - Are you experiencing disruption in any part of your business?
 - How are you feeling overall? Nervous, uncertain, overwhelmed...or maybe feeling proud of your team or inspired by of people being great neighbors, great partners and coming together to help others
- Share what you're doing to work with your customers to ease their concerns
 - Are you flexing any of your standard policies – payment terms, returns/cancellations, etc.
 - Are you offering any promotional discounts?
- Reassure customers that you will be sharing more information with them as you have it
- Encourage them to reach out to you if there's anything you can do to help

We are all navigating this crisis in the best ways we know how. While we might not have all of the answers, we can help each other feel a bit more secure knowing that we aren't alone in our challenges. Creating empathy and support within our businesses and communities can make a difference in the challenging weeks ahead.