

BE READY FOR ANYTHING: MANAGING EFFECTIVELY DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES



A volatile economy. An unpredictable supply chain. The Great Resignation. What's next?! With so much uncertainty surrounding you, how can you keep your workforce loyal, productive, and flexible? Start here:

In this eBook, we share practical advice and strategies for leading during uncertain times, including:

- Essential leadership traits
- Workforce engagement tips
- Peak productivity ideas
- Flexible workforce strategies

We don't know what's coming next, so we must prepare for anything.

Let's get started.



LEADING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

Have you ever heard of the term VUCA? While you may not be familiar with the abbreviation, after the last few years, you're undoubtedly familiar with the impact it's had on your business.

What is VUCA?

- **Volatility.** Where things change rapidly—and unpredictably.
- **Uncertainty.** When preparing for the future is difficult because the past can't help you make accurate predictions.
- **Complexity.** Where countless causes and variables complicate problems.
- **Ambiguity.** When causes (i.e., who, what, where, when, how, and why) behind events are unclear.

With the current economic conditions, VUCA is here to stay. To thrive, managers must learn to lead effectively through ongoing uncertainty. The show must go on, and your employees deserve a trustworthy guide. The best leaders will learn to balance compassion with a desire to “get work done”—and inspire their team to do the same.



LEADERSHIP TRAITS ESSENTIAL TO MANAGING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

Although it's never easy to manage people through challenging times, adversity can bring out the best in people. Managers must possess key traits to lead effectively despite continued uncertainty. Here are 7 characteristics that can help you “keep calm and carry on”:

- **Mindfulness.** You'll be better able to support your team if you take the time to process your own emotions. Acknowledge and evaluate your thoughts and feelings about stressful events before choosing the best response.
- **Honesty.** Pretending that everything is fine when it is not can cause your team to lose trust in you. Approach challenges head-on, admitting uncertainty and focusing on how the team can respond positively.
- **Caring.** People have been through a lot over the past few years. Interact with your team one-on-one and show compassion for what they are going through. Showing empathy will help build a foundation of trust that will allow you to be a more effective leader.
- **Ethics.** Great leaders hold themselves to the highest standards of their organization and model ethical behavior—even during challenging times.
- **Communication.** Effective managers communicate clearly, honestly, and transparently, particularly when the information relates to rapid change. Leaders must listen and talk, keeping communication flowing both ways.
- **Flexibility.** During continuous change, leaders and managers alike must be able to pivot to attend to emerging problems and quickly change strategies to get better results.
- **Vision.** Leaders must understand the direction of the organization and be able to communicate it to all team members, helping them feel grounded in a shared purpose.

BUILDING ENGAGEMENT: HOW TO KEEP YOUR WORKFORCE ON BOARD DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES (1 OF 2)

Show Your Workforce the Value of Working for YOU

Employees look to leadership to provide stability—even amidst chaos. You might not have all the answers, but honesty, transparency, and consistent communication will let your people know you're working to support them. Here are a few other strategies to build trust and loyalty—and hopefully improve retention—during continuing uncertainty:

- **Pay well.** Salary ranks near the top of the list for many employees. If you're unsure how competitive your company is regarding pay, research pay rates in your industry and region to ensure you are offering a fair—or more than fair—wage.
- **Provide valuable benefits.** Money isn't the only thing that matters to today's workers. Career development, flexibility, and other benefits are also essential. Show your employees the value of working for you by providing the perks and benefits they need to be healthy and productive.
- **Build a supportive culture.** Work environment and company culture are crucial factors in employee satisfaction. Creating and maintaining positive company culture takes work. It's more than your company mission; it's what happens when your employees understand and embody your core values—and believe your company is a place where they can thrive, no matter what.



BUILDING ENGAGEMENT: HOW TO KEEP YOUR WORKFORCE ON BOARD DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES (2 OF 2)

Show Your Workforce THEY Are Valued

Your employees want to contribute and know they are valued for their effort and achievement. Build trust and loyalty in your workforce by recognizing their hard work and emphasizing how it supports the organization's mission.

- **Build connection.** Focusing on a shared purpose can build a connection to the company, which is essential during uncertain times. But connection to the organization isn't the only important factor. Managers must also strive to make meaningful connections among the people on their teams. Personal connections create a sense of stability and belonging, helping teams support each other during challenging times.
- **Keep your talent close.** Stay connected to your team. Hold frequent meetings or develop another consistent method of two-way communication. Keep them informed and take every opportunity to do a pulse check on morale. Staying in touch with your team allows you to show you care, make them feel valued, and respond quickly to concerns.
- **Focus on the future.** Help your employees see a future with the organization by providing professional development opportunities and career advancement. If they feel the company sees a bright future with them, they will be more likely to see a future with the company.



SUPPORTING PRODUCTIVITY: HOW TO KEEP YOUR WORKFORCE ON TASK DURING CHALLENGING TIMES (1 OF 2)

Uncertainty. Anxiety. Overwhelm. Your employees don't leave their worries behind when they arrive at work, leading to distraction and lowered productivity. How can you help them handle their uncomfortable feelings while helping them stay on task?

- **Manage with compassion.** Your people look to you for guidance, providing a valuable opportunity to set a positive example for thriving during challenging times. Here are a few ways to help them handle stress in their lives:
- **Acknowledge uncertainty.** If you sense anxiety in your team, don't ignore it. Carrying on as "normal" might lead to more significant problems down the road. Instead, acknowledge that things seem chaotic at the moment. Allow your team to share their feelings, but keep the discussion centered on how the team can face the future together.
- **Focus on what can be controlled.** In times of uncertainty, it helps to focus on what can be controlled. Your employees might need flexibility in their schedules or how their work gets done, but helping them stay grounded in your organization's daily routine and deliverables can create a sense of control—and keep your business moving.
- **Provide hope.** Prolonged uncertainty can spiral into hopelessness. By communicating with your employees and fostering a supportive environment, you can keep them connected to the company mission, show the value in their contribution, and envision better days ahead.



SUPPORTING PRODUCTIVITY: HOW TO KEEP YOUR WORKFORCE ON TASK DURING CHALLENGING TIMES (1 OF 2)

Even in challenging times, your team wants to know what is expected of them.

Here's how to flex your leadership strategy to help your team cope with the anxiety they might be feeling and do their best work:

- **Set expectations and structure.** Although you may have to adjust your goals to your team's situation, make sure team members know exactly what is expected of them. Evoking a sense of accountability to the organization and the team can help your employees feel a reassuring sense of structure that is missing elsewhere in their lives.
- **Empower growth.** Provide opportunities for your employees to develop their professional skills and advance their careers. Seeing a forward path into a better future can boost productivity. Growing soft skills like time management, organization, and communication can also make staying productive during uncertain times easier.
- **Prioritize well-being.** Helping your employees focus on strategies to stay physically and mentally well during times of doubt can improve morale—and productivity. Remind your team to care for themselves by eating well, getting enough sleep, and exercising. Prioritizing well-being will show your team that the company values them as individuals, not just as workers.



CREATING FLEXIBILITY: HOW TO KEEP YOUR WORKFORCE AGILE DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES

The past few years have been a wild ride for employers and employees alike. After navigating the uncertainty of 2020, companies struggled to hire enough people to make up for lost time and ground—only to slam head-on into the threat of recession.

Since we don't know what's coming next, we must stay flexible, employing staffing strategies that flex to rapidly changing business conditions.

By using contingent labor as a significant part of your workforce, you can increase your ability to meet sudden upturns, downturns, and new skills needs, as well as:

- Lower your fixed labor cost
- Free your core staff to focus on revenue-generating activities
- Reduce overtime
- Minimize layoffs
- Work around a hiring freeze



CREATING FLEXIBILITY: HOW TO KEEP YOUR WORKFORCE AGILE DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES

Rather than reacting when a big order comes in or a key team member takes a leave of absence, planned staffing can help you stay ready for recruiting challenges. You might not always be hiring, but you'll have a flexible plan to meet future hiring needs. Here are a few benefits:

- **Capture more business.** Work with a staffing specialist to develop position profiles for the types of workers you need when business spikes. Your recruiter will be ready to quickly deliver talent when you need it—without committing you to a permanent hire.
- **Plan for seasonal spikes.** If your workload varies, planned staffing can deliver the flexibility you need to increase your workforce only when required, reducing the need for layoffs when business slows down.
- **Prepare for the unexpected.** Don't wait for the next recruiting challenge before you examine your staffing strategy. Talking to a staffing specialist about how to build more flexibility into your workforce before you need it, will help you adapt to unexpected changes faster—and leave your competition behind.



UNCERTAIN TIMES CALL FOR TEMPORARY SOLUTIONS

Strategic staffing enables you to use temporary, contract, and direct placement services as a permanent solution for meeting workforce challenges. Your staffing partner can help you prepare for what's next by working with you to create a proactive, strategic approach to managing your workforce—and help you stay ready for anything.

