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Supporting Employees Who Remain After Layoffs

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As more companies announce layoffs before the holidays, employees who remain may still have their jobs but may also carry the stress of more responsibilities, a degraded company culture and fear of what might happen next.

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This is a natural response, industry leaders say, and one that should be addressed with the same care and concern as was expressed to [those who were let go](#).

"Many employees are in shock from seeing so many colleagues and friends involuntarily depart the company," said Kayla Lebovits, CEO and founder of Bundle Benefits in New York City. "This creates new stress and anxiety about job security and new ['do more with less'] job expectations, loss of confidence in the company, and dwindling work ethic and culture. This is not ideal at a time when employees are needed most to move the company forward."

Be Ready to Hear What Employees Are Saying

Lebovits said it's crucial for managers and leaders to listen and be open to hearing the good, bad and the ugly from employees.

"Give them a space to express their concerns openly and personally in this time of grieving for the loss of friends and colleagues," she said.

Barbie Winterbottom, CHRO, founder and CEO of the Business of HR in Tampa, Fla., said it's healthy for remaining employees to "reach out to their former co-workers to check in

and say hello and to express that their relationships are still very valid, even if one of them had been laid off."

Joe Du Bey, CEO of people operations software company Eden in New York City, said the management team must quickly transition to ensuring that the remaining workforce feels cared for and inspired to continue to build.

"By demonstrating transparency, accountability and sound analysis in the layoffs announcement—explaining what the underlying problem was that caused the issue—the remaining team can retain trust in their leadership," he said. "Providing a respectful process and generous terms to the outgoing employees demonstrates care and mutual respect for all colleagues, which the remaining team will observe and will impact their perception of management."

Stacey Berk, founder and managing consultant at Expand HR Consulting in Rockville, Md., said HR business partners should work with individual leaders and coach them to be compassionate, transparent and respectful to the remaining employees.

Companies that can promptly implement employee experience initiatives and benefits that breathe new life into the workforce will succeed, according to Lebovits.

She said companies should help relieve culture tensions and build in social time to allow the formation of new work relationships and collaboration networks to ease feelings of loss and improve loneliness.

Don't Leave Managers on Their Own

Sandra Moran, chief marketing and innovation officer at WorkForce Software in Detroit, said leaders should first focus on remaining midlevel and front-line managers in the wake of layoffs, giving them support and attention.

"Front-line managers shoulder the burden of staff reduction actions and support for their teams in the aftermath," Moran said. "Acknowledging the people who have remained in their roles should be priority one. Provide guidance on priorities and give managers permission to say, 'No, for now,' to work that might have been ... performed but doesn't have to be reallocated immediately."

Moran recommended establishing opportunities for peer-to-peer communications among the company's front-line managers so they feel connected and can collaborate with one another.

"Providing an outlet to find solutions for the challenges of leading through change can make a big difference to managers who need practical advice on how to handle

reallocation of work, supporting their teams and responding to concerns without feeling like they must have all the answers on their own," Moran said. "This creates camaraderie across teams, makes people more inclined to pitch in when the company really needs it and fosters friendships within the company. Strengthening workplace relationships can often make or break employee retention."

Answer 'How Will This Affect Me?'

Christy Pruitt-Haynes, global head of talent management and performance at the NeuroLeadership Institute in Nashville, Tenn., said once the remaining employees are over the initial shock, they'll wonder how the change will affect them.

"It is essential that all work is prioritized so the remaining employees know where to focus and understand that they aren't expected to do twice the work to 'make up for' the employees who are no longer there," Pruitt-Haynes said. "Change is not only hard for those who are let go but it is hard for those who remain. Organizations must openly discuss what projects can be deprioritized, how work will flow differently and how to get help when it's needed."

Keep Employees Engaged

Harley Lippman, CEO and founder of New York City-based IT staffing firm Genesis10, said layoffs can also weaken confidence in retained employees, resulting in undesired resignations and exodus of important or top-performing employees.

"Prior to layoff announcements, an organization should identify its key and top-performing employees and create a purposeful retention strategy for these individuals," Lippman said.

Amy Mosher, chief people officer at isolved in Gardnerville, Nev., said, "During down economies, each remaining employee is relied on even more for their creativity, agility and resilience. They have to do more with less.

"If they don't genuinely care about their teams and the organization or they are not truly engaged, the motivation to get the business through difficult times is lessened and business performance suffers," she said.

Mosher said how employees are treated daily, the interactions they have along the way and the experiences provided by the company are what build connections and support performance.

"Do they have trust in management to make good decisions and communicate honestly with them?" she asked. "Those everyday investments will pay off when times get tough."

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