Coming Back Together:
Managing Employees Fall of 2021

Managers have a lot on their plates and hold multiple priorities. They are concerned about the well-being of their employees; they are tasked to make sure to achieve the objectives of their departments; and they are employees with their own concerns and stresses. They can feel caught in the middle; they are responsible for outcomes but may not feel they have a lot of control. Right now, managers are experiencing challenges in guiding their employees in three principal areas:

- Navigating fear and anxiety with things like the rise in variants and potential budget cuts
- Uncertainty and the unknown while having to make both short-term and longer-term plans
- Negotiating change with adopting hybrid models, remote work, and an increase in density to campus

The reality at this time is that most of us feel unsettled, and that can be unnerving but it is unlikely managers will be able to make that feeling go away. The following are some ideas from the body of research on resilience and burnout that support some specific recommendations of things managers can do:

1. **Develop a Sense of Connection** – Within their units, it is especially important for managers to be strategic and thoughtful to create an inclusive environment. The work of developing connection is a foundation of effective communication, as it creates space for acknowledgement, dialogue, and a sharing of being human together. Some ways to increase connection are:
   - Be Clear and Direct in Communication
   - Give Employees an Opportunity to Provide Input
   - Give Employees Opportunities to Make Choices
   - Find Time and Ways for Employees to Enjoy Each Other's Company

2. **Emphasize Meaning and Impact of the Work** – Supervisors can explicitly acknowledge to employees how they are contributing to their department, to UT and making a difference in the lives of individuals. Acknowledgment requires a small time-investment from the manager but can provide a substantial deposit in the employee's emotional bank account. This is especially important if a manager does not see their employees often. Acknowledgement may not seem like a lot, but without these reflections and feedback employees tell us they are not sure if their managers know how much they are doing, or if they are really making a difference.

3. **Encourage employees to build in "recovery moments"** - Recovery moments are intentional breaks that provide an opportunity to recharge. They do not have to be large breaks, small breaks if done with intention can be surprisingly energizing. Examples:
   - For individuals looking at screens all day, the rule says that for **every 20 minutes** spent looking at a screen, a person should look at something **20** feet away for **20 seconds**. This rule does not have to be followed exactly but finding a way to incorporate this concept can reduce eye strain and provide a visual and cognitive break.
   - Stretch breaks at your desk or in your break room

- Take deep breaths
- Walk outside

4. **Help Employees Create Boundaries** – At this stage in the pandemic, it is crucial to have thoughtful and clear discussions about expectations for each employee's role. The ideal for some individuals and jobs may not be the same as it used to be. Some examples of clarifying these expectations are:
   - When the work day begins and ends
   - What goals need to be accomplished in what time frame.
   - When to turn off devices

5. **Encourage Employees to Access Resources** - The University offers a wide range of resources that can be a support for a myriad of diverse needs and contexts, such as:
   - HealthPoint Employee Assistance Program (EAP) – eap.utexas.edu
   - HealthPoint Wellness and WorkLife Balance Programs – healthpoint.utexas.edu
   - HealthPoint Occupational Health (OHP) - hr.utexas.edu/current/services/occupational-health-program
   - Conflict Management and Dispute Resolution - hr.utexas.edu/current/services/conflict-management-and-dispute-resolution-office
   - Ombuds - /ombuds.utexas.edu/
   - Learning and Development – hr.utexas.edu/learning-development
   - Organizational Effectiveness - hr.utexas.edu/manager/oe
   - Strategic Work Force Solutions - hr.utexas.edu/current/services/consultation-services

6. **Create Emotional Regulation Through Self-Care** – It is important for managers to find ways to support their own emotional regulation through self-care--to be grounded and refreshed. Self-care is bringing compassionate curiosity to what we might need now. This is so important because of "mirror neurons," mirror neurons are the part of our brain that picks up and reflects whatever we are surrounded by—so in this way both anxiety and calm are contagious state. What do we need to feel, comfort, connection, action, or distraction? Ask:
   - What might help me feel things that need to felt?
   - What might comfort me?
   - Do I need connection with someone else?
   - Do I need to do an action?
   - Am I needing distraction right now?

7. **Practice 4-7-8 Breathe** – One example of a tiny self-care practice is the 4-7-8 breathe. This breathing exercise can support the nervous system downshifting from activation to a place of spaciousness. See the demonstration in the video at minute marker 12:50.

8. **Seek Out Consultation and Lean on Your Resources** - Managers do not have to have all the answers. This is such a new context and time that none of us have ever navigated before, so it makes sense that questions are going to arise that are complex. The resources mentioned above are also resources for managers. These are the offices on campus who are available to talk through the myriad of diverse and unique challenges that are unfolding this year. We want to remind managers they do not have to do this alone.