



Let's talk about compensation: having effective conversations with your employees

Being a people leader means your organization has deemed you ready to handle the challenges of management. One such challenge of management is having conversations with your employees about sensitive topics like performance, negative team dynamics or personal hygiene issues. Conversations about compensation score high on the difficulty meter for most managers. Talking about money can be awkward and intimidating for both people leaders and employees alike. However, these are necessary and important conversations, so learning what you can do to make this topic as comfortable as possible will bode well for everyone.

Here are some tips to maximize the effectiveness and ease of these sometimes daunting conversations.

Be informed

Be sure you understand how compensation works at your organization. Every workplace has different policies in place when it comes to salary; when and by how much pay raises occur varies from company to company. As a people leader, gain access to all the information you need to ensure you are well informed.

Be clear about what you reward

When making decisions about salary increases, it is helpful to have a defined metric of what your reward. Is it performance? Loyalty and longevity? Skill? It could be a combination of these, but whatever it is it needs to be consistent across the organization, and you need to know what you're looking for.

Discuss performance and pay separately

Grouping these two conversations together can muddy the waters and make it difficult for employees to hear what you are saying about their performance. Schedule a discussion about compensation a week or two after a performance review.

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Don't decide alone

Team-based input and decisions about compensation can help keep things objective, especially for organizations where performance measurement and rewards are very clear. Involving other managers in these conversations will ensure that you stay as fair and consistent as possible. For employees, knowing that a team – and not just his or her immediate manager – will decide on compensation can provide a sense of fairness as well.

Maintain an ongoing conversation

Speak to your employees early and often about their performance and your expectations. When the time for their evaluation comes, there should be no surprises. The best way to achieve this is to keep a dialogue open, communication is key.

As a leader or manager, you have great responsibilities and power, which is not always comfortable. From time to time, it can feel overwhelming and even unfair to be able to make decisions that affect other people's lives. This discomfort is indeed a part of the job, not an unfortunate consequence of it. Successful leaders are excellent interpersonally - they communicate clearly and often. If you are struggling with the emotional labour of being in a people leader role, speaking to a counsellor can help you develop new skills and strategies to be effective in this important role.

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How to become a mental health leader in your workplace

Even today, mental health and illness continue to carry a lot of stigma, and this stigma often makes people reluctant to discuss their mental health with their co-workers and managers. Mental health, like physical health, is a reality that affects many people's lives, with approximately 20% of Canadian workers taking three or more days off per year due to mental health concerns. Just as workplace safety is emphasized, making your workplace a psychologically safe place is just as important. It's up to all of us to actively play a role in reducing the stigma associated with mental illness. You have the opportunity to become a mental health leader in your workplace and set an example for others. To help you get started, here are some ways you can make your workplace more accommodating of mental illness.

Get educated

It can be hard to know whether someone's behaviour is a result of a difficult emotional phase, or a signal of mental illness. Learning the warning signs can help. Some common signs of mental distress include: obvious personality changes, problems coping with daily activities and challenges, difficulty making decision, concentrating or remembering things, and unprovoked emotional outbursts.

Pay attention

Develop an awareness of your employees' moods and emotional health. While we all experience highs and lows in life and work, consistent changes in behaviour can highlight a bigger issue. Are they missing deadlines? Do they seem excessively stressed or anxious? Pay attention to people's behaviours and new patterns you may see.

Listen and accommodate

If you notice that someone's behaviour has changed, be sensitive and listen to their needs. Do they need to take a few days off work? Do they need to see a counsellor to get them the help they need? Be compassionate, understanding, and nonjudgmental - mental illness is an illness like any other, treat it as such.

Raise awareness

It is often incredibly difficult for people to talk about mental illness, especially at work. If your workplace has a culture of mental health awareness and acceptance, this can make it easier to address. Consider organizing an event around the mental health, fundraise for the cause, or share your own story about mental health.

Be flexible

If an employee expresses that they are experiencing higher stress levels, work together with them to figure out strategies to deal with this. Can they work from home one day a week? Can their work day be slightly shorter? Can you extend a deadline once in a while? If you listen to what they need, you can probably work together to find a solution that is in everyone's best interests.

Set an example

Show everyone in your workplace that you are comfortable talking about mental health and illness. Correct people when they say harmful and hurtful things. If you have a story of how mental illness has affected your life, be brave and share it openly, and encourage others to do the same.

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And finally, seek outside help

If you aren't sure about how you can further improve your organization by making it more accepting and accommodating of mental health issues, it's okay to reach out for help. Talk to a counsellor about your goals, questions, and hopes for your organization and take advantage of their expertise to help you achieve them.

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