



Roundtable Member,
Fiona Ellis, AVP, Dealer
Relations at Canadian
Tire shares her advice for
keeping a team motivated
and confident after a
stressful restructuring.

Mentoring **MATTERS**

Q *My organization is going through yet another round of belt tightening and I had to restructure my team and let two people go. There aren't any other moves planned (that I know of) but I can tell this has been unsettling for the rest of my team. How can I get the team focused and reduce the worry that "they're next"?*

Organizational restructurings cause a lot of anxiety for employees. And rightfully so. However, restructurings are a part of business and are often necessary to improve the health of an organization. Senior executives don't decide to restructure lightly; a great deal of thought and consideration goes into the decision. Understandably, employees will have lots of questions about why it happened, and they will wonder: Are there more changes coming? Is my job at risk? These questions can be very difficult for us to answer.

As leaders, we need to be empathetic, respond truthfully and give employees a chance to process the changes before asking them to resume business as normal.

Preparation is critical.

If possible, prepare in advance for your conversation with employees. Put yourself in their shoes. Ask yourself, "What questions would I have?" Prepare answers to all those questions. The more preparation you do in advance, the more confident you will feel going into the meeting, which will foster a genuine and empathic discussion.

Sometimes we can be caught off guard by questions we have not thought of, so prepare a response for those questions too. You could say, for example, "That is a good question, I don't have an answer, but I will look into it and get back to you." Be careful not to make any promises that you can't keep.

Whatever context you are able to share can help in understanding and moving forward! If possible, provide employees with insight on what led to the need to restructure – new competitors, increasing operational costs, et cetera.

Stay close to your team.

Be present to support and connect with them. Pay attention to how the team seems to be feeling based on how they respond and interact with you. They may be grieving the loss of their colleagues,

so give them time and space to process those feelings before asking them to focus on moving forward. Be empathetic, while remaining supportive of the decision to restructure. You want to support the change, not inadvertently plant seeds of doubt with the team or undermine management's decision.

Be mindful.

Your team is going to be watching you very closely for any signs of further changes. If you must hold closed-door meetings and hushed conversations, try to do so away from the department or around your team.

Make sure you meet regularly with your direct reports. Now is not the time to cancel or move your update meetings. Use these meetings to ensure objectives are clear and to focus your team on moving forward. You can also use this time to find out how the rest of the team is doing. I love finishing my update meetings with one question: "What support do you need from me?" This does two things; it lets your employees know you are there to support them and it allows them to raise any issues with you. They may not want to talk about the restructuring anymore, but if they do, this gives them a window of opportunity to do so.

Host team meetings to review business objectives and progress to date. Celebrate successes and recognize team-member contributions. Use this as an opportunity to engage the team. Perhaps do a fun team-building activity or host a brainstorming session to seek their input on a business issue.

In summary, stay close to your team and communicate, communicate, communicate.

Be as open and honest as possible. As you continue to foster open, two-way communication, you will build trust with the team again, they will start to focus less on the restructuring and more on business objectives.



Fiona Ellis joined Canadian Tire in April 2018 as AVP Dealer Relations. Her team is responsible for the selection and training of new Dealers (independent owner/operators) for the Canadian Tire retail stores. Her team manages all Dealer Milestones from selection, through mobility and store changeovers, to retirement.

Before starting at Canadian Tire, Fiona worked for the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) in various Human Resources and Operations roles. Fiona has more than 10 years of Human Resources experience coupled with 6 years of Operations experience. Her operations experience included managing a 200 seat contact centre, providing operational support to all contact centres and retail stores and overseeing the day to day operations of the Road Side Assistance business.

Fiona managed the successful rollout of a new POS system to 700 contact centre and retail store employees. She drove employee engagement up in the contact centre and was recognized for ranking in the top 25% of companies. She introduced a fully remote workforce and AI platform in the contact centre which provided critical scalability for high call volume events, improving the customer experience.

Fiona is passionate about employee engagement, leadership effectiveness and customer experience. She believes in the importance of hiring for the right attitudes and behaviours to deliver exceptional customer experiences. Fiona completed The Roundtable for Leaders program in 2018.

When Fiona isn't working at the Tire, she enjoys shopping at the Triangle! Shopping is one of Fiona's favourite past times when she isn't watching her boys play hockey, hanging out with her friends or playing a round of golf with her husband.



Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.