



Roundtable Member,
Jaspreet Sandhu, Vice
President of Development at
The Corporation of Massey
Hall and Roy Thomson Hall,
shares strategies for staying
close to the needs of your
team during the pandemic.

Mentoring **MATTERS**



The anxiety and stress of the pandemic has taken its toll in my organization; we've been seeing a higher level of involuntary turnover. As a manager, what strategies can I put into place to stay close to the needs of my team, and to help create a better employee experience?

Jaspreet's Point of View

The world has seismically shifted in some ways we can see and others that we can't. The effects of this ongoing pandemic include anxiety and stress of teams, resulting in involuntary turnover. It's hard to provide stability for teams as a manager, when everything has changed, and continues to feel unsteady and uncertain.

The issues that we are seeing during this pandemic with team-members are not actually new issues; the cracks are just bigger, which means the stress and anxiety is bigger including childcare, domestic violence, racism and prejudice, access to technology. All of these heavy topics were always below the surface but now we're in a pandemic pressure cooker. As a manager, what we see from our employees (especially when it's remote) it is oftentimes limited. Our conversations tend to focus entirely on work, performance and output without attention to keeping the team feeling like a team and motivated.

It Starts with You

Well first, managers are human too and you're probably experiencing the same stressors as your team. When you fly on an airplane, the flight attendant instructs you to "put your oxygen mask on first before helping others." Leadership is the same. You can't help others if you aren't taking care of yourself. So, starting with refilling your own cup of energy can go a long way in preventing transmitting any of your own anxieties to the team. This way you can also be a steady and reliable leader for your team. Having a level of self-awareness is a good place to begin in being open and ready to connect with your team.

Find the In-Between Moments

Without those organic moments to connect with people, the lack of face-to-face interaction can be tricky. We don't have the same in-person dynamics where you can read body language with tell-tale signs of a shift in posture, pushing a chair away, and glance down. You also can't celebrate with your team over a coffee or lunch. And more importantly, it also means you don't get to catch up with someone while getting your tea or taking off your coat. All those in-between moments matter more than we realize. Those moments are the times where you get to know what's going on in your team member's lives and unless you're deliberately creating space for those conversations in your team meetings or one-to-ones, then you're not getting a full view of what's going on.

Finding Context Through Conversation

Some approaches I've recently employed is being sure I give my team member time to chat about whatever they choose to during our weekly check-in. I take the last 15 minutes but whether it's personal or work, there is a space for them to chat and open up. Another is starting our meetings with non-work-related conversations. It has not been a fun time, and it's okay for all of our conversations to not be upbeat. Being real and creating an authentic space have greater meaning during this time and space.

Be Human

During this time, you might be inclined to sidestep feedback or uncomfortable conversations with your team members — please don't! Just add a touch of empathy to your comments. Feedback is not positive or negative, it's cause-and-effect. If you're noticing issues in performance, don't wait until they are too big and too unruly; have those small but thoughtful conversations as they occur with a focus on coaching and empathy.

Recently, I had a team member who underestimated the time it took to produce deliverables which impact the rest of the organization. I knew she was having a hard time finding worktime at home. We chatted about it, we spoke about options and flexibility in working hours as she had a little one who needed some attention with home schooling and a partner working evening shifts. We spoke about the need for taking breaks and taking some time off. And most importantly, we had an open conversation about how things are going. We didn't ignore what was happening at home, and how that trickled into her work life.

In the end, take a moment, this pandemic will pass and I think we can keep our teams motivated and engaged if we recognize there are bigger issues going on, put them in context through conversation, and be human.



Jaspreet Sandhu, Vice President of Development at The Corporation of Massey Hall and Roy Thomson Hall, is passionate about building communities for high-impact not-for-profits. She has a proven track record as a transformational business change agent who applies creative thinking using a unique balance of business, marketing and leadership acumen. Throughout her career, Jaspreet has successfully led teams to tackle complex projects that required radical process and organizational culture changes. As a leader, she strives to gently push her team members outside comfort zones to enable their true potential.



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.