

LISTEN TO LEARN

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS AND STRESSORS OF YOUR TEAM

Finding ways to listen to the needs and stressors of your team is a critical leadership skill, and this is particularly true in professions where high levels of psychological and physical risks are involved. Ongoing awareness of what your team is experiencing provides opportunities to identify risks and intervene.¹ Your team wants to feel assured you have their backs. Listening to their concerns and working with them to solve problems is key.²

GENERAL TIPS

- Listen with the intent to understand rather than respond,³
- Encourage two-way dialogue and be open to ideas and suggestions from staff,⁴
- Ask open-ended questions (e.g., Who has a different view?),³
- Use varied methods that provide frequent opportunities for multiple levels of your organization's leadership to be visible and accessible to staff,^{2,4}
- Document your "listening strategy" to detail the different ways your organization, and you as a leader, are hearing from staff about concerning issues. This will help you to identify and act on any gaps in your approach.⁵



WAYS TO INCREASE VISIBILITY AND OPPORTUNITIES TO LISTEN:

Leadership walk-arounds: Leaders at all levels of the organization can visit each area they are responsible for, at a regularly-scheduled time, and engage with staff, typically using the same set of questions. It can help “pulse-check” how staff are doing and identify any concerns, information needs, or successes to highlight.^{2,6}

Town halls: When structured as a conversation, town halls can be used to hear from and address questions from a large number of staff. Depending on staff size, you may wish to have questions submitted in advance using a survey.^{2,7}

Listening sessions: Sessions can be designed so that leaders can listen to and understand the needs of the workforce at a particular moment in time.² These could be particularly helpful at key transition points such as, in the case of COVID-19, prior to the return to in-person operations.

Stress-pulse surveys: Surveys intended to inform leaders about workforce stress and its drivers, sent out at regular intervals, allow you to continuously assess staff needs as contexts shift, both related to the pandemic and other social, political, and environmental challenges.^{2,8}

After-action reviews: This is a method for reflection, helping leaders to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement for any given piece of work. These can occur at a frequency that makes sense for your context (e.g., after shift, after event, etc.). They foster trust, allow team members to check-in with one another, and provide an opportunity to “correct distortions or thoughts that can lead to self-blame and moral injury.”¹

TIP: Consider the communication and feedback mechanisms you already have that you can leverage, and practices happening in one area of the organization that you could expand.

REFERENCES

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- 8 Institute for Healthcare Improvement (2020). Listening: The Key to Workforce Support during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Blog Post. Accessed from: <http://www.ihl.org/communities/blogs/listening-the-key-to-workforce-support-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>.