A ATLAS INSTITUTE FOR
VETERANS AND FAMILIES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

DURING TIMES OF STRESS AND UNCERTAINTY

Effective communication is paramount during times of stress, uncertainty, and change. As a leader, being mindful that what and how you communicate can go a long way to ease anxiety and promote calm when people are feeling vulnerable.[1,2] Remember, people don't process information in the same way during times of stress, so your usual communication approach may need to be modified to fit current circumstances.[3]

COMMUNICATION SHOULD BE:

Genuine. Sterile communication rarely captures the humanity behind people's experiences and can be disengaging. Acknowledge the feelings your team may be experiencing and share with them, in a safe way, how you are feeling too.

Transparent. Be honest about what you know, but also what you don't. And when you don't know, make your team aware of how you will find out.[3-7]

Simple. When messages are overly complex or contain nuance, people may simplify what they are hearing and lose the meaning. Keeping your messages simple helps them to be heard accurately.[3]

Credible. Hearing information from multiple, trusted, and credible sources can help people move on from beliefs that are incongruent with current knowledge.[1,3]

Frequent. During times of stress and uncertainty, communication should be regular, repeated, and thoughtful.[4,6]

Accurate. Share an accurate assessment of what you know about the nature of the situation and how your organization will respond to it. This helps mitigate the risk of spreading misinformation.[1-3,5]

Anticipatory. Help your team understand what could come next.[4] If you are unsure, acknowledge the discomfort in the uncertainty.

Multi-modal. Find multiple ways to communicate information to your staff, and match the method with the message and the audience.[2] For example, difficult information may best be delivered in private by a trusted direct supervisor.

Actionable. Where possible, it can be helpful to offer people a positive course of action they can take to make circumstances more manageable.[3]

The thread running through all of the above principles is to show respect to those you are communicating with. Keep that at the heart of all messaging.[1]

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