

Standing tall

TIMES ASCENT
Potential beyond boundaries

IT IS A WELL REPORTED FACT THAT ORGANISATIONS ALWAYS KEEP A TAB ON HOW EMPLOYEES FEEL. HOWEVER, IT IS DURING THE TIME OF CRISIS WHEN THEY NEED TO STEP UP THE PLATE AND MAKE A SPECIAL EFFORT TO TAKE CARE OF THEM.

RAMIYA BHAS FINDS OUT WHAT ORGANISATIONS ARE DOING TO KEEP THEIR EMPLOYEES IN THE LOOP BY ENHANCING EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION

We don't need more stories or reports to tell us how the meltdown is affecting organisations across the globe. And during such times, organisations downsize and lay off employees. Though this does not occur in every organisation, it leads to chinese whispers, causing and leading to a sense of panic among the employees, as they are often kept in the dark about the situation. So what can organisations do during crisis to make sure that their employees feel at home? While parts of the world economy is crumbling, India Inc. is definitely doing its share to keep the employees in the loop and in turn are making sure the productivity and morale does not crumble.

A STEPPING STONE

History has taught us that crisis of any sorts is something that no organisation expects. While they usually do have a back up plan in place, organisations are known to be caught on the wrong foot, causing them to take drastic actions. So, what is the first step that an organisation takes to make employees feel a part of the system? Experts say the first step to handle anything, including a crisis, is to communicate.

"The first and foremost thing that an organisation needs to do is to understand the severity of situation and the possible impact due to this. Then, communicate the same to the employees using appropriate platforms and package it in such a way that employees get the right message and do not panic," explains Ulhas Aher, HR Head, Datacraft.

Subhinder Singh Prem, MD, Reebok India further adds that even while communicating the situation to the employees, organisations should make sure that they give complete information and not withhold any important information. "While communicating the situation, organisations should make the employees feel engaged and informed rather than speculating and adding to their worry. This leads to a participative atmosphere in the company; as it encourages open discussions and keeps the environment friendly," he opines.

Communication can happen anytime. And organisations have great ways to send out information about the various happenings in the

company. So why should they give special emphasis on this during a crisis? Ashim Kumar Banerjee, Director HR, Wanbury says that at times like these, employees may draw their own conclusions, which may lead to unwanted aftermath in the company. "Grapevine discussions and sceptics doing the damage should be curtailed right from the beginning. The communication should precede with revisiting the strategy and course correction in the operating plan," he explains.

MAKING IT WORK

Experts agree that communication is the way to go. And while they are doing their best to keep their employees in the loop, productivity is something that gets affected during such times. Reasons may be many, but work needs to be done. So what can organisations do to inspire at times like these? ABG Shipyard Ltd's, Head - Group HR, S K Dutt says "Initiatives such as lectures by veterans who have seen earlier business down cycles, inspiring leadership talks, addresses by eminent economists and clarifying role expectations are some of the measures that we have initiated," he adds.

- Deepak Mohla, MD, InspireOne says this is the time when organisations need to step up coaching processes for employees. "This is also the perfect time when organisations can upgrade skill sets of the employees, learn new processes and in turn, improve performance and increase productivity. Organisations need to coach their employees by holding regular meets and discussing the issues on an open forum," he explains.
- R.Venkatesh, Executive Vice President & Head Human Capital, Development Credit Bank (DCB) says an organisation needs to design a 'Retention Bonus Plan' for the business unit or function that could have a direct impact. "Also, it is imperative to continue team events and town halls," he adds.
- Pankaj Agarwal, Group CEO & MD, Mindteck (India) Ltd explains that the senior members of the Mindteck team, starting from team leaders to management team members, hold weekly meetings with their respective team members and give them details about the latest updates. "Other than these meetings, we have recently re-

launched our corporate website with advanced interactive tools like blogs to nurture two way communications with the society at a large and promote co-creation, thrive on free flowing ideas and suggestions. We also use our Intranet portal extensively as an internal communication tool. All kinds of updates/developments are shared on the Intranet on a regular basis. Employees can freely express their views/opinions on a certain issue using this platform. This acts as a platform for our employees to share their key concerns.

SURVIVAL MATTERS

Darwin's "survival of the fittest" theory rings true in today's corporate context. While downsizing becomes an integral part during crisis, not every one gets laid off. However, employees always have a lingering thought if they would be the next in line. This, in turn, hampers the morale of the employees, leading to the downfall of mental and emotional stability. So how do organisations make this situation work? Experts say that the existing employee workforce can be utilised in various ways to make them feel productive. One such way is to give additional responsibilities to them. "By giving additional responsibilities to existing employees, they get a sense of being useful, which in turn makes them feel productive," Prem explains further. This also helps in broadening of the skill sets of the employees and also provides on-the-job training for them, without incurring any additional costs.

V T Gopinath, Executive Vice President, Actis Biologics, opines that it is imperative to motivate employees' drive through various initiatives, including counselling sessions. "People are motivated not by what you think they ought to have but by what they want. Constant counselling and interaction with employees, both formal and informal will help to create a conducive atmosphere in crisis period," he adds. Mohla says that this is the perfect time for employees to think more on the terms of responsibility and accountability. "This is the time when this comes into action as this leads to more personal development and increases a sense of balance between the organisation and the employee," he concludes.

In the end, a crisis is the perfect time when employees come to know how well their organisations handle difficult situations. Though there are no guarantees about anything, organisations are doing all that they can to make their employees feel a part of the bigger picture. All you need to see is how well can your company handle this.

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