

Vitae Tip Sheet:

Dealing with Changes at Work and in Daily Life as COVID-19 Continues to Impact Us

As we approach autumn 2022, the impact of COVID-19 on Aotearoa New Zealand and all who live here continues to be felt. The levels of uncertainty that businesses owners, managers and staff have been experiencing for more than two years impacts on each of us differently.

Returning to work

With the recent removal of the vaccine pass mandate and some unvaccinated people being able to return to work, there are more changes happening in the workplace. This puts responsibility on managers to lay the foundation for new ways of working that minimise health risks, maintain staff wellbeing, and restore a caring culture.

The workplace

Some employers have asked staff to return to the workplace while others are requesting employees continue working from home. A number of organisations are encouraging staff to take a flexible approach and work some days onsite and some at home.

As a manager, you may have remained in the workplace throughout COVID-19 or you may have recently returned yourself. In either situation, leading your team in a changing work environment (as well as online) will be challenging due to the historic impact of COVID-19 on business and staff over the last two years and ongoing uncertainty.

Managers and team leaders may be required to implement protocols that are difficult for staff to follow and which could have a significant impact on your team. So, if there have been changes to health and safety guidelines or work processes in your workplace, it is important these changes are explained to staff as soon as possible.

Communicating with staff

Wherever possible, managers are encouraged to talk to staff before they return to work to get an understanding of any concerns or perceived barriers they may have. If staff have already returned to the workplace, it can be helpful to meet with each person individually to check on their well-being and address any issues.

Staff meetings to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the business and staff is important for keeping communication lines open. Meetings allow employees to express their views and enable managers to answer questions and get an overall feel for the level of staff comfort and engagement.

Work culture & values

During this time of ongoing change, your staff will be regrouping and there may be some strain between team members due to their different views and experiences of COVID-19. Therefore, it is crucial that managers start rebuilding team culture. This is also an opportunity to assess what's important for your team in terms of leadership, being future focused, setting clear expectations, communicating effectively, and delivering products or services in new ways.

Managers also need to make sure that staff treat each other with respect and work well together despite differences. If there are perceived divisions amongst staff relating to COVID-19, these need to be addressed quickly and effectively. It may be useful to set up a resource person or a pathway for facilitated conversations that can address any potential conflict that may arise.

Wellbeing at work

Make sure your expectations of yourself and others, in relation to work, are sustainable. You are in a leadership role *and* face the same workplace challenges as your staff. It is important that managers prioritise their own well-being by checking their stress levels and taking self-care seriously.

Self-care is about maintaining a good balance at work and home while building resourcefulness into your everyday life. Leading by example and putting self-care strategies in place for yourself and your team will set the scene for a cooperative, caring culture.

Research evidence confirms that when managers look after their own wellbeing, the people reporting to them experience a better quality of leadership. Here are some tips:

- Mindfulness – being attentive to what is going on without having an emotional response to it – helps prevent exhaustion and increases psychological reserves.
- Moderate levels of exercise buffer the negative effects of stress and increase your resilience.
- Getting enough quality sleep reduces the changes of feeling anxious or depressed which are markers of stress. If you're not sleeping well, talk to someone who can help.
- Stay positive and remember that your own well-being is critical for you *and* your team because it directly impacts on your ability to lead effectively.

Equip yourself

Ask yourself what experience and education you can bring to promoting and supporting overall wellbeing and productivity in your team. Think about whether you'd benefit from upskilling through the Manager Equip toolkit which is designed specifically to support managers and team leaders in their role of promoting wellbeing at work. The toolkit consists of workshops, clinics for one-on-one or group consultation, and coaching. The workshop relevant to this topic is 'Stress, personal self-care and resilience' – find more information [here](#).