Employee health, business success and public good are more interconnected than ever in the midst of a global pandemic. Because of this, a social responsibility lies with leaders from across industries to ensure the response minimizes negative human impact. Business leaders should spend the immediate future refining, or instituting, inclusive policies that benefit every employee—and persist for years to come.

Here are five things leaders should do now to ensure mid- and post-pandemic operations center around diversity, inclusion and compliance:

1. **Prioritize the emotional health and safety of every employee**

   Leaders should continue to encourage employees to place their needs (and the needs of the people they care for) first—and give them the flexibility to do so. This means institutionalizing corporate environments (like regular one-on-one calls with an executive or confidential online feedback forms) where people feel comfortable sharing any challenges or special circumstances impacting life or work.

   As the pandemic peaks and economies work to reopen, it's crucial for leaders to **prioritize** workforce safety, health and access to information right now. Leaders should think strategically, communicate clearly and act decisively to build trust and confidence among their workforces.
2. **Avoid practices that surface bias and lean into practices that deliver transparency**

As the world works to bounce back from the COVID-19 economic shockwave, it is incredibly important for business leaders to encourage collaboration and inclusion among employees. They should especially focus on helping workers sort through the complexities of balancing life with work and deliver compassion to people feeling the physical or mental health toll of social distancing.

In the process, business leaders should avoid alienating individuals during the course of virtual meetings, business communications or other remote corporate activities. Leaders should look for opportunities to gather feedback from staff across the organization—and act on anything in the path of delivering an inclusive environment.

3. **Host regular all-hands that cover changes to COVID-19-related policies and institutionalize radical transparency across organizations**

Business leaders should work directly with HR executives, team leads and other personnel-oriented teams to clearly communicate shifts or updates regarding available healthcare, remote working and corporate resources for employee engagement during all-hands conversations. These meetings should involve transparent and substantive corporate debriefs followed by open question and answer sessions accessible to all employees.

Moving forward, leaders should keep regular all-hands in place to ensure employees are not blindsided by massive operational changes, layoffs, pay docking or other measures that may need to happen in the future depending on company finances and global socioeconomic conditions.

4. **Prioritize investment in remote-friendly technologies and direct employees toward accessible digital resources**

Most companies are not in a position to give employees stipends to buy technologies like laptops and tablets. In the face of these dynamics, business leaders should make it a priority to direct every employee toward free and publicly available resources. They should also consider long-term investments in digital platforms as well as increasingly practical technologies (like augmented or virtual reality) that enable remote and essential workers to do jobs effectively.

Leaders should provide employee guidelines for work tech usage that encourage turning on computer or device video cameras during virtual meetings and keep remote work-related conversations to manageable lengths—25 minutes for a 30 minute time slot or 45 minutes for an hour-long meeting.

“A key predictor of low worry and high confidence is whether each employee believes, and experiences, that [their] organization is looking out for their best interest.”

GALLUP
The COVID-19 pandemic has irreversibly changed the way society approaches life and work. And from hospitality to healthcare to transportation to retail, the business world is faced with a common challenge to not only keep the lights on, but deliver sustainable models for lasting corporate success that prioritize the health and safety of people along with profits.

As people settle into at-home routines aimed at work/life balance and companies look for opportunities to deliver inclusive connectivity, it’s important for business leaders to encourage employee engagements that aren’t just dedicated to work—a Zoom happy hour or a meetup using the social app Houseparty, for example. As the world of work shifts from getting used to the new normal with remote—or, at the very least, socially distant—operations, business leaders need to step up today to ensure survival and success well into the future.

Prioritize remote operations that allow employees of all levels and abilities to work

Business leaders should continue to invest in digitizing workflows, moving teams to business communications platforms, connecting with clients or internal teams through video conferencing tools, and boosting access to virtual learning and workforce training platforms. Moving forward, business leaders should develop technology and tools with procurement plans that prioritize remote working conditions.

Be mindful to take the individual needs of every experience level and position with the company into consideration for remote functions. Leaders should also ensure that selected technologies and tools are compliant with industry regulations and accessible to as many employees as possible.

“I see the value in the context of... more thoughtful responses to COVID-19, a crisis which reflects the increasingly complex, interconnected nature of business today.”

LLOYD W. HOWELL, JR., CFO OF BOOZ ALLEN HAMILTON

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