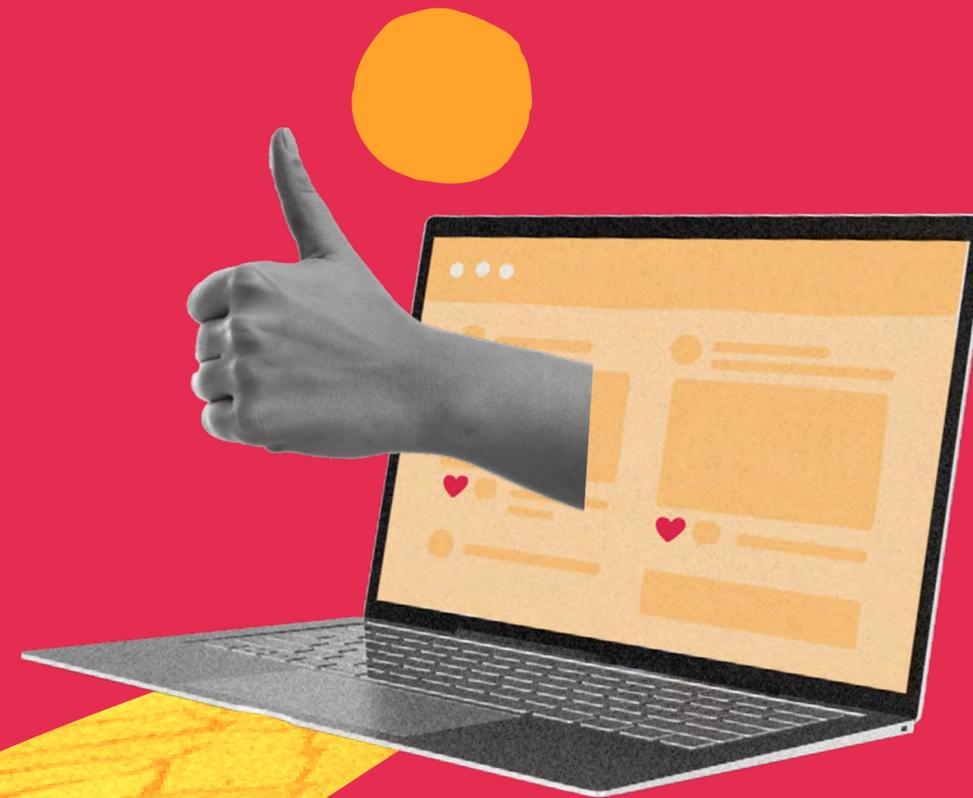


How HR can communicate with

EMPLOYEES DURING A CRISIS



Introduction	3
Honest communication in times of crisis	4
How can HR facilitate honest communication?	6
Tips for communicating with employees during a crisis	10
How should managers handle communication in times of crisis?	12
Identifying the signs of a team member in crisis	18
The role of HR in uncertain times	20

Introduction

According to the **World Health Organization**, stress, depression, and anxiety are leading causes of disability and absenteeism in the modern workplace. In the UK alone, regular workplace stress costs **13 million workdays** every year. This negative impact is even more pronounced during times of crisis, making the responsiveness of human resources departments vital to prioritizing and promoting wellbeing.

The global pandemic and recent economic downturns have shone a spotlight on the negative impact of stress on the productivity and mental wellbeing of teams across the world. This is reflected in workplaces, with almost **40 percent of American workers** worrying about their job security.

When a crisis hits, it's imperative to protect business systems, processes, and profits. But the most important asset to protect is your people.



Honest communication in times of crisis

During a crisis, the most important thing HR can do to help people manage their stress is to initiate an honest, comprehensive communication strategy. Open communication contributes to maintaining operational capacity and conveying unified messaging to relevant stakeholders, but most importantly, it supports a feeling of psychological safety.

During a crisis, HR leaders can foster a culture of honesty by encouraging open communication and initiating contact with their teams. Some ways to foster this culture include:

- Setting individual standing meetings
- Facilitating team-wide roundtables
- Creating opportunities for people to express concerns or challenges

- Working through problems with empathy and not with judgment
- Acknowledging team input

Honest communication is integral to both the ongoing health of your business and the psychological health of your people, and so it be the foundation of your HR crisis strategy.



At the outset of a crisis:

- Immediately initiate communication with management and team members.
- Outline the situation and deploy an initial, unified message to communicate with stakeholders.
- Share any pertinent and verified information.
- Let your team know that HR is available for any questions or concerns and that they should expect regular updates.
- Once an initial message is released, you can formulate your internal crisis communication to employees strategy based on company and team needs.

Prioritize psychological safety

Placing your team's wellbeing at the forefront of your crisis management strategy contributes to your business' sustainability and ensures operational continuity. HR plays a pivotal role in opening up effective lines of communication and creating a **culture** of honesty, even under the most difficult circumstances.

For example, during a financial crisis, many people may worry about job security and a wide range of further concerns brought about by economic downturns. And when companies experience financial difficulties, layoffs can start becoming more and more widespread.

While many people may be hesitant to approach HR about personal mental health struggles, even within the context of a greater crisis, maintaining practices that encourage open and honest communication will signal a willingness to help and **promote team engagement**.

Another way to prioritize psychological safety during a crisis is to encourage people to practice self-care. When people are under stress, it can be difficult to make enough time to do even the most basic things, like eating and sleeping well, going outside, and setting aside time to relax. Communicate wellbeing-focused reminders to promote both mental and physical health, and also to lighten the mood.

How can HR facilitate honest communication?

In times of uncertainty, rumors, assumptions, and misinformation can cause a lot of damage.

As the adage goes, the fear of falling can be worse than the fall itself. Crisis situations are unstable and in flux, and from one day to the next a business may have to pivot or restructure, leaving people feeling apprehensive.

If left unaddressed, this apprehension can spread and spiral, leading to less productivity and leaving people worse off. Acknowledging how difficult uncertainty can be and the toll it takes shows compassion and helps to open up lines of communication.

Once there is concrete information to share, it's important to do so swiftly and concisely. Even if the news isn't good it's better than not knowing, so communicating relevant facts and details will create more confidence and help quell anxiety.

Being transparent can be challenging when the information you are communicating is negative but, as an HR leader, effective communication during a crisis will position you as a source of truth. Rather than speculate, people will know they can seek out HR for information and guidance.

Another important strategy when communicating with people during a crisis is to let them know about available resources. Whether the challenge is personal, professional, or global, some people may need more assistance. Communicating what options they have and how to pursue them will reduce stress and provide people in distress with solutions.

During regular times, people may not be aware that HR is available to provide psychological support, so it's important to initiate communication and let them know that you are there to support them. Whatever the company policy is or what assistance programs are available, providing clear details about them will reduce anxiety and provide direction.

Once the foundation has been laid, there are a number of ways that HR can ensure that they continue to communicate openly and honestly, and provide adequate, ongoing support.

1. Confidentiality

When faced with a crisis, transparency is key. But unless confidentiality is guaranteed, it's unlikely that people will feel comfortable sharing challenges. Left bottled up, these challenges will eventually affect performance and company morale.

The role of HR in crisis management is to support people, but this doesn't mean ignoring professional boundaries. Avoid prying or asking too many personal questions if someone approaches you with a problem. Instead, focus on offering resources and workplace accommodations.

2. Open-door policy

When a crisis hits, one of the first messages HR should communicate is an open-door policy.

Once you've laid out your organization's crisis management strategy, encourage your team to come to you with any questions or concerns. Be there for your team and listen to your people when they approach you. Giving people an opportunity to vocalize their issues and concerns will preempt the spread of confusion and anxiety.

You can also make sure that HR leaders are available during difficult times to help keep a finger on the pulse of morale. With a better understanding of what team members are going through, HR can assist management to strategize effective solutions benefitting both your team and the company as a whole.

Consider sending short **anonymous surveys** at regular intervals to understand how people are weathering the crisis. Include questions that assess whether they understand the organization's strategy and their role in its successful execution, how they feel they are being managed, and whether they feel they can approach team leaders when facing challenges. You can also ask them about any areas that need improving. Having this data at your fingertips will help you respond to oversights or gaps in your crisis management strategy.

3. Navigating between team members and managers

A company in crisis will often adopt an all-hands-on-deck mentality. Your team members, however, may find this unmanageable and, if the workload is not adjusted, will increase the likelihood of burnout. HR can mitigate this by navigating between management and team members and issuing clear guidelines to **protect their work-life balance**.

For example, set policies about how long in advance people must be notified of meetings and when your team is expected to be available. Encourage managers to stay flexible and focus on productivity instead of working hours, and let people cut commuting and gas costs by offering a schedule that enables them to **work from home**. Another way to indicate your commitment to work-life balance is by letting people block off “family time” on their schedules.

HR can strengthen communication between managers and team members by training managers to interact with people during crises. This includes how to implement reasonable goals and schedules, how to initiate communication with a team member in distress, and how to encourage self-care.

Creating **useful guides** and toolkits that emphasize team building and healthy communication can assist managers in implementing effective crisis management strategies. People should turn to HR if they require assistance with management, whether there is a conflict that needs mediating or a team member needs guidance on how to approach their manager with a specific request or concern.



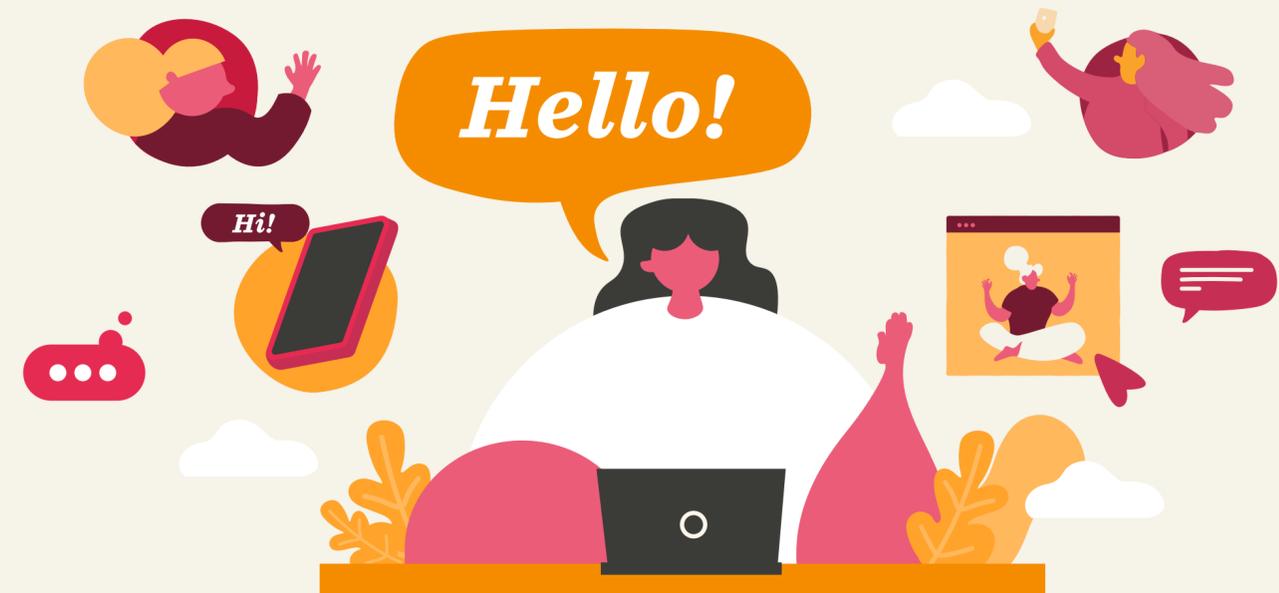
4. Instituting team member assistance policies

Show your team that the company is committed to their wellbeing by offering a robust **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**. These programs offer free, anonymous mental health counseling to anyone in distress. If possible, expand benefits during a crisis and encourage people to communicate what additional assistance they feel is needed. Clearly explain what is offered in your company's EAP or other services, including providing links or phone numbers to make reaching out easier.

Here are some benefits to consider including in your crisis management strategy:

- Sick leave
- **Compassionate leave**
- Work from home
- Reduced copays
- Mental health support
- Subsidized loans

These are some concrete ways you can use to support your team during a crisis that will leave a lasting impression. Studies have found that EAP services, including counseling, improve **occupational functioning**, and encourage engagement and team retention.



Tips for communicating with employees during a crisis

It's been said before but it's worth saying again:

In a crisis, HR communication to employees is key.

With that in mind, HR leaders with strong communication skills and a plan in place will be far better equipped to weather the storm.



Here are some tips on communicating with your team during a crisis:

It's been said before but it's worth saying again: In a crisis, HR communication to employees is key.

With that in mind, HR leaders with strong communication skills and a plan in place will be far better equipped to weather the storm.

Here are some tips on communicating with your team during a crisis:

- **Silence is a no-go.** At no point should your team members be in the dark during a crisis. Even if your organization hasn't put together a proper response to relay to everyone, you should at least let people know that things are being put in place and you will get back to them with something concrete as soon as possible.
- **Be forthcoming with information.** Your team members may not feel comfortable asking directly for information.

So, create easy and accessible avenues of communication that can quickly provide employees with accurate and relevant information.

- **Address job security concerns.** With many companies looking for ways to cut down on costs, many people are understandably worried about job security. Reassuring team members of the security of their positions can go a long way toward keeping those concerns to a minimum. However, if need be, let them know as soon as possible to allow them to have a clear view of the situation and start planning for the future.
- **Share your strategy.** When uncertainty is in the air, sometimes the best way to address it is to provide a plan for the future. Try emphasizing what is currently going well for the company, what the short- and long-term plan is, and praising standout performers who are helping drive business to help raise morale.

How should managers handle communication in times of crisis?

Managing people during a crisis can be challenging. To strike the fine balance between pushing productivity and supporting your team, the first step is to communicate.

In practical terms, this means sending out an email or internal newsletter that openly outlines the situation and the company's strategy to overcome it. Your communication should:

- Offer concise information about how the workflow will be impacted, how tasks will be delegated, and what the expectations are in terms of output.
- Set a schedule for regular communication with a team or individuals.
- Explain what provisions are being made to accommodate your people in distress – for example, flexible hours or time off.
- Provide contact information and details about EAPs or other forms of support.



In addition to communicating information, managers should communicate with empathy. Emphasize that wellbeing is the company's first concern and encourage any team member who needs additional guidance to ask for it freely. Keep communication frequent and open to ensure that nobody is left out of the loop.

It can be tempting to cut salaries and bonuses when disaster strikes, but, if financially feasible, offer your people bonuses. It's a great motivator and will alleviate the anxiety of income uncertainty. Another possibility to motivate and reassure people is to offer **learning and development** opportunities to expand skill sets in case of restructuring. Keeping valuable team members will propel your organization's future success when the storm blows over, so it's vital to manage teams with compassion and agility.

Managing a team member who's having trouble working

People have different circumstances and personalities that will affect how they handle the workload during a crisis. While some people will quickly adjust to the new reality, others may struggle. At the outset of a crisis, clearly outline what your expectations are in terms of work tasks, timelines, and meetings so that your team has an opportunity to regroup and plan accordingly.

Offer as much flexibility as possible and make sure to detail any assistance programs that are available. If it's feasible, paid leave, reduced hours, or additional flexibility will go a long way toward demonstrating care and support.

During a crisis, there are a few things managers can do to maintain open lines of communication with team members who may be struggling:

- **Stay connected with regular calls**, both with the team and one-on-one, where participants are encouraged to discuss how they are coping during the crisis. These don't need to be formal meetings; casual hangouts can foster deeper and more meaningful communication.
- **Communicate with honesty and authenticity.** Managers are human too, and helping people see that will provide comfort and camaraderie. Of course, this isn't the time to overshare; just do enough to demonstrate **empathy**.
- **Be flexible about work hours, deadlines, and working from home** (within reason, of course). If paid leave is a possibility, offer it to those who you see are having trouble working.
- **Maintain healthy, respectful boundaries** with your team. Sending messages after work hours or insisting on videoconferencing with your remote team members is invasive and may cause unnecessary anxiety.

Once everyone has had a few days to acclimate, take stock of the situation. Assess productivity, collaboration, and morale, and make adjustments as needed to ensure that your people are keeping up without suffering undue stress. Speak with your team members individually as well as in group meetings to facilitate open communication and encourage those who may be struggling to access counseling or health services.

The goal here should be to find workable solutions—not to alienate a team member in distress. If someone continues to struggle and is unable to complete necessary tasks, this may be a good time to involve HR to strategize a long-term plan.



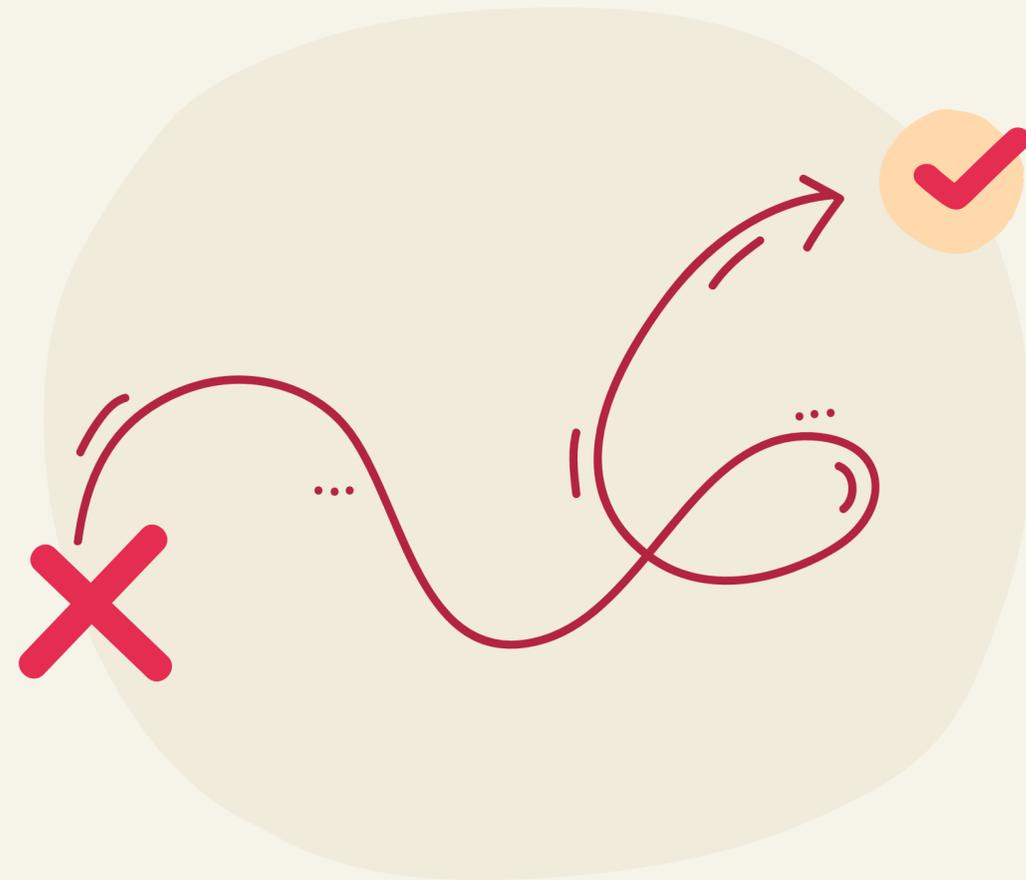
1. Readjust expectations

When a team member is unable to manage their workload due to the effects of a crisis, sit down with them and take the time to discuss all of their current tasks. Show empathy and discuss what the person believes they can handle and adjust expectations accordingly. It's important to let the team member communicate in a supportive environment; otherwise, they may feel pressured to assume more responsibilities than they can actually manage.

Once there is clarity about their workload, redistribute tasks to prevent gaps in business operations. Covering someone else's projects will likely put more weight on the shoulders of fellow team members, so make sure they are rewarded for their dedication.

With an interim plan in place, check in regularly with your team to understand whether things are working well and adjust as needed. If these changes are likely to impact clients or other departments, communicate what measures are being taken to ensure continuity and productivity.

It's important to set clear timelines for making adjustments and discussing the next steps with anyone in distress. At every interval, communicate your expectations, including any specific goals or tasks the team member is expected to accomplish. Not only will this promote continued engagement, but it will also give them a sense of direction and a sense of psychological safety.



2. Create a performance plan

Once concrete timelines and expectations are discussed, **develop a performance plan** that aligns with the individual's and the organization's needs. Performance plans are an effective management tool promoting mutual understanding and honest communication between managers and team members toward the shared goal of organizational success.

Despite challenges, managers need performance data in order to keep the business moving, even during a crisis. Utilizing performance plans to evaluate how a team member in crisis is functioning will help managers make critical decisions about their future at the company and take any necessary measures to retain a talented team member going through a rough patch.

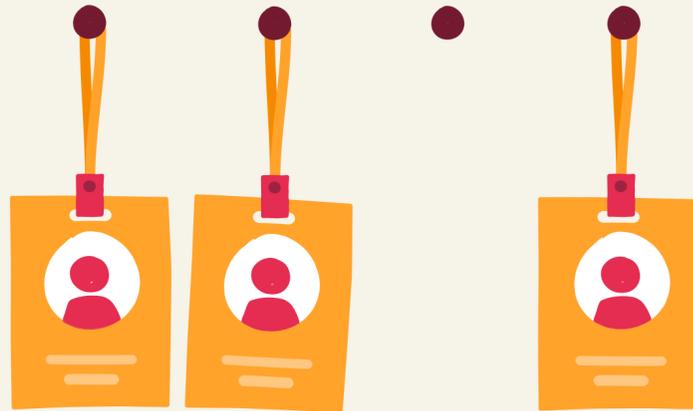
In normal times, evaluations help to identify those people who can benefit from additional development and those whose performance is stellar. During a crisis, they can help you to identify the impact of a crisis on individuals and guide your assistance strategies.

Another benefit of performance plans during a crisis is that they provide an opportunity for constructive, solution-oriented communication with anyone who is struggling with their workload.



Can you ethically fire a team member in a crisis?

If a team member continues to struggle with their performance despite ongoing intervention and assistance, it may be necessary to consider terminating their employment. In a crisis, the compassionate and correct thing to do is to keep people on the payroll for as long as possible; however, this may not always be an option. For a company in dire financial straits, letting a struggling team member go may be necessary, especially if the situation is impacting other team members or clients.



It's difficult to fire someone who is already anxious or distressed, but if it's necessary then it should be done as kindly as possible. Here are some ways to soften the blow:

- Provide them with ample notice so that they can make arrangements.
- Give them a generous severance package.
- Offer recommendation letters or to serve as a reference for future employment opportunities.
- Encourage them to continue accessing any assistance programs offered by the company until they leave.

Firing a team member in crisis is an absolute last resort. The best way to avoid getting to that point is to identify the individual in crisis early and initiate interventions as quickly as possible.

Identifying the signs of a team member in crisis

In times of crisis and in times of plenty, employers should keep an eye out for anyone who may be struggling.

Signs of distress vary from person to person. But usually, if a person displays noticeable behavioral changes or begins to show inconsistent performance, they may need additional support or guidance.

Of course, in a catastrophic situation such as during a global recession, it's safe to assume that everyone is in crisis.

In such situations, the best plan is to be fully prepared.

Effective human resources departments are equipped to initiate crisis management protocols and communicate effectively when disaster strikes. While team confidence and trust is vital under normal market conditions, it's even more essential in a crisis. Without it, morale drops, and there's a greater risk to a team's wellbeing.

While a global crisis will likely affect most people, some may struggle more than others. Identifying someone in distress early can stop a downward spiral before it accelerates.

One thing to look out for is a sudden drop in performance. This may be indicated by reduced productivity, but also by more mistakes or accidents. A team member in crisis may struggle with decision-making and planning, resulting in disruptions to workflow. Or they may not be motivated or **engaged** to the same degree that they were previously.

You may also notice that the person is missing meetings, not actively participating, or that they have a negative attitude. When someone is struggling, they may bring that tension to work, causing conflicts between team members or even disciplinary issues.

You may even find that the team member is putting in longer hours but with less output, or that they are struggling with timekeeping. Many of these signs are subtle and not directly performance related, so use intuition and common sense to identify a person in crisis.

Remember, if something “feels off,” don’t brush it off.



The role of HR in uncertain times

In the modern workplace, **the role of HR** has expanded to include a greater focus on wellbeing. During a crisis, HR becomes vital to how an organization weathers the storm.

During such times, human resources leadership must support their teams and create a culture of compassion and communication.



10 ways that you can carry your organization and its people through a crisis:

1. Develop a rapid response, honest communication strategy that puts people first.
2. Position HR as a source of truth to prevent the spread of misinformation.
3. Check in with management and team members to identify what's working and what needs adjusting.
4. Communicate what resources and assistance are available to team members experiencing challenges or stress.
5. Utilize performance data and surveys to assess morale and productivity.
6. Promote flexibility and agility, including retraining or aligning valued team members to new roles.
7. Practice generosity by relaxing policies for work hours, paid leave, and remote working.
8. Communicate positivity and support, including encouraging people to practice self-care.
9. Train managers on how to identify team members in crisis and manage them effectively.
10. Create open-door opportunities for people to communicate freely and honestly about their concerns and fears.

Some crises are impossible to anticipate or plan for, but how a crisis is managed will make the difference between organizational recovery and collapse. HR's role during these times is to guide policies and strategies that prioritize **wellbeing** and foster open and constructive communication.



Meet Bob

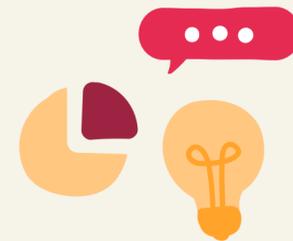
An HR platform such as Bob offers a one-stop-shop for all things people. It sits at the center of your HR ecosystem, is fully customizable, and grows with your organization.

In a short time, Bob can be deployed to enable communication, collaboration, and connectivity that drives stronger engagement, productivity, and business outcomes.



For HR

It automates many common processes, it delivers automation of many common processes, allows greater oversight and visibility of the business, and centralizes all people data in a secure, user-friendly environment.



For managers

It provides access to data and insights to help them lead more effectively and streamline processes.



For employees

It's the tools and information they need to connect, develop, and grow throughout their journey.

Now is the time to make smarter decisions
when it comes to your people and organization.



To learn more about HiBob and our data-driven
tools, get in touch with us at contact@hibob.com

SCHEDULE A DEMO



NEW YORK
205 Hudson St.
New York, NY 10013

LONDON
Boundary House
91-93 Charterhouse St.
London EC1M 6HR, UK

AMSTERDAM
Weesperstraat 61-105
1018 VN Amsterdam
Netherlands

SYDNEY
Redlich, Level 65
19 Martin Place
Sydney NSW 2000

TEL AVIV
28 Ben Avigdor St.
Tel Aviv 6721848