

Find the post-pandemic **SILVER LINING**

HR Managers can instill hope in employees now that we've emerged from the pandemic.

Saying that it has been a difficult last few years almost feels like a comedic understatement at this point. I know I didn't have a pandemic listed on my 2020 bingo card when planning ahead for all of the plot twists that life could throw at me. Yet, here we are over two years later, and the reality is that the collective fear and anxiety we've all been experiencing (not to mention everything that's happening currently on a global level from global warming to gun violence and war) is valid and terrifying. As much as it's been said, it's actually true: we're living through unprecedented times. No one is fully equipped to handle everything that we're all now required to handle, and it's undeniably taking a toll on all of us.

This is precisely the moment when our connections with others are more important than ever. From personal relationships to even coworkers and employees, we all need others to lean on for support. And it's hard knowing that people we care about are struggling while feeling like there isn't anything substantive we can do to help alleviate their suffering. For HR Managers, making sure that your employees have the support they need comes with the job. And for most of us (managers and company leadership alike), we genuinely care about the well-being of our staff. So knowing that we, ourselves, are mentally and emotionally maxed out, how can we be the light in the storm that our teams currently need?

While it might feel endlessly exhausting—like plugging a leak in the lifeboat, while three more spring up—and many may feel helpless, the truth is that we're stronger together, and using effective communication strategies can allow us to be the support systems that we and our teams need to be for one another. We all know that encouraging our employees to seek support when they need it and having open lines of communication available at the workplace are important, but it's not enough to simply know that the support is there, we also



FROM THE US

BY ERIC YAVERBAUM
CEO of Ericho Communications

need workers to take advantage of it. This is precisely where empathy, honesty, and positivity (hint: all key aspects of good communication) come into play.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

I've said this before and I'll say it again—good communication starts with empathy. Really listening to how other people are doing and what their specific, individual fears and concerns are is vital. While it might be easy to assume you know how others are feeling or what they're going through, really listening could shed some light and even help you get to know them better as people. The simple truth is that we all have fears that we're battling on a daily basis and attempting to understand these with empathy and compassion is far more useful than judgment and criticism. Especially during these increasingly unpredictable times where it often feels like we're living in an upside-down mirror world; the world might look eerily similar, but the rules of the game have changed.

What we don't want is for our employees to be suffering in silence because they don't feel supported at work, you know, the place most of us spend a great deal of our lives. This is where effective communication (backed by action) comes into play. Make sure that your policies for employees who are struggling are rooted in compassion and empathy. That is the best way to really put your money where your mouth is and to be able to show your employees that you genuinely care for them. Make sure that therapy is a covered benefit and even offer some extra PTO for employees who need it (including and especially for mental health reasons). Lastly, make sure that your employees know that there's no shame in needing help, not only now, but in the future as well.

Sometimes, we all need a reminder that it's okay to be human and that the tough times can be what make the good times that much better. It's in the toughest moments that strong bonds, trust, and loyalty are forged. While it might feel like this difficult time is unending, the truth is that we're already in a much better place than we were at the beginning of the pandemic with safe and effective vaccines that are widely available. We've all figured out how to adapt and make it this far, and there's no reason why we can't keep moving forward together towards a more positive future. Our teams are always stronger together.

THE POWER OF POSITIVITY

I want to be clear, what I'm discussing here



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isn't what's known as toxic positivity. The truth is, no one is, nor should be, peppy and positive all the time, and we certainly cannot expect our employees to be able to breeze through challenges, loss, and grief without it impacting their work. We are all people first, and assuming we can all compartmentalize our personal life without it bleeding into our professional life is an unrealistic expectation. If anything, our workforce should be celebrated for having successfully moved forward through these difficult times. Despite all of the fear and uncertainty, people have shown that they are resilient and capable of adapting to any circumstance. This should be our focus moving forward—how strong and resilient we are as a collective and as a team and the things we can accomplish when we support one another.

HR Managers represent some of the most visible and accessible company leadership for most employees. Aim to be that elusive beacon of hope within your organization. A reminder and light in the storm of uncertainty that we are a team and that together, we can get through this. Although life is unpredictable right now and the future can appear bleak, we can not only survive, but we can in fact thrive and be better for it. In truth, we've already weathered the worst of the storm and have managed to keep going, so as long as we stick together, there's no end to what we can achieve. Hold onto that. ■

ERIC YAVERBAUM is CEO of Ericho Communications, a communications, media, and public relations expert with over 40 years in the industry, having co-founded Jericho Communications and served as President from 1985 until its successful sale in 2006. Eric has worked with a wide-range of top-of-their-industry clients, including Sony, IKEA, Progressive Insurance, Domino's, Beachbody, H&M, and fitness guru Jack LaLanne. Eric is also a bestselling author who literally wrote the book on public relations – the industry-standard bestseller *Public Relations for Dummies* – as well as six other titles, including *Leadership Secrets of the World's Most Successful CEOs* (with over a million copies sold). He will be recounting his lifelong ability to look towards the bright side for his upcoming book *The Audacity of Silver Linings*, set to release in 2022. He is a regular TV pundit, and his expert commentary has been featured in Forbes, Entrepreneur, The Washington Post, The New York Times, HuffPost, CNBC, MSNBC, Fox Business, Inc., and PR Week, among others.