



CARING FOR EMPLOYEES

The pandemic-induced crisis has highlighted the companies that really cared for their employees and those that only pretended to do so. The reputation of the latter will deteriorate along with their value in the labour market. Below are our tips on how to avoid damage to the employer brand during the challenging times.

Bird, a Silicon Valley-based startup providing electric scooter rental services, has recently achieved notoriety for inviting a third of its employees – more than 400 people – to a Zoom meeting to announce their dismissal in just two minutes. After that, their accounts in the Slack corporate messenger were disabled.

TODAY, ANY COMMUNICATION NEEDS TO BE PROACTIVE, WITH THE COMPANY AND THE MANAGEMENT
ADHERING TO PRINCIPLES OF TRANSPARENCY AND INTEGRITY

The incident made headlines in the media across the globe. It came as a shock that an exemplary Silicon Valley startup, which became the fastest ever to rise to unicorn status in 2018, turned out to be a model of unethical and careless attitude to people.

The current situation, which became a crash test for many, also proved to be a catalyst for some companies. Many entrepreneurs started thinking about the importance of HR communications. We at Electric Brand Consultants have long been involved in providing advice on integrated communications. Having monitored the market for the last two months, we have put together a number of tips that can come in handy for most of the companies today.

Tip 1: provide opportunities to show initiative

Offer your employees a more entrepreneurial approach to work – let them feel that you are all in the same boat and that everyone is able to make a difference and help find a way out of the trouble. Encourage employees to develop new business lines and take on more responsibility for the existing ones, offer a bonus or a share in future revenue.



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Internet giant Amazon is probably the key beneficiary of the coronavirus crisis. The company managed to rapidly expand its capabilities and benefited from the lockdown measures. It is quite possible that the pillar behind Amazon's resilience was the last year's initiative as the company offered its delivery employees to launch their own business in the field and provided them with an initial investment of USD 10,000, along with a three-month pay as a one-time allowance.

Tatyana Chernysheva, Vice President for Human Resources at MTS, also speaks about the way employee initiative is helping the company: "We continue to develop Garage, an in-house innovation incubator that allows any employee to go ahead with their business ideas together with MTS. Last year, we received 72 ideas, with four of them already at the pilot stage."

Tip 2: support volunteering

If your employees have some time to spare, create opportunities for them to work on charity initiatives together, which can be a rewarding activity in isolation and strengthen their bond with the company and the team even when there is no actual work to do.



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As one example, SIBUR facilities have established Family Support Centres. According to Artur Bortsov, Corporate Communications Director, volunteers from among the Company's employees help the shift workers' families to buy and safely deliver food, medicines, household chemicals or pet products, and to fix urgent problems at home, such as a broken socket. A request for assistance can be filed to the Centre by a shift worker or their family using e-mail, hotline, or website request form.

Tip 3: boost the morale

While employees are staying in a confined space and spend the whole day in front of their computer display, think about their peace of mind. Maintain a day schedule, offer joint yoga or meditation classes via video conferencing, and try to introduce entertainment activities and in-house flash mobs.



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The abundance of flash mobs of any kind is probably the one feature of today that will be remembered. Internet campaigns that allow people from different locations to experience a sense of unity have been more in demand than ever during social isolation.

EF, A COMPANY WITH OFFICES AND SCHOOLS IN 116 COUNTRIES, LAUNCHED ITS HELLO DANCE CHALLENGE TO BOOST MUTUAL SUPPORT

For example, EF, a company with offices and schools in 116 countries, launched its Hello Dance Challenge to boost mutual support. A song was written and choreographed specifically for the #efhellodance challenge. Alisa Arinovich, the company's Product Marketing Manager, says that thousands of employees from different countries have already started recording their EF Hello Dance videos, sharing them on Instagram, TikTok and Facebook to provide unprecedented coverage for the company's communications.

Pavel Chernookiy, Project Manager at the Brandquad IT company, said that their team launches new flash mobs on a weekly basis: they started with a contest to choose the most unusual workplace before proceeding to a challenge to recreate famous paintings and posters along the lines of #isoisolation, a trend in the Russian internet. Coming next was a competition to recreate shots from movies using whatever is available at home.

SIBUR opted for a more serious approach: together with its partner SOGAZ, it launched an online mental health support service. Facing the threat of emotional burnout for employees working irregular hours from home, the Company decided to introduce new practices.

Coca-Cola HBC Russia also focused on the work-life balance of its people. According to HR Director Irina Petrova, one of the new moves to support employees was free individual sessions with the company's certified coaches. They are intended for helping people to cope with the stress they may be experiencing.

Tip 4: invest in education

Now that many people are taking the opportunity to learn something new, it is the right time to reflect on the best training for your employees and come up with programmes for them. You can also encourage them to start teaching: if someone has the ambition, it is now easier than ever to fulfil it by sharing experience within the team or presenting your very own training programme.



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SIBUR FACILITIES HAVE ESTABLISHED FAMILY SUPPORT CENTRES. VOLUNTEERS FROM AMONG THE COMPANY'S EMPLOYEES HELP THE SHIFT WORKERS' FAMILIES TO BUY AND SAFELY DELIVER FOOD, MEDICINES, HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS OR PET PRODUCTS, AND TO FIX URGENT PROBLEMS AT HOME

Many companies today have provided public access to their in-house online training courses, previously available for employees only. The trailblazers were courses on remote team management and working from home, offered by Sberbank, Skyeng, and Beeline. They shared tips and know-how, aiming to show their corporate culture from the inside for people looking for answers and eager to learn how things work. This helped the businesses to communicate their values and management practices while also improving brand recognition in the market, including among their employees of their competitors.

Many companies provided access not only to courses dedicated to remote working, but also to a wide range of online training. This also shows brand strength, enhances interest from potential job candidates, and raises awareness in general.

Tip 5: show that you are a team

Project a sense of unity: it is important for the employees to understand that the company's owners and managers are all in the same position, have respect for employees' concerns, and are ready to share the burden of the crisis. Maintain open and honest communication at all times and accept trade-offs that can ease tension within the company.



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“The COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the transformation in our HR policy: today, any communication needs to be proactive, with the company and the management adhering to principles of transparency and integrity. Employees expect their employer to be sharing clear information as quickly as possible,” said Maria Konovalova, PR Advisor to the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Metafrax Group.

Severe inequality at such times is often a cause of dissatisfaction among employees and people at large. It is hard to say whether Elon Musk, whose wealth was estimated by Forbes at USD 38.9 bn as at 29 April, is thinking about it now. Musk is on the verge of receiving the biggest pay of his life – USD 600 m – amid cuts in wages at his Tesla, which amounted to 10–30% depending on employee position. Musk's further decisions may have a long-term impact on the company's HR brand.

Tip 6: know how to let go

If you cannot support your team, try to make the situation easier for everyone and do everything you can to appreciate each employee's contribution and help them get a new job if necessary. You can write a short story about each of them and post it on social networks to publicly express your appreciation and provide a reference for a potential employer.



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For example, Bash Today, an IT company and the largest aggregator of event venues, recently saw its revenue fall to zero. Despite attempts to diversify the business through IT development services and online events, the company was unable to continue paying all of its employees. Given the circumstances, the CEO decided to search for new jobs for his people.

“First of all, I told everyone it wasn't over,” he said. “The crisis will end, and we will win back the positions we lost and will be back together again. However, I asked everyone to update their CVs, posted references on Facebook and shared them in Facebook and Telegram groups for other entrepreneurs to see, and wrote to some of my friends who might be in need of new talent. We have already managed to find a job for nearly everyone.”

COVID-19 brings major changes, and the right personnel decisions may not be so obvious. However, if the employer is committed to openness and transparency and pays attention to the needs of its employees, the company is bound to emerge from the crisis with strong team morale and renewed energy to work in a post-COVID world.

Source: Sekret firmy (<https://secretmag.ru/selfie/kak-vesti-sebya-s-sotrudnikami-v-krizis-6-sovetov-dlya-rossiiskogo-biznesa.htm>)