

Letters to Leaders, Volume 8

Caring for those who care for patients and the community: Moving toward a new normal

By: Lindsey Greene-Upshaw, Engagement Director at Lucania Partners



As leaders, we are responsible for protecting our staff, both as individuals, and within the context of their jobs. We explored how we might care for those who care for patients and the community during crisis in [Letters to Leaders - Volume 1](#).

This Letter aims to expand on the same theme as we transition from crisis to recovery. So, what are the most important considerations when developing or refining an existing staff care plan, one that acknowledges and rewards the risks that our workers have, and will likely continue, to experience?

Key considerations for developing a staff care plan:

- **Practice active communication.** As leaders, we must share environmental and organizational challenges with our staff and solicit their insights in order to demonstrate respect for the work that they do, and to fully understand their needs now and into the future.
- **Build Organizational Capability.** Organizational capability is a function of human capability. The better and more holistically we care for our staff, the more potential they will have to develop new skills and apply their talents, by extension improving the organization's ability to serve.

Practice active communication. As leaders, it is our responsibility to engage our staff. This may be accomplished, in large part, by active listening, working to address their concerns, and outlining a clear plan forward. Where there is not clarity, leaders must work to create it in order to effectively enable their teams.

We must focus on improving transparency, reducing complexity, and casting vision to mitigate uncertainty. Although this is challenging in our current unpredictable environment, it is essential to address the fundamental needs of staff.

According to [Gallup](#), the four needs of followers, or of our own staff, are trust, compassion, stability, and hope. Consistent, clear communication helps demonstrate attentiveness and address these needs. A clear plan forward and honesty about what is unknown helps our staff trust us, and a well communicated plan helps provide a sense of stability and hope, even if there are still some unknowns.

Effective communication is not just an "output." As leaders, we must also carefully consider communication "inputs", meaning feedback from our staff. Valuing these "inputs" helps our staff feel that they have been heard.

Leaders must solicit feedback and manage course corrections to address their team's needs and build confidence. Properly executed, this is marked by continual communication to determine the level and nature of their needs.

Tactically, ongoing communication may include daily huddles, use of assessment tools, or engaging in conversation with front line staff directly. These exchanges must be holistic in nature and include active listening and sharing. More and more, leaders must pay particular attention to potential mental health needs and resources, in order to fully support and protect their staff.

Front Line Focus

This week, as we have in past weeks, we'd like to recognize healthcare heroes at RWJ Barnabas Health in New Jersey. An anonymous individual wrote in chalk in front of their Bayonne hospital "heroes work here". RWJ Barnabas turned it into the [#HeroesWorkHere campaign](#) for the public to join. To show your support, you can personalize a message on a yard sign, provided online by the hospital, and post it on lawns or windows. We would like to join and add our thanks and recognition for the sacrifices made on behalf of patients and families. Thank you!

Build Organizational Capability

Building organizational capability means building the capability of each and every member of our team and staff, across all dimensions and the systems that support them, to help ensure the total health and well-being of the individual and the organization.

Most acute at the moment are mental and physical well-being, often in the context of one's financial security and job-related stress. These factors impact staff directly and will be felt even after operations trend toward a new normal. To address some of these issues, the [American Medical Association \(AMA\) recommends the following](#):

- creating a resilient organization;
- supporting physicians and other health care workers during a crisis; and
- learning from a crisis to be an even more resilient and effective organization in the future

The AMA suggests that successful organizations take a proactive approach to managing crisis, by making regular investments in employee wellness and crisis planning. During a crisis, we must support frontline workers by monitoring their stress-levels and needs, executing the crisis management plan, and adjusting to meet staff's evolving needs.

A good example of an organization taking a proactive approach to addressing the mental health needs of their front-line workers and building the capacity of the organization is found at Mt. Sinai Health System in New York. They are supporting their frontline workers by [opening the Mount Sinai Center for Stress, Resilience and Personal Growth](#) designed to address the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on the lives of their frontline health care providers. They also developed a [phone line to help their staff access basic assistance and self-care resources](#), including mental health and psychosocial support.

To address the social, financial, community, and physical elements of well-being, accommodations like hazard pay and benefits are important considerations to build individual capability that will be reflected in the organization's capability. These accommodations work synergistically with post-crisis staff response that should include debriefing, cataloguing what was learned, deploying support, and honoring first responders.

Our front-line heroes and leaders will no doubt have mental and emotional scars from their tour of duty. As leaders we can help keep our staff stay resilient and engaged by attending to intentional communication, enhancing individual and organizational capability, and addressing staff well-being in a holistic manner.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Greene-Upschaw

About Letters to Leaders

Letters to Leaders is a series written by team members at Fund Love and Lucania Partners. Each week we do our best to offer some perspective on the challenges we all face as leaders. We also pause to reflect and thank our industry's frontline leaders and staff, for showing us the way during this unprecedented period. We share our ideas and appreciations from a place of good fortune, gratitude, and humility.