Can't Stop, Won't Stop

A no-B.S. guide to leading your teams
through turbulent times

By: Cameron Deatsch
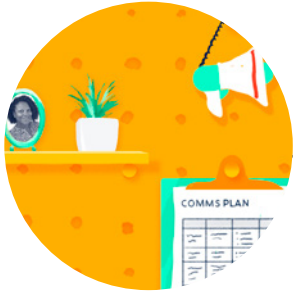**Chief Revenue Officer**

Thriving in business is fundamentally about adapting to change. The most diligent leaders have a healthy sense of paranoia ingrained into everything they do, training them to look around corners, prepare for the unknown, or strike quickly at new opportunities. But we're all human. When times are good, as they've largely been for the last few years, it's easy to let our guard down – to convince ourselves that the good times will continue forever, even though we know that's impossible.

We all learned (or re-learned) this lesson recently as we watched the entire world change overnight. There were no playbooks for responding to these situations, no peers to whom we could look for guidance. We all had to figure out how to adapt. But we did adapt. We made decisions, learned from mistakes, listened to our teams, and continued to push our organizations forward knowing that the only way to survive is to embrace change with open arms.

The good news is that now we've built a little muscle around making dramatic changes on short notice. This guide will help you further strengthen those muscles so you're better prepared the next time a crisis hits. Because that's when thoughtful, responsive leadership is needed most.

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NAVIGATING THE NEXT

"oh
shit"

MOMENT

By: Anu Bharadwaj, **Head of Product–Atlassian Cloud**   Illustrator: Vania Wat

Leading through change and embracing the mess

Lessons learned about courage, compassion, and staying true to yourself.

The phrase "transformational change" pops into my head a lot. We're certainly being forced to make massive changes these days. But, truth be told, transformational change was on my mind well before I'd even heard the word "coronavirus" or knew you could make a face mask using coffee filters.

Not only because many of the customers my teams build for are evolving in some pretty dramatic ways (agile at scale, anyone?) but also because my organization has just come through a massive change ourselves. Having been at the forefront of this, I've learned a few lessons that can help leaders in any industry guide teams through times of transition – whether they're choosing change, or adapting to new circumstances.

First, let me set the stage. My teams have traditionally made software that our customers install and maintain on their own servers. And we still do that today. But like many other tech leaders I've spoken to, we recognize that the future is in the cloud – i.e., the hosted "software as a service" (SaaS) model. So in addition to shifting our entire business into cloud-first mode, we have to be prepared to help our customers navigate the transition from server to cloud when they're ready.

Chances are, you're eyeing a similar change on the horizon, or, if nothing else, are eyeballs-deep in the sudden shift to working from home. Given the uncertainly around how long we'll continue to work remotely and the added challenge of having kids, partners, and roommates around, our teams need us to step up more than ever. Here's how.

Lead with courage and compassion in equal measure

Change breeds fear. A common reaction to fear is to build conspiracy theories. Accusations fly fast and thick. "The customer support team is lazy"… "Sales teams don't sell enough"… "Product teams just don't have a product ready"… "It's all stupid politics!"

Leading with courage requires calling bullshit on blame games, and leading with love requires understanding why people are playing them in the first

place. We tend to assume the worst when we don't understand the reasons behind whatever change is afoot. When the finger-pointing starts, that's a sign that people can't see that there's a shared goal. As a leader, it's your job to peel back the layers of misinformation and explain how the change will help everyone accomplish more.

As a leader, you also need to acknowledge the disruption your teams are experiencing. This can be hard. Still, it's the best way to calm their fears and help them adapt.

Courage can overcome your own misgivings, but you need love to help others overcome theirs. At the end of the day, you all play for the same team. But if people lose sight of that, competitors will kick your collective ass.

Embrace the chaos, but manage the rate of change

From a distance, Africa's great wildebeest migration appears to run like an elegantly ordered transit system. When you look closely, however, you see the truth: it's utter chaos.

So is large scale change.

As long as you're moving in the right general direction, it's ok to adopt a mindset that values progress over perfection. In fact, that's probably the most prudent (and sanity-saving) thing to do.

With the server-to-cloud transition I led, there were countless deliverables needed from pricing and packaging to product capabilities and more. Trying to answer every question in painstaking detail before we started delivering anything to customers would have delayed us by weeks or even months. Instead, we chose an incremental approach in which problem discovery and solution were centralized in one team. They cleared the path for other teams that focused on keeping current customers happy and landing with new customers. This way, we could both manage the rate of change and make progress on several workstreams that ran in parallel.

To be sure, the sudden switch to remote work has been chaotic, partly because it wasn't possible to make that change incrementally. We can, however, give our teams continuity in smaller ways. Don't let rituals like retrospectives or team lunches fall by the wayside – it's easy enough to adapt those to a remote work context. Keep checking in, keep talking with team members about their career growth, and keep offering words of encouragement.

Learn from others, but be true to yourself

Leading change can be lonely. Especially when you're the one with the unpopular opinion, the one that is convincing others to look in a different direction. At those times, it's wise to ask for help. Over the past year, I've spoken to dozens of tech leaders, many of whom have led teams through a similar transition.

While I learned a number of valuable lessons from them, it also made me understand how unique my teams' strengths are. Not that we're perfect. Far from it. But while we grow and learn and make mistakes, we also need to have the conviction to be ourselves and not just copy what others do. This holds true at the individual level, too. Take working at home, for example: setting yourself up on the couch in sweatpants is calming for some, de-motivating for others.

At an offsite a while back, we went through an exercise in which we all wrote down the one big thing we dreamt of doing over the coming year. I wrote: "Start a movement." Granted, leading my teams through a major change to our business model and dealing with all the downstream effects on how we build products wasn't exactly what I had in mind. And leading them through a complete upheaval of the way we work, forced upon us by a global pandemic? Didn't really see that coming, either.

That's the thing about massive organizational change: it has a way of choosing you. (And not the other way around.) If you respond by resisting it, you're sunk. But if you choose to embrace it, you've got a fighting chance at navigating it successfully and leading people on a journey they'll think back on as an adventure.

Speaking of adventure, you've probably heard about Earnest Shackleton's failed expedition to the South Pole. But did you know that Shackleton pioneered the "pivot" on that voyage? Faced with crisis after crisis, his innovative and emotionally intelligent leadership was quite literally the difference between life and death for his crew.

Learn more about Shackleton's approach on this episode of Teamistry, an original podcast from Atlassian.

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

· Agile at scale
· Migrating from Atlassian server products to Atlassian cloud products
· Agile retrospectives
· Remote work

By: Erika Fisher, **Chief Administrative Officer and General Counsel**   Illustrator: Vania Wat

How responsive is your crisis response strategy?

Tight feedback loops keep employees' needs top of mind as you navigate a rapidly changing reality on a timeline you don't control.
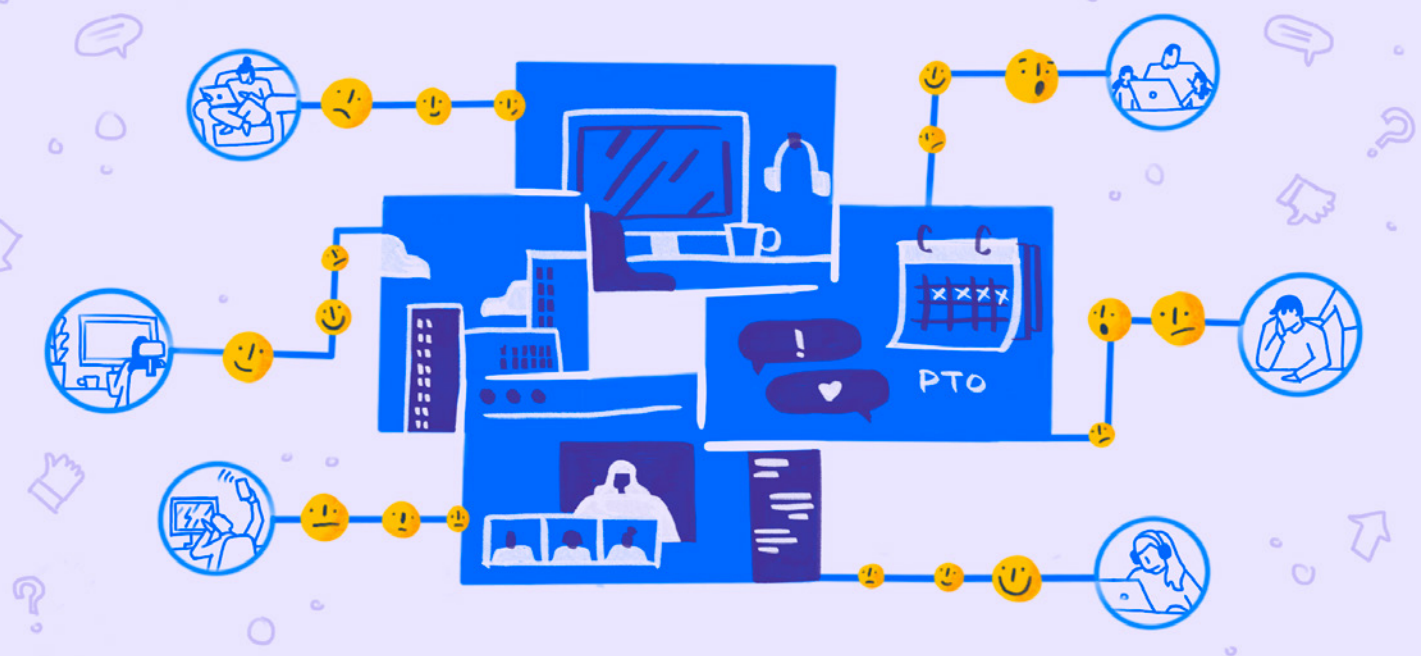
Right now, as we continue to deal with COVID-19, the uncertainty of the situation brings in a whole new dimension. We executives and HR professionals are not only running triple-duty right now – as leaders at work, as health and safety captains at home, and as conscientious neighbors when we venture out – we're doing it all on a timeline that is both unknown and outside of our control.

Although the time for immediate response to the COVID crisis is over, chances are, there are a few aspects of your initial response strategy that could use some fine-tuning in order to carry you through the longer term. The approach we've taken at Atlassian is to invite our staff into conversation with HR and the executive team, and it's working. We're able to get a holistic picture of what our people need, address those needs, and gather feedback – then rinse, repeat, rinse, repeat. (See the appendix for the initial long-form survey we used during the COVID crisis and use that as a template for your own employee surveys.)

We're sharing the details of this employee-driven approach in the hopes that it can help you shape your own response strategy into one that is strong and flexible enough to get you through our current situation and any similar crises in the future.

Guiding principles for a sustained response strategy

Employees' health and well-being come first. Period. There's been a lot of hand-wringing over the perceived choice between productivity and well-being, which is understandable, especially if your company's revenue is in free-fall. But this is a false dichotomy. If your staff is disengaged, it's not because they are fundamentally lazy and can't be trusted to work at home.

The truth is, engagement is a natural by-product of well-being. People worry about the crisis itself, about whether their jobs are secure, about the affect on their family, about what life will look like after the worst has passed.

Those worries distract us in all sorts of tangible and more nuanced ways. But micromanaging is not the answer. In fact, tactics like time-tracking software only exacerbate the problem. A more effective approach is to focus on easing their fears. The more distractions we as leaders can clear away, the more effective our people will be.

To that end, part of our response is to have employees and their managers hold performance and growth check-ins throughout the year. It's a way to acknowledge the contribution each employee is making, set them up to be productive in the short-term, and help them navigate their longer-term professional goals by getting people and their managers better aligned.

This brings up another guiding principle: err on the side of over-communicating, both top-down and laterally. Develop a communication plan you can deliver on, and be consistent. Maybe it's a daily email from the heads of each business unit, or video messages from the CEO as we're doing at Atlassian. Keep holding your company and department all-hands meetings as well so leadership at all levels stays visible. Even if when you have bad news, share it. Without reliable information from you, people will invent their own stories to fill the void, which increases their stress even more.

But communication shouldn't be a one-way street. Our third principle throughout this time has been to keep the feedback loop tight. For the past three months, we've surveyed all employees on a regular basis as to how they're coping, how their work is being affected, and how they think leadership can help. Not only does this give us credible information to act on, it also allows us to share the results back to staff so they can take comfort in the fact that they're not alone in their struggles.

Let employees point the way

I cannot overstate the importance of proactively asking employees how they're doing and what's holding them back. That's how you know you're responding in the right ways at the right time. That's what it means to be employee-driven in your response strategy. It's the difference between declaring a company-wide day off on an arbitrary date and giving employees permission to take an extra day off on a day of their choosing.

If you haven't yet solicited information from staff, start with a fairly comprehensive survey as we did initially. Check in on basic issues like whether they have a safe and reliable place to work and whether they feel

able to balance work and family obligations. These aren't just logistical issues – they have a psychological impact, too. Also inquire explicitly about their emotional state. Do they feel connected to their team, or cut off? Are they overwhelmed by stress and anxiety? Last, try to get a view of whether they're able to collaborate with teammates effectively.

From the initial survey we ran when the COVID pandemic hit, we learned that many employees were ill-equipped for remote work in terms of monitors and desks, so we offered a $500 home office stipend. We also heard that nearly every parent was tied in knots trying to juggle homeschooling with their usual full-time job. This led us to encourage managers to work out flexible schedules for those with dependents at home, and encourage those folks to take additional time off as needed.

Of course, checking in can't be a "one and done" sort of thing. After the initial survey, we sent shorter versions that serve as a quick pulse-check. This provides the information we needed to adapt our response as the situation and employees' needs change.

After the home office stipend was announced, for example, the next survey showed a massive improvement in how effective employees felt and their ability to work from home indefinitely. But just about the time the logistical issues were in hand, our pulse-checks showed that loneliness was starting to take hold. So we rolled out programs to help people connect on a personal level like a walking challenge, online yoga classes, and other virtual workshops employees could attend together (the webinars for managers new to remote work were an especially big hit).

We plan to follow this model long-term. Even outside of crisis situations, we'll continue to ask questions around emotional health and general well-being.

> **Tip:** Find our set of survey questions at the end of this article and use them to kick-start the feedback loop at your company.

The strategic value of listening

Taking an employee-driven approach to navigating uncertain times lets you adapt policies and practices quickly and in a way that is informed by data rather than gut feeling. And that's critical when you're dealing with

fast-changing circumstances of any kind, be it a pandemic, an economic downturn, or some calamity we haven't imagined yet.

External factors like revenue and customer retention rates give you an indication of how you're faring out there in the marketplace, but you'll never get a holistic picture of your company's health unless you have a conversation with your employees. They may not remember every policy decision you made during this time, but they'll certainly remember how you made them feel. And how they feel will inform how engaged they are over the long term.

When people feel they're being heard and their needs are taken into account, their mental load is reduced and they can focus on delivering great work. If company leaders take one lesson from this whole experience it should be that caring for your people and caring for your business are one and the same thing.

Atlassian's initial employee survey around the COVID-19 crisis and the shift to remote work

We're all dealing with big changes in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Completing this short survey helps us make sure you are supported to keep doing your best work, and stay well and safe.

The following survey should take you less than 10 minutes to complete and is completely confidential and voluntary. Please do not include any information in your open-text response that could identify you or another person.

Working from home during COVID-19

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the statements below about remote work and how you are feeling

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It has been easy to work 100% from home this week					
Working from home this week has negatively impacted my productivity					
I feel connected to my team while working from home this week					
Working from home this week has negatively impacted my team's productivity					
I feel highly motivated today					

How has your motivation changed since the closure of the Atlassian offices?

○ Much lower　　○ Lower　　○ The same　　○ Higher　　○ Much higher

Is anything making it difficult for you to work at home productively?
What would make it easier?

Organizational response to COVID-19

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the
statements below about Atlassian's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Atlassian has responded decisively to COVID-19					
Atlassian has communicated clearly about COVID-19					
Atlassian has given me the information I need about COVID-19					
Atlassian has acted responsibly with regards to COVID-19					
Atlassian has demonstrated its values in its response to COVID-19 so far					

What unanswered questions, if any, do you still have about Atlassian
and the COVID-19 pandemic?

_____

Teamwork while working from home during COVID-19

Thinking about the last week, please tell us how much you agree
or disagree with each of the statements below about your team

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel a sense of belonging with my team					
My team is working together effectively					
I feel supported by my team while working remotely					
My team is focused on getting things done					
I feel supported by my manager while working remotely					

Before you started working remotely, how much of your team's communication was done using digital tools (such as Slack, Zoom, Jira, Confluence)?

○ None   ○ Some   ○ Most   ○ All

Please share with us some of the new ways your team is working together on a daily basis, now that you are remote

_____

Home workspace setup

My home workspace has

○ Everything I need to be productive

○ Most of what I need to be productive

○ The basics that I need to be productive

○ None of the things I need to be productive

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the statements below about how remote work has impacted you (Randomise question order)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Working from home has helped me lead a healthier lifestyle					
Working from home has made me feel less stressed					
I feel supported by my team while working remotely					
Working from home has made it easier for me to fulfill my family commitments					
I am clear on the expectations of me while working remotely					

Which of the following represents some of the barriers to your productivity when you are working from home? (Select as many as apply)

- ⃝ My internet connectivity at home is not the same speed or quality as at work

- ⃝ I have limited private space to do my work

- ⃝ I have personal/family commitments to take care of at home

- ⃝ My computer and desk setup is not as good as the one in the office

- ⃝ The VPN is preventing me from working at my normal pace

- ⃝ I can't access specific software from home. Please specify

- ⃝ Other, (please specify)

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

· [Active listening](#)
· [Tips for an ergonomic home office](#)

By: Sarah Goff-Dupont, **Principal Writer**

Illustrator: Sara Van Slyke

How to manage internal communications when you're flying by the seat of your pants

Suddenly responsible for keeping everyone on the same page in a crisis? Use this guide to calm the fire drills (and your stress level)
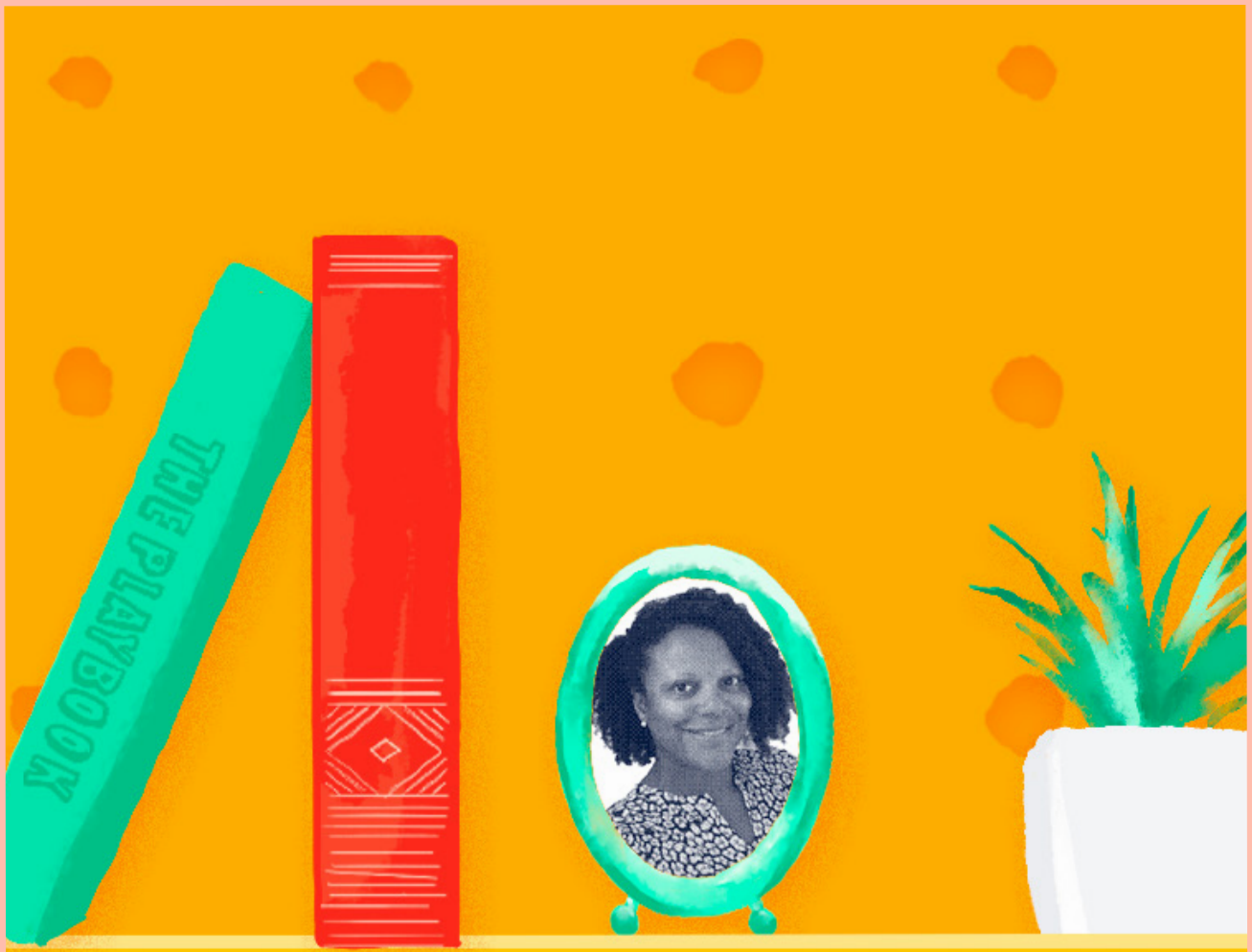
Assuming responsibility for internal communications on short notice, particularly in a time of crisis, puts you at the center of a whirlwind of activity. Events are outside your control, timelines are unpredictable, and everything feels urgent. You're not just refueling in mid-air, you're building the plane while flying it.

So what's the best way to transition from reactive mode to proactive mode? Create an internal communications plan.

In many ways, it's similar to crafting a structured approach to stakeholder communications for high-stakes or long-running projects. According to L'Teisha Ryan, Head of Internal Communications at Atlassian, the goal is to be disciplined and deliberate, but not rigid.

"We're constantly looking at how we can improve, evolve, and adjust," she says. "When the COVID-19 crisis emerged, for example, we started with emails from the company founders, open Q&A sessions on Zoom, and a central space in Confluence to share updates and FAQs, then added video updates after we closed our offices to help maintain a sense of connection."

If you're ready to get organized and step up your internal communications game, read on to learn all the ways having a plan will benefit you and how to put one together step-by-step.

What *is* an internal communications plan, anyway?

An internal comms plan can't just live inside your head. An effective plan is a living document that describes **who** your various audiences are, **what** information you'll communicate to each audience, **which** channels you'll use, and **how often** you'll communicate. Include success metrics, as well– e.g., 80 percent open rate on emails from the CEO.

Although the plan itself doesn't need to be shared with the entire company,

it should be open to anyone who'll be helping you execute on it. (Don't forget to involve your HR business partners and folks in similar people-flavored roles! They can help you scale by partnering with managers and making sure team members fully understand important changes.)

Why bother with a plan?

When $#!t hits the fan, you hardly have a moment to catch your breath and might be tempted to continue making it up as you go along. But investing the time to put a proper internal communications plan together will pay off in a few ways. You'll be more consistent in your communications, which gives your fellow employees a sense of stability and helps reduce any anxiety they might be feeling. It also gives you greater peace of mind. You've got a map to guide your way forward, as well as a historical record to refer back to.

On the flip side, flying by the seat of your pants feels expedient in the moment, but can be disastrous in the long run. If people aren't getting information through official channels, or if it comes sporadically, they'll invent their own information. The resulting confusion will not only distract people from their work, it may result in project plans and budgets that are rooted in misinformation.

Without a plan, you also risk leaving important information out or overloading some of your audiences with information they don't need. Not a good look.

Guiding principles for an internal communications plan

Before you dive into the tactical planning exercise, take a moment to set some guidelines for yourself. For L'Teisha and her team, defining their core principles came down to aligning with company values like "Open company, no B.S." and "Build with heart and balance." Here's what we recommend as a starting point.

Transparency

Share information promptly, and err on the side of straightforwardness. This is especially true if you have to communicate bad news such as layoffs, furloughs, or pay cuts. Research shows that leaders wait too long to deliver this type of news, with negative impacts on both parties: the bearer of bad news carries the dread of delivering it, while the people affected have less

time to adjust and may resent being kept in the dark. Either way, trust suffers across the entire organization.

Speaking of maintaining trust, be as open about the decision-making process as you are about what the decision is and how it affects your audience.

Empathy

An emotionally intelligent approach is always the right idea, and doubly so during times of uncertainty. Think about how your audience is feeling right now, and how you want to feel after they receive each communication. Remember that it's easy to feel overwhelmed by too much information, so part of your job here is to keep your comms small enough to digest, yet robust enough to satisfy.

Beware of straying into ruinous compassion, however. Kim Scott, author of [Radical Candor](#), reminds us that well-intentioned attempts to spare someone's feelings can backfire. (Like not telling your friend she has spinach in her teeth to save her from the embarrassment of being told… then she attends a whole afternoon of meetings with the spinach still stuck in her teeth.) Communicating with empathy in this context is a balancing act. Be patient with yourself if you miss the mark and try to learn from it.

Discoverability

L'Teisha realized quickly that with all the different communication channels her team uses, information will become scattered and hard for employees to find later. So they set up a hub page in Confluence that makes it easy to refer back to past updates. It's a win for her team, too: they don't get pings every five minutes asking where the updated travel policy can be found.
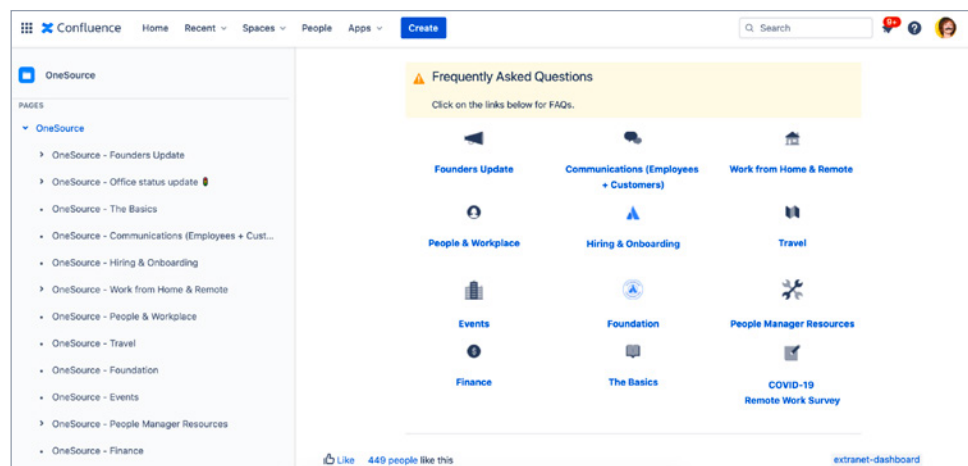
Adaptability

Expect to evolve your plan as the situation changes and based on feedback you get from employees. (Bonus points if you proactively ask for feedback.) Review your plan every few weeks and adjust as necessary.

Customize your internal communications plan

Your internal comms plan will spell out how you'll provide employees with the right information at the right time and via the right channels so everyone stays on the same page. Plan on spending an hour or two drafting it, with additional time for a round of feedback from your team.

Step 1

Start by laying out a 4 x 7 table with the columns labeled "Content, Audience, Channels, Purpose/Goals" Label the rows, "Daily, Weekly, Fortnightly, Monthly, Quarterly, Yearly, Ad Hoc."

Step 2

Now think through who your various audiences are. For example, when L'Teisha and her team thought about how to approach internal comms when the coronavirus crisis hit, they identified six groups: the Atlassian board, our executive leadership group, the site leads at each of our office locations, the People/HR team, all other managers, and general employees.

Step 3

Determine the most effective way to communicate with each audience. Think about what content you'll be sharing as well as the tool you'll use to share it. At Atlassian, we're using a combination of virtual town hall events with prepared updates and live Q&A, all-company announcements on Slack, written updates from the company founders using Confluence's blogging feature, video updates from the founders, and email.

Step 4

Ok. This is the fun part. Ready? Deep breath, *and…*

Start filling in your table. You might find it easiest to go row by row, noting what you'll be communicating on a daily basis, weekly, etc. Or, it might make more sense to go by audience, thinking through what each of them needs to hear about, through which channels, and how often. Don't gloss over the goal of each communication. Build trust? Help people feel connected with their leaders? Announce new information? Other?

Defining the purpose now will make it easier to compose your comms later.

Consider whether you should time communications differently for each group. For example, L'Teisha and her team communicate updates to execs or the leads for each office location before sharing them with all staff. "We've been very deliberate about providing leaders with information in advance", she says. "This gives them a chance to think about how it will affect their teams, anticipate questions, and have thoughtful responses ready."

As you work through, you might discover you'll need to bring in new forms of communication to meet your audiences' needs, or evolve existing ones. When Atlassian first transitioned everyone to working from home, our executive team heard from loads of managers that they felt like a fish out of water trying to lead their teams remotely. So our People team pulled together a series of webinars to train them on best practices, which were very well received.

> **Tip:** People need to feel like they're being heard. Set up a virtual suggestion/Q&A box using Jira Service Desk or Google Forms, and address the questions you receive in future communications.
>
> Be sure to share the plan with your team and relevant stakeholders for review. They'll help make sure nothing falls through the cracks.

Be authentic to be successful

Don't stress if some things aren't perfectly polished. We're all "BBC dad" now, so we might as well embrace the messiness. What really matters is delivering timely, thorough information to the people who need it.

"One of the reasons we switched to video updates from the founders is that we wanted to bring a human touch into it," L'Teisha tells me. "Those quirky moments like when Mike's daughter popped into the room remind us that they're having the same experience as the rest of us."

Remember too that people may have wildly different feelings about whatever changes are taking place. For L'Teisha and her team, this means empathizing with the fact that not everybody is thrilled about the switch to remote work, and weaving that in so people feel validated and acknowledged.

Showing some personality and being candid about the fact that things are a bit upside-down right now are not only signs that you're on top of it, but a breath of fresh air for the people receiving your updates. The more you keep it real, the more effective your communications will be.

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

· Leading a distributed team
· Effective all-hands meetings
· Radical candor

Example internal communications plan

Context: To keep all staff on the same page as we move into the next phase of the coronavirus pandemic, the newly-formed internal comms squad will be sharing updates to company policy and similar announcements through all-hands meetings, blog posts, etc.

Guiding principles: transparency, empathy, discoverability, adaptability

Last updated: June 10, 2020

|	Content	Audience	Channels	Purpose
Daily	Compilation of COVID news and other relevant developments	Executive team	#exec-updates channel on Slack	Compile relevant news items for execs so they can stay focused on running the business
Weekly	Message from the CEO	All staff	Video (embedded in a Confluence page)	Make sure top leadership stays visible; maintain connection
Monthly	Updates to leadership toolkit	Team leads	Confluence page	Provide leaders with resources and tips for managing distributed teams
	Global town hall	All staff	Livestream via Youtube	· Share progress on company-level OKRs and other business-as-usual updates · Open Q&A with CEO related to the pandemic
Quarterly	Earnings report + shareholder letter	· All shareholders · Investment analysts · Industry analysts	Post on investor relations page	· Publicly celebrate successes · Keep investors and analysts apprised of our financials and direction for the near term
Yearly	Annual Report	· All shareholders · Investment analysts · Industry analysts	Post on investor relations page	· Recap our successes and financials for the fiscal year · Share our vision for the upcoming year
Adhoc	Company policy updates	Shared first with team leads, then with all staff 24 hrs later	Confluence pages or Slack, as appropriate	Provide staff with timely information on travel policies, return-to-work preparations, etc.

Kicking off the change management process

Build a shared understanding of what's changing and why, then draft your plan of action.

Step 1: Gather the team

Bring the team responsible for implementing the change together for a one-hour workshop.

Step 2: Align on purpose

Ask the project's sponsor to outline the goal of the change, what prompted it, who the key players are, and what will happen if you don't make this change.
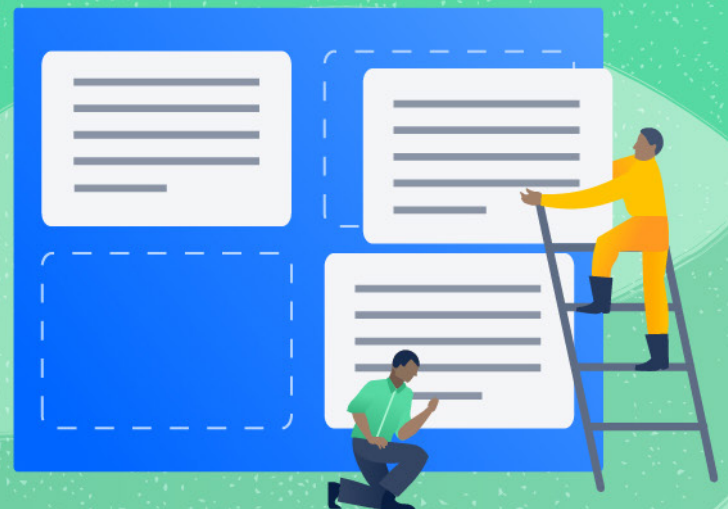
Step 3: Decide on guiding principles

Brainstorm and agree on a set of principles the team will adhere to throughout the change process. For example, "Communicate with customers early and often" or "Commit to decisions made by the team even you disagree with them".

Step 4: Sketch out your message

What is changing and when? Who is affected and how? Agree on the key points that will form the backbone or your messaging to internal and/or external customers.

Step 5: Select your communication channels

Web pages, chat, social media, all-hands meetings... consider how easy they are to use and how effective they are for reaching the right people.
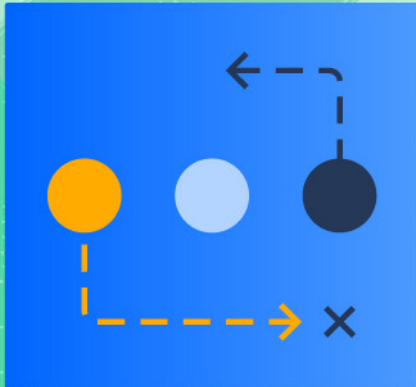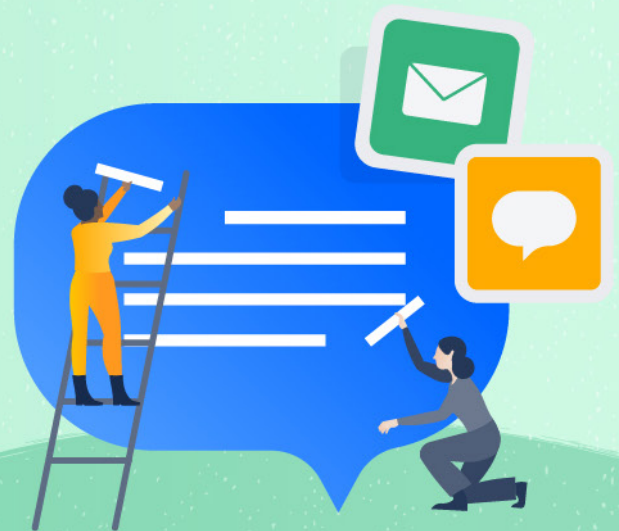
Step 6: Map out the process

Either work backward from a deadline, or estimate the level of effort needed to deliver on each step. From there, determine what the milestones are and give them target dates.

Step 7: Confirm roles and responsibilities

For each milestone, identify an owner and the contributors. Don't be afraid to bring in people from outside your team – they'll offer new ideas and help ensure you're covering all the bases.

Get more details, along with tips and next steps, from our Change Management Kickoff play in the Atlassian Team Playbook.

SLOGGING THROUGH WHEN EVERY-THING'S GONE

SIDEWAYS

By: Sarah Goff-Dupont, **Principal Writer**

Illustrator: Vania Wat
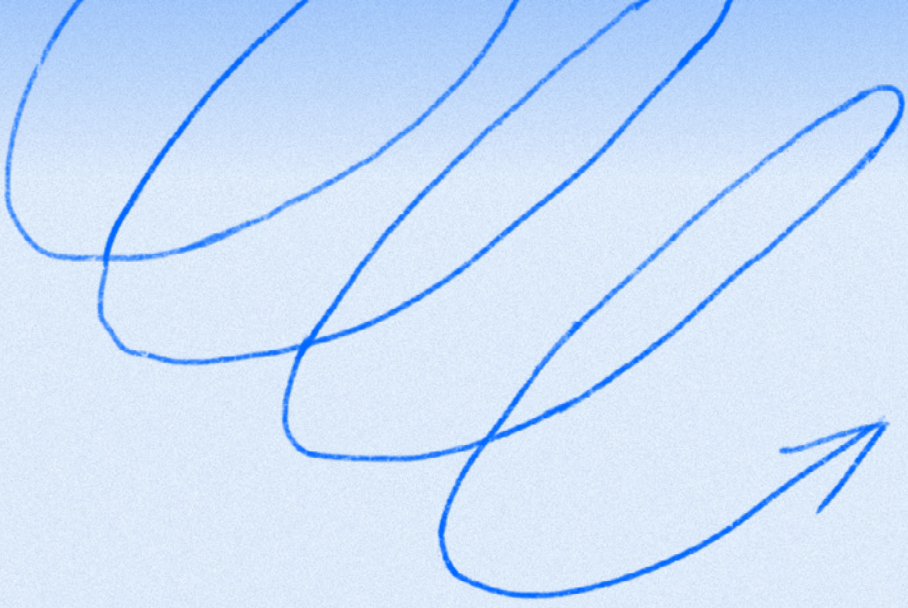
Everything I need to know about coping with crisis, I learned from the Agile Manifesto

What looks like chaos and upheaval
is really an opportunity to iterate.

As I write this, we're many months into the COVID-19 crisis. And I don't know about you, but things still feel chaotic to me. Part of it is trying to work from home while also wrangling a 6-year old and 9-year old. Part of it is trying to keep up with all the recommendations and requirements from our public health officials. The big reason things feel chaotic to me, though, is all the uncertainty.

At times like these, our impulse is to impose order – even if that order exists only in our heads. We need ways of understanding the unsettling things we observe. Tools for mentally organizing what we read in the news. A framework, if you will. Some people may look to religious texts for this, but as a Certified Scrum Master and nerd, I've been thinking about the Agile Manifesto.

Corny? Maybe. But hear me out and see if you don't find a little comfort in it, too. Because sure: you could choose to view the recent changes to our lives as upheaval. I prefer to view them as iteration.

At its core, agile methodologies are about adapting. Workflow not working? Improve it. Year-long project plan gone off the rails? Plan for shorter increments. If the Agile Manifesto were written today, I bet it would go something like this:

We are uncovering more resilient ways of working and living as a global community. Through this shared experience we have come to value:

- **Personal relationships** over processes.

- **Authenticity and accountability** over polish and promises.

- **Collaboration** over competition.

- **Responding to change** over following a plan.

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

ICYMI, HERE'S THE ORIGINAL

We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it. Through this work we have come to value:

Individuals and interactions over processes and tools.

Working software over comprehensive documentation.

Customer collaboration over contract negotiation.

Responding to change over following a plan.

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

Personal relationships over processes

Processes and workflows are brittle. Interfere with any one piece, and the whole system breaks down. Think about the supply chain issues we've seen as factories struggle to stay open while keeping their workers safe. See also: the chain of approvals when you file an expense report. Chances are, there are at least two people standing between you and your reimbursement. (Do you even know who they are? I for one, do not.) And, chances are, they are the only people authorized to approve it. If one person is sidelined with an illness, you're left carrying hundreds of extra dollars on your credit card.

Relationships, on the other hand, are enduring. They are anti-fragile, meaning they can actually become stronger under stress. Although we don't generally think about relationships in such a technical way, we've instinctively emphasized them lately, both personally and professionally. We're reaching out, checking in, empathizing, and supporting like no time I can remember. If there's a silver lining in all this, it might be the human connections that we've built and will benefit from for years to come.

Authenticity and accountability over polish and promises

For the first time in I-don't-know-how-long, it's really, truly ok to not be ok. We're all processing day after day of bad news, and for many of us, it's

more than our emotional metabolism can keep up with. There's no stigma attached to being real about how you're feeling, how you're struggling to stay focused, and how much work you can deliver. (At least, there shouldn't be any stigma attached. See the article on empathy-centered leadership contained in this guide for a deeper dive.)

We're also remembering, after years of seeing curated versions of others' lives in our social media feeds, how messy life actually is. Kids are making "impromptu cameos" during our Zoom meetings, and our teammates see the dirty breakfast dishes stacked on the counter behind us. Yeah, it's less than ideal. But so what? Substance matters more than appearance.

Now is no time for promises we can't fulfill or a polished image that hides our imperfections. The more open we are with each other, the better we can support each other.

Collaboration over competition

We're facing a problem that is bigger than any one person, organization, or country. Nonetheless, we all have our roles to play. As communities, we're teaming up to sew masks for each other and fetch groceries for elderly neighbors so as to limit their risk of exposure. Atlassian joined forces with partner companies and the Australian government to build a mobile app for sharing virus-related updates, which was delivered in just seven days. Even Apple and Google, fierce rivals in the marketplace on a normal day, have been working together on technology designed to track and curb the spread of the virus by tracing who an infected person recently had contact with.

Despite the circumstances, it's refreshing to see so much cooperation–among erstwhile competitors, no less. Maybe it's too much to hope today's togetherness will stick around when things go back to "normal". But I'm crossing my fingers anyway.

Responding to change over following a plan

This is the line in the Agile Manifesto that started tickling my brain in the first place. No matter your industry, age, location, or favorite Beatles album, we're all getting a crash-course in adapting to change right now. Knowledge workers and the companies who employ us are embracing (with varying degrees of enthusiasm) remote work. Parents are learning how to be teachers. Barbers now know how to deliver virtual haircuts.

Of course, those who can't work at all right now face the toughest challenge: adapting to life on a much smaller budget. As much as we want every business and school to fully open back up, we're being forced to take a wait-and-see approach. Planning on short time horizons is very "agile" of us, too. Balancing physical health with mental and economic health is no easy task. Responsiveness is key.

Everyone wants to know when we can get back to something that resembles our regularly-scheduled lives, but the fact is, we just don't know. The reminder that we humans aren't in charge of as much as we think we are is deeply discomforting. Humbling, too. Perhaps a positive outcome of COVID-19 is that next time we'll be better prepared, both logistically and mentally.

This way, down the rabbit hole…
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

· Agile methodologies
· Building relationships at a distance

Shifting focus at the speed of business

When the coronavirus pandemic hit, e-commerce companies had a hard time knowing which way to pivot. Economic strain meant decreased consumer spending, but on the other hand, stay-at-home orders meant increased online shopping. For the SmartBuyGlasses Optical Group, purveyors of brands like Ray-Ban, Prada, and Lacoste, there was an extra twist: they straddled the realms of expendable luxury sunglasses and essential prescription eyewear. Would things balance out in the end?

To have a fighting chance, the company had to – practically overnight – position itself for both new dynamics in the retail landscape and shift to a distributed style of working in order to keep employees safe. "We needed clear and transparent communication with the stakeholders all the way through to our customers about what we were dealing with, what delays were possible, and how we were responding," says co-founder David Menning.

Product managers and customer-service teams adapted the company's offerings, as well. They added eye-protection for medical personnel to their product line and a web-based tool that allows customers to scan their existing eyeglasses to determine the prescription, which helped reduce the need for in-person visits to the optometrist. Despite an initial drop in business and some painful personnel cuts, the company has held steady.

Menning and his team harbor no delusions about this being the only crisis they'll face as a company. Although they look forward to working together in person again, they're determined not to let their "distributed teamwork" muscle atrophy. The digital systems they've strengthened and new ways of working they've adopted give them the agility to adapt and thrive in just about any circumstance.

By: Sarah Goff-Dupont, **Principal Writer**

Illustrator: Vania Wat

When it's time to deliver bad news, this is how the pros do it

Learn the simple framework developed by psychiatrists and oncologists that emphasizes empathy, facts, and finding a way forward.

Fellow citizens of the global economy, we need to talk. As companies continue to wrestle with uncertain and unpredictable conditions, there will likely be more layoffs, more furloughs, more budget cuts, and more career-defining projects canceled.

If you're in a leadership role, you'll have the unenviable task of relaying the bad news, which is like walking a tightrope. Speak too bluntly and you'll make the other person's pain even worse. Sugarcoat the news and you risk leaving out important information or offering false hope.

However, there's a way to deliver bad news that is both compassionate and candid. It's called the SPIKES protocol, and you've been experiencing it in action since you started reading this article. (Keep reading, and you'll understand how.)

Developed by a team of psychiatrists, oncologists, and medical researchers, SPIKES is a six-part framework that guides doctors through difficult conversations with patients, like delivering a cancer diagnosis, in a humane way. While losing your job or your budget is hardly as perilous as navigating a life-threatening disease, SPIKES translates well to an office environment. With practice and preparation, leaders can use it to break the bad news without causing their team members (or themselves) undue stress.

The SPIKES protocol, step-by-step

SPIKES was inspired by a body of research showing that, although thoughtful communication from doctors can reduce a patient's distress, most doctors feel unskilled in this area. The same can be said for the typical office: empathetic managers are better at difficult conversations, but until recently, empathy didn't feature in manager training. SPIKES bridges these gaps.

Here's how you can put it to use if you need to inform a team member they're being laid off or that the funding for their project was cut.

Step 1: Set up the conversation

"Conversation" is the key word here. Don't do this in an email. Take time

beforehand to anticipate the questions they'll have and prepare answers. You may even want to think through some of the language or phrasing you want to use.

Choose an appropriate setting – ideally, an office or conference room with a door that closes for privacy. If being physically in the same room isn't possible, a video call will at least bring you face to face. Sitting down will let them know you're not trying to rush through this, and putting away your phone signals that they are the most important person in your world right now.

FOR EXAMPLE…

I invited you into conversation in the first line of this article by saying "we need to talk".

Step 2: Assess the other person's Perception of the situation

Being called into a surprise one-on-one conversation with the boss will put most people on edge. Your job is to figure out exactly how freaked out they are and what they already know so you can tailor your delivery and get to a shared understanding of the situation.

Ask questions like "What have you heard so far about the budget for this coming fiscal year?" or "Did you have a chance to read our earnings report and forecast?" Be sure to correct any misunderstandings before proceeding.

FOR EXAMPLE…

Since this article isn't an interactive conversation, I used the first paragraph to articulate what I *think* might be your perception of the global economy, based on recent news headlines.

Step 3: Invite them to hear more

In truth, this is information you are *required* to convey – they can't just opt out of hearing it. However, you can let them decide how much detail they want to receive right now: "You're probably wondering what this is all about. Do you want to hear the background, or just get straight to the main point?" If they choose to skip the background information, let them know you're happy to share it with them some other time.

FOR EXAMPLE…

Ok, ok. I skipped this step when writing the intro to this article because you can stop reading whenever you like. The fact that you're still reading now means you chose to hear more information.

Step 4: Give them Knowledge

This is where you break the news. Be straightforward and use plain-spoken language. Don't insult them by trotting out jargon like "right-sizing" when they're being laid off or "back-burnered" when their project is being canceled.

Remember that the merits of the decision are not up for debate in this conversation. Even if you think upper management made the wrong call, keep that to yourself for now so as not to create confusion or offer false hope. But do be as transparent about the decision making process as you can: who was involved, what other options were considered, why this was ultimately the outcome.

FOR EXAMPLE...

There were two pieces of bummer news in the introduction: the fact that more cuts are likely in our future, and that you, dear reader, will be the one to tell your team about if they're affected. Note how I conveyed all that in less than two sentences.

Step 5: Empathize and create space for their emotions

Now that the hard part is over, here comes the other hard part. They may be in shock or disbelief, they may be in tears. Whatever is going on with them, make space for it. Acknowledge that what you just told them was hard to hear and invite them to express their feelings: "If you're comfortable sharing your thoughts with me, I'm here to listen."

Then let them know you've heard them by making a connecting statement such as "I know this isn't what you wanted to hear, and understand why you're concerned about [supporting your family / your prospects for a promotion]." Let the conversation continue in this vein until the intensity of their emotions has died down and they're composed enough to discuss the next steps.

FOR EXAMPLE...

I demonstrated empathy in the second paragraph by acknowledging that delivering bad news feels like walking a tightrope.

Step 6: Summarize and strategize

The more you can help the other person make a plan from here, or at least help them see the path forward, the better you'll both feel. In the case of layoffs, you might offer to give them feedback on their resume or connect them with a recruiter you know. But be sure to sum up the conversation

first: "As I said, you'll need to clear out your desk as soon as we're done talking. Then, if you want to chat about where you might take your career from here, I'd be happy to meet for coffee next week." In the case of budget cuts or a canceled project, give the other person a day to absorb the news. Then circle back and ask for their thoughts on how to best move forward.

FOR EXAMPLE...

In the last two paragraphs of the introduction, I ease your anxiety about the future by letting you know there's a reliable method for delivering bad news that you can take advantage of.

Don't wait to deliver the news

As a leader, you not only have to walk the not-too-blunt-not-too-soft tightrope, you also have to walk the line between supporting your team members and supporting a decision from higher-up. You might feel caught in the middle, and want to put off relaying the news until you've sorted out your own feelings about it. Even with a clear head, it's tough to deal with the other person's distress, especially when there's little you can do to make things better for them. You might also be nervous that they'll "blame the messenger", which makes you want to avoid the conversation even more.

The irony is that delaying bad news erodes the other person's trust in you. They'll wonder how you were able to look them in the eye when you knew but weren't telling them. And they'll resent the fact that, had you told them sooner, they would've had more time to prepare for whatever is next.

Most people prefer to receive bad news as soon as possible and in a straightforward way. This also saves you from the burden of carrying it around longer than necessary. Turns out your dad was right: "ripping the band-aid off" really is the best thing for everyone involved. Especially if you're standing by, ready to offer a Kleenex.

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

· Improving communication
   in the workplace
· Building trust

By: Sophie Wade, **Future of Work Strategist**

Illustrator: Vania Wat

This is what empathy-centered leadership looks like

It's a new world that calls for shedding the approaches of decades past and elevating our humanity.

Disrupted operations and fragmented environments that have scattered the workforce are creating a very different dynamic for leaders. It's raised the bar, compelling you as a leader to adopt a more personal style of management where you have to react more empathetically through greater awareness of the stresses and strains your team is under.

In the old workplace, you may have focused on how well you were projecting confidence and conviction through your words, and how successful you were at persuading others of your vision, ideas, and decisions. You could see up close how your audience reacted – what worked, what didn't. Meetings that went well, and meetings that missed the mark. Part of your success as a leader was determined by recognizing how people responded to you and adjusting your behavior accordingly.

You've also been attuned to your company, department, and team's rhythms, alert to tiny details that communicated the views and emotional state of particular colleagues and the office community. The facial expression of the receptionist... the presence of huddles around certain cubicles... the number of messages on your desk or in your inbox.

But all that is changing.

The new realities of leadership

This implicit awareness is now *essential* when practicing empathy in a virtual environment, and must be purposefully cultivated. Leading from afar, your first action is to discern and decode new signs in these altered settings. The second is to lean in proactively during your interactions with your team members, putting aside any assumptions, and gathering detailed, accurate information. Third, leaders have to put aside personal opinions and perspectives in order to understand each employee's point of view and take action based on the needs of that specific person and their situation.

It's not an easy job. Leaders need sufficient data to understand what their

employees are going through. "We have a focus on deepening empathy with our teams," says Marilyn Chapman, the Chief HR Officer of global telecommunications firm NTT, who recently emphasized this new way of working with 1,300 of the company's leaders worldwide. She urged them to pay close attention to employees' specific situations, so they can respond appropriately.

Another upside to showing greater empathy: when a leader engages more deeply in a conversation, not only do they glean more useful information on what's troubling a team member, but the employee also experiences a positive, empathetic connection. To practice effective empathetic leadership across a distributed company or team, first distinguish the signals and decipher what they mean.

The 6 steps of showing empathy from afar

1. Recognize routines

Working as a distributed team will lead to new routines. Paying attention to these will help you identify each employee's habits and cues so you can spot whether they're coping well or struggling, and what might be wrong. Have they established new, productive habits yet? If not, is there an issue? Are they reaching out much more than they did at the office?

"Distributed working routines are likely to be consistent with office-based ones," observed experienced remote leader, Heidi Melin, CMO of Workfront. Someone who didn't typically drop by her physical office is not likely to 'drop by' in a virtual setting. If new habits are contradictory or adoption seems hesitant, it's time to ask if someone needs help.

2. Observe signs

Video conferencing provides the best channel to 'decode' communications and emotional states. Brian Day, CEO of Fuze, stresses video as a critical tool for effective leaders. "I read employees' facial expressions and body language," he says. "I notice who is engaged during a call and observe physical reactions to what's being said."

If someone is glancing off-screen, fiddling with something, looking listless, leaning away, or not turning on their video, take the next step: delve further. The empathetic response is to find out – directly and from colleagues – rather than make assumptions or judgments, since many work (or non-work) distractions could be affecting someone's participation.

3. Listen actively

Pay close attention to your team member's voice tone, timbre, pitch, and the words and phrases they use. If someone sounds stressed, hesitant, or isn't speaking up, what are they signaling? A client of mine, who is a trading team leader in financial services, listens attentively to clients' and team members' updates over the phone, comparing their tenor in previous calls. If a client's mood seems off or a colleague sounds distressed, she will ask questions to confirm or amend her interpretation before going ahead with her new sales idea or guidance.

4. Ask questions

In order to empathize, pose open, supportive questions to draw out details of how that team member is coping. "Why weren't you paying attention on the call?" is likely to prompt a short, defensive response rather than honest dialogue. Instead, ask: "Is there anything going on that I could help with? I sensed something during our call." This approach shows you care, is non-judgmental, and encourages trust. The employee is far more likely to share openly and explain what they're going through as well as be more forthcoming in the future.

5. Be approachable

Heidi Melin from Workfront makes an effort to nurture relationships and two-way dialog with her team. She deliberately makes herself very accessible and actively welcomes team contributions, which promotes empathetic interactions. She uses Slack, email, and now regularly has an open video 'room,' so team members have many ways to connect and chat.

Brian Day from Fuze launched "Ask Me Anything" video calls after they switched to a distributed work model in order to build trust and promote transparency across the company. This allowed everyone to feel informed and included. It also offered a safe space to raise issues and voice concerns. Whatever you choose to do, your goal is to foster an empathetic environment where everyone is comfortable and encouraged to communicate openly, and you are modeling these behaviors.

6. Personalize your responses

Leaders have to put their own points of view aside in order to react with an empathetic understanding of an employee's point of view and situation. Responding appropriately to each individual requires what Marilyn Chapman from NTT calls "a variation in leadership." Moving on from impersonal

and imperial directives, leaders have to be open and authentic and adapt their style and approach for each team's or employee's specific needs and temperament. This means communicating with extra sensitivity, since lockdowns, family tragedies, and economic hardships may well have added to a team member's stress.

A burned-out direct report, overwhelmed by new work conditions, might need warm appreciation and coaching. An older team member who has been struggling with new digital tools could benefit from kind reassurance as well as training. A younger employee, feeling financially insecure after seeing friends furloughed, might be comforted by a career discussion. An emerging leader, whose parent has just been hospitalized, might need mental health support.

Distributed working conditions are accelerating the conversion of leadership styles from 'command and control' to 'connect and communicate,' emphasizing empathy. Leaders have a unique opportunity going forward to deepen personal and professional relationships, become more attuned to others' perspectives and experiences, and better manage, motivate, and support employees wherever they are working.

This way, down the rabbit hole…
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

· Listening instead of speaking
· The "perception gap"
  between managers and
  team members

KEEPING YOUR
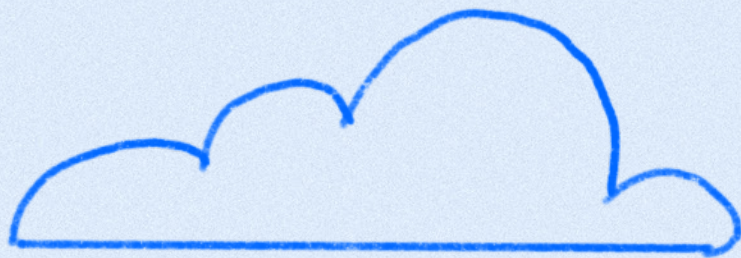
HEAD UP

LIKE A CHAMP

"I'mma keep runnin'
because a winner don't
quit on themselves."

– Beyoncé Knowles-Carter

By: Dominic Price, **Work Futurist**   Illustrator: Vania Wat

Getting started with the Team Health Monitor

Self-assess against eight attributes common amongst high-performing teams to identify strengths you can exploit or weak areas that need to be addressed.

Since introducing the [Team Health Monitor](#) to teams outside Atlassian, we've gotten a lot of enthusiastic feedback. And quite a few questions, too. For some teams, the lingering questions and doubts are holding them back from giving the Health Monitor a try. If that's the case in your organization, then let's punch those doubts in the face and set you on your way to stronger, thriving teams.

What *is* the Team Health Monitor, anyway?

At the most basic level, the Team Health Monitor is a self-assessment tool that lets teams identify the strongest and weakest aspects of their collaboration practices. At a higher level, it's a way to get team members talking about what they need to do the best work of their lives, and taking action to get it. Did we make this thing up? Yes. Did we pull it out of thin air? Not in the least!

After an extensive study of Atlassian's own teams, we found that the healthiest, most effective teams have several things in common:

1. Consistent leadership

2. Balanced skill-sets

3. A shared understanding of their work and its purpose

4. Clear success metrics

5. Demonstrable outputs and/or a proof of concept

6. A one-pager summarizing who the team is and what they're up to

7. Effective dependency management

8. A sustainable velocity

From there, we developed a framework for teams to self-assess against these attributes, and boom: the Team Health Monitor was born. We then extended it with go-to techniques that will help shore up any areas where the team is struggling. (For example, if the team lacks a shared

understanding, invest 30 minutes in developing an elevator pitch for the work they're doing.)

During a Team Health Monitor session, a facilitator will guide the team through the eight attributes, describing them in more detail than I have room for here. For each one, team members rate how they think the team is doing using a thumbs-up, -sideways, and -down system (or, red-yellow-green if you prefer). After individual ratings have been revealed, the facilitator invites team members to share why they chose the rating they did. That's where things get interesting. Suddenly, you've got multiple perspectives coming together to form a 360° view of the situation. The facilitator and team then agree on a consensus rating for the attribute and move to the next one. Finally, the team chooses one or two weak attributes to focus on improving in the coming month and (ideally) schedules their next check-in before the session ends.

Over time, a team's Health Monitor output might look something like this:

Attribute	Checkpoint 1	Checkpoint 2	Checkpoint 3	Checkpoint 4	Checkpoint 5
Full-time owner	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔺	🟢
Balanced team	🔺	🔺	🟢	🔺	🟢
Shared understanding	🟥	🔺	🟢	🟢	🟢
Value and metrics	🔺	🔺	🔺	🟢	🟢
Proof of concept	🟥	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
One-pager	🔺	🔺	🟥	🟢	🟢
Managed dependencies	🟥	🔺	🟥	🔺	🔺
Velocity	🟥	🟥	🔺	🔺	🟢

(You can find this handy tracker template and full step-by-step instructions here.)

Note that the Team Health Monitor is all about how a team works together. It does nothing to assess technical competence or subject matter expertise. Also note that the only heuristic involved is how each team member feels. There's no mathematical formula for making each assessment, and no concrete proof points required. That is 100% intentional. Relying on qualitative, subjective data opens up space for candid (and sometimes difficult) conversation in a way that objective measures can't.

So this is some kind of quiz?

No. Both the Team Health Monitor and a quiz involve asking questions, but that's where the similarities stop. There's no such thing as "right" or "wrong" answers here – only your answers. For example, we've noticed that healthy project teams have the right balance of skills. So if you're a project team, you'd ask yourselves whether you have the right balance of skills to get the job done. What does "right" mean? That's for you and your team to decide. Totally depends on the project, and what phase you're in.

I've been in sessions where everyone rated an attribute green, except one person who rated it red. In the conversation that followed, that person opened up and raised an uncomfortable truth – e.g., "Not having a dedicated designer is really slowing us down", or "We keep re-opening debates instead of rallying behind decisions".

And you know what happened in each case? The rest of the team thanked that person for sticking their neck out and speaking that truth. The problem had been hiding in everyone else's blind spot, and would have bitten the team hard had they not seen it coming. But now, with eyes open, they could do something about it. The power of this technique is in sharing and listening – not in reinforcing the default viewpoint.

And whereas taking quizzes as a group is generally considered cheating, doing the Team Health Monitor with your team is absolutely essential. In fact, that's the whole point! We all see the world through subtly different lenses, and that's ok. Cognitive diversity is the name of the game. Conformity and "group think" would just waste everyone's time.

Is it only for Atlassian customers?

Heck no! Like the rest of the Team Playbook, the Team Health Monitors are freely available to all teams who embrace continuous improvement. You don't need Atlassian products to make it work. You can track your team's ratings on a Confluence page, a Google Doc… anywhere that is easily accessible to everyone on the team. To help you get started, we offer PDF templates for project-based teams, along with variations for leadership teams, and service teams.

When should teams use it?

Any time is the right time for the Health Monitor.

- When a team forms around a new project or service.

- When a team who've been together for a while find their morale is low and frustrations are high.

- When a team feels like they're floating along just fine, thank you.

Do sessions often enough that you can uncover issues before they do too much damage. But not so often that you find the same problems over and over because you don't have a chance to fix them. A good default is monthly for project and service teams, and quarterly for leadership teams.

There are three Team Health Monitor variations – how do I know which one to use?

It depends on what flavor team you're on. Your team is unique, so look for the Health Monitor that's an 80% fit. You might even find that you're actually on more than one type of team! (I'm a member of the project team that makes the Team Playbook, and on the leadership team in our R&D department.) Here's how they break down:

Project teams – Your mission is to deliver awesome outcomes for your customers like shipping a new product feature, delivering a tactical project for "the business", or launching something new. Note that many project teams have internal customers, especially in the realms of HR, Finance, and IT. Even if your role is generally service-oriented, you might find yourself on a project team once in a while – migrating to a new data center, for example.

Leadership teams – You are influencers and decision-makers who work on the longer-term vision and high-level initiatives. You're not executing the day-to-day work on projects, but leading people who are.

Service teams – Whether you're technical or non-technical, you're all about high volume and quality response. Your work is queue-based, and you likely have daily or weekly quotas. Note that service teams also live outside the "usual" places like IT and customer support. Recruiting, email marketing, and design teams are often service-oriented.

Each team type has its own set of attributes and it's own Health Monitor.

We're also developing Health Monitor for rapid-response teams and more. Watch this space!

Who should facilitate Health Monitor sessions?

Ideally, someone from outside the team facilitates so every team member can be fully focused on the discussion, instead of diverting some of their attention to taking notes, etc.

But really, anyone can facilitate a session. Individual contributors, managers, interns... doesn't matter. What matters is that the team creates a safe space to share honestly and openly.

Can it be done virtually?

Yes! In fact, so many of Atlassian's teams are distributed across locations, we had to design the Health Monitor to accommodate that. Use video conferencing if at all possible (not just a phone bridge) so the discussion is enriched by being able to see facial expressions and body language.

You can even take a page from the Trello team: if even one person is joining from outside the office, everyone joins via the video conference. Yes, it feels a bit goofy at first to join from your desk while sitting next to a teammate who is joining the same call from their desk. But it puts everyone on the same playing field, which goes a long way.

Will my team still get along afterward?

Probably. (And hey: if you're doing the Team Health Monitor because you're not getting along anyway, then what's to lose?) In the 700+ sessions we've facilitated within Atlassian, I've noticed that, while teammates may not like each other any more than before, they walk out trusting each other a little bit more.

Because here's the thing: speaking your truth takes guts. It puts you in a vulnerable position. It forces you to take a leap of faith to trust that the people around you won't chop your head off when you stick your neck out. And the trust in your teammates that you demonstrate in that moment breeds more trust – both your trust in them, and their trust in you.

Upward spiral for the win!

What if we come out with all red ratings?

Don't panic. It happens. And it doesn't mean your team is totally screwed.

It'll be tempting to tackle all eight areas at once. Resist that temptation. Choose one (two at the most) and focus on improving the root cause, not the symptoms. You'll probably have some ideas of changes you can make. Plus, you can find loads of exercises and collaboration hacks in the Atlassian Team Playbook that map directly to these eight attributes.

Be sure to schedule a follow-up session in 2-4 weeks so you can check on your progress. Don't expect that your focus area will suddenly be green. It might be yellow, or even still red. Look for signs that you're moving in the right direction, and be patient with yourselves.

How do I know it'll work?

The truth is, you don't. Your team will get out of it what you put into it. If you treat it like a "check-the-box-yay-we're-all-green-let's-go-have-lunch" exercise and don't share how you're really feeling, you probably won't see much improvement.

You can't know whether it'll work for your team until you try it. So now that your most urgent, burning questions about the Team Health Monitor have been answered, the only thing left it to just go for it. Find the variant that suits your team, schedule an hour together, and give it a whirl.
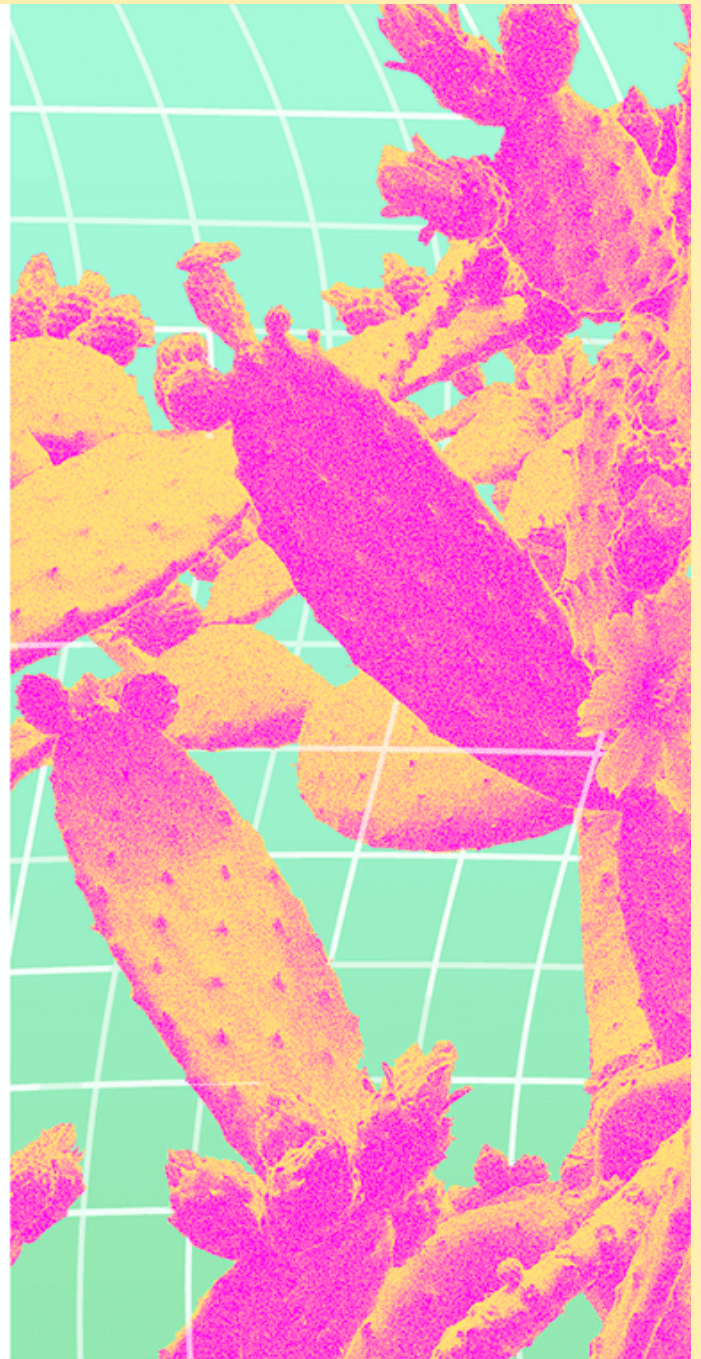
This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

· Atlassian Team Playbook
· Meeting facilitation

By: Sarah Goff-Dupont, **Principal Writer**

Illustrator: Megan Rowe

Research-backed practices that boost your emotional resilience

Psychologists have been studying resilience for decades. Here's what they've found.

If you want to learn a thing or two about emotional resilience, just talk to entrepreneur Ash Ambirge, creator of The Middle Finger Project. She's been looked down on because she grew up in a trailer park. She's been fired from jobs she worked hard to land. She's had her heart broken and her savings stolen on the same day. She's spent more than a few nights sleeping in her car. Yet even after all that, she's still standing.

Ash may not have born into an easy life of uninterrupted success, but she has always bounced back. You might even say she's bounced forward. "The act of contributing meaningfully requires you to step out," she says. "Your every weakness will be on display, but so will your courage."

That's the essence of emotional resilience: the ability to experience something stressful without letting it destroy your resolve, sense of purpose, or hopes for the future. It's more than just keeping calm and carrying on. Being emotionally resilient means that you can acknowledge and metabolize negative feelings instead of locking them away or being overwhelmed by them. When an emotionally resilient person wears a brave face, there's genuine bravery and optimism behind it.

If your resilience is starting to wear thin, take heart. Psychologists have been studying resilience for decades and their body of research suggests many ways to cultivate it. Some of them, such as practicing patience, can't be practiced any ol' time you like – you have to wait for a stressful event to catch you by surprise. Others, like journaling, self-compassion, practicing gratitude, and promoting hope are available to us any time, any day. More on those below, including ways to extend your practice to include your family, friends, and colleagues.

Why bother building emotional resilience?

Resilience is important to our sense of balance, whether that's work-life

balance or our ability to navigate challenging situations successfully. It helps us feel like we can control how we respond to events, even when we don't control the events themselves and acts as a buffer against anxiety and depression. Moreover, emotional resilience helps us achieve more because it makes us better problem solvers when things go awry.

There's even evidence to suggest that resilience helps support the immune system. Stress hormones like cortisol are involved in triggering the immune system response. However, the immune system can build up a tolerance to cortisol when levels stay elevated for long periods of time, thereby leaving us more susceptible to illness. Cultivating emotional resilience helps regulate your stress levels and keeps your immune system responsive.

4 daily practices that support emotional resilience

Journaling

You've probably experienced a sense of relief after confiding in a trusted friend. But did you know you can get that same sense of relief without having to disclose your deepest thoughts to another human? Reflective journaling has been shown to improve emotional stamina and resilience among nurses. (And if anybody has to absorb a lot of drama on the job, it's a nurse.)

When we write down our experiences, we tend to ascribe meaning to them, says Debra Jackson, a professor at the University of Technology Sydney. This can lead to new insights and a deeper understanding of ourselves. Over time, we may recognize patterns in our behavior or emotional responses and respond more constructively in the future. Furthermore, reflecting on your successes promotes a sense of pride, which also contributes to resilience.

You don't have to journal every day or write long entries in order to get the benefits. Still, it's not a bad idea to keep your journal in your backpack or at your desk so it's always handy. You don't have to use pen and paper, either. Many people use a simple text file on their computer, and some people even do voice recordings. For the artistically inclined, a sketch journal might do the trick.

Whatever format you choose, make a point to create an entry on days you experience big highs or lows. Capturing those moments and your feelings about them while it's all fresh in your mind means your entry will be more authentic and detailed, and therefore, more beneficial.

Holding regular retrospectives with your team serves the same purpose as journaling. As you think back on the significant events of the past month, what's working well, and what's not, capture the team's thoughts on Trello cards or a Confluence page. Over time, this living record will expose patterns suggest new ways of working together that help your team hold steady in the face of setbacks.

Self-compassion

For those new to the concept of self-compassion, it might sound a lot like self-esteem. There are a few key differences, however. Self-esteem is your sense of worth (or lack thereof), often based on external factors like accomplishments or how you compare to others. Self-compassion, on the other hand, comes from the inside. It's about resisting the urge to pass judgment on ourselves and treating ourselves with the same kindness we show to others. But there are limits.

Self-compassion isn't the same as giving yourself a free pass every time you mess up. Dr. Kristen Neff, a leading researcher on the subject says it's about "mindfully accept that the moment is painful, and embrace ourselves with kindness and care in response, remembering that imperfection is part of the shared human experience." Instead of getting down on yourself when times are hard, ask yourself what you can learn from it and have faith that you'll get through it – just like billions of people who've come before you.

Neff offers a collection of free guided meditations touching on various aspects of self-compassion, like noticing your emotions and giving yourself permission to receive compassion. (Because yes, you really do deserve it, and no, accepting compassion is not a sign of weakness.) She has also designed thought exercises around reframing your negative self-talk and motivating yourself with kind words that can be incorporated into a regular self-compassion practice.

So where does all this get you? A meta-analysis of several studies showed that self-compassion can act as a buffer against the negative feelings we harbor about ourselves, including allowing people to "acknowledge their role in negative events without feeling overwhelmed by negative emotions." Self-compassion is also strongly correlated with well-being and may be an effective intervention for those suffering from chronically negative views of themselves. It's even been shown to reduce the impact of trauma among combat veterans.

Banish all scapegoating. When working through a problem in your personal or professional life, start with the assumption that everyone involved was acting in good faith and to the best of their abilities. (It won't always turn out to be true, but if "innocent until proven guilty" is good enough for the law, it's good enough for the rest of us.) Seek to understand other people's actions and the reasons behind them instead of jumping straight to judgment. You might find that they weren't acting unreasonably after all, and together you can figure out a better way forward.

Gratitude

You don't need to be a psychologist to know instinctively that feeling grateful for all the good things in your life helps you deal with the bad things. In the book she co-authored with organizational psychologist Adam Grant, Option B, Sheryl Sandberg, COO at Facebook, shares a story that poignantly illustrates the effect gratitude can have.

During the early days [after my husband died of sudden heart failure], my instinct was to try to find positive thoughts. Adam told me the opposite: that it was a good idea to think about how much worse things could be. "Worse?" I asked him. "Are you kidding me? How could this be worse?" His answer cut through me: "Dave could have had that same cardiac arrhythmia driving your children." Wow. The thought that I could have lost all three of them had never occurred to me. I instantly felt overwhelmingly grateful that my children were alive and healthy.

She goes on to explain how the gratitude she felt overshadowed some of her grief and acted as a tailwind as she moved forward with her life.

The connection between gratitude and resilience lies at the neurotransmitter level. Our brain releases serotonin and dopamine (the "happiness chemicals") when we express or receive gratitude. Plus, researchers have found that the two areas of the brain responsible for regulating emotions and memory, the amygdala and the hippocampus, activate when we feel gratitude. With a daily gratitude practice, these neuropathways get stronger, resulting in more sustained feelings of contentment.

As with any regular practice, the key to practicing gratitude on the regular is to choose a method that integrates naturally with the rest of your life. For example, at our house we go around the table at dinner and share one thing that we're thankful for that day. Others make a habit of pausing for

a moment as they get out of bed and meditating on what they're grateful for. That simple act sets them up to move through their day with balance and perspective. Studies involving people with neuromuscular and sleep disorders found that making nightly entries in a gratitude journal improved their sleep quality – those positive thoughts stay us as we drift off.

BETTER, TOGETHER

Acknowledging a colleague for a win they scored or contribution they made feels great and can be as easy as dropping a note in your team's chat room. Make this a habit and you'll be surprised how fast it catches on – gratitude is contagious! If you're a manager, consider setting aside a budget for small peer-to-peer thank you gifts as well.

Hope

Ok: hope isn't a "practice," per se. It's a state of being similar to resilience in that both help you stay optimistic in the face of adversity. Not surprisingly, studies have found that hope takes the edge off day-to-day stresses because hope is rooted in a sense of agency and ability. In other words, it makes us feel like we have the ability to turn that stressful event into something more positive or find ways to avoid it altogether in the future.

Cultivating hope within yourself isn't as straightforward as keeping a gratitude journal (although that does help). Whenever we find joy in something, that ignites hope. How you find that joy is up to you: belief in something larger than yourself, escaping to nature, spending time on a hobby or with people you love. And don't forget to celebrate each victory, no matter how small, so you create a sense of momentum as you move through life.

This way, down the rabbit hole...
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

· Daily affirmations
· Team retrospectives

Random ways to be kind to your co-workers

1. Surprise a teammate with a yummy treat on their birthday or work-iversary.

2. If your team has an on-call rotation (or similar), offer to step in for the person who's been working overtime lately.

3. Relay the positive feedback you heard about someone's work if they weren't there to hear it first-hand.

4. Instead of criticizing in a moment of frustration, write it in an email to yourself. Send, wait a moment, then read it. If it still seems important after those few minutes, by then you'll probably have thought of a kinder, more constructive way to say it.

5. Re-share social media posts referencing a colleague's work, and add a bit of commentary for a personal touch.

6. Smile.

"Be kinder than is necessary. Everyone is fighting some kind of battle."

By: Lauren Marten Parker, **Contributing Writer**

Illustrator: Megan Rowe

Celebrate those little wins to keep your team motivated

Fostering a recognition-rich environment can lift up your whole team – especially when times are tough.

SENT AN EMAIL

PUT ON PANTS TODAY

FINALLY WATCHED THE WIRE

Crisis fatigue is real. Ceaseless uneasiness with no discernible end in sight is simply the pits, and when big wins feel like a thing of the past, surfacing the small ones – meeting a deadline, finally getting around to watching The Wire, whatever – is essential to our emotional well-being.

So how can we harness the power of small wins in the workplace? Or, put another way, how can we mindfully celebrate each other's incremental acts of progress when we're all stuck at home, staring down a formidable to-do list?

Atlassian's research shows that team goal-setting and achievement-celebrating can have a huge impact on team morale when times are tough. Even a "great job!" callout at a team meeting or a passing high-five in the hallway can go a long way to help people feel appreciated and teams feel connected. Luckily, it's probably easier than you think.

Fostering a recognition-rich environment

According to Gallup, the most meaningful recognition comes from managers (and managers' managers, and their managers, all the way up to the executive suite), but that the happiest teams are forged in a "recognition-rich" environment, where acknowledgment and appreciation flow freely up, down, and across hierarchies. This certainly includes public declarations of pride for individual and team-level accomplishments, but positive feedback between individuals gets the job done too.

In any environment, the liberal application of employee recognition–including budget-friendly verbal acknowledgments and words of praise – makes for more engaged team members, which means higher productivity, better retention stats, and, well, happier people. In an environment, where your entire workforce is struggling with challenges to productivity and emotional wellbeing, a boost in confidence in ourselves, our teams, and our workplace can help get us through the day.

Atlassians enjoy one long-standing company tradition in particular

that embodies this focus on the simple yet powerful act of expressing appreciation: our Kudos program. Any employee can nominate a coworker for going above and beyond their job description with a Kudos, which is a small gift – think Amazon gift card, movie tickets, or charitable donation– electronically delivered to the nominee.

Ways to celebrate the little wins

Kudos are a celebrated tradition for Atlassian, but there are lots of ways that anyone who wants to acknowledge the hard work of a team player– meeting a goal, shipping a project, picking up some slack for a teammate in need – can do so, anytime and from any distance. Even if your budget is tight, that doesn't preclude anyone from letting a teammate know that while they may be out of sight, they're certainly on your mind. Here are some ways to celebrate a teammate *gratis*.

- **Karma Bot:** If now isn't the time to add a Kudos line-item to your company budget, but you can tap into that same sentiment with the Karma bot app, available on several communication platforms, including Slack and MS Teams. Send your work-mates kudos (AKA good juju) with an @ mention to put a little pep in their step.

- **Snaps**: Take five minutes at the beginning of each team meeting, virtual or otherwise, to acknowledge those mini victories that might otherwise fade into the background. For example, "Snaps to Beverly for being on call every night this week," then everyone, yes, physically snaps their fingers.

- **Team social hour:** If your team has recently finished a project or accomplished some other goal, organize a virtual coffee date or happy hour and raise a mug/glass to yourselves. In addition to marking an achievement, scheduling social time with your team can fill that void in your heart where watercooler catch-ups used to live.

- **Managers – share team wins with the organization at large:** As I mentioned, managers are in a unique position to build up their direct reports, and they shouldn't stop at team-level plaudits. Rather, higher-ups should spread the word to their counterparts far and wide, so HR knows that the sales team hit their target, and the dev team gets a look at the major project design just shipped.

If you happen to be a manager keen on beefing up your team's recognition game and have resources to spare, you might look into establishing a formal peer-to-peer recognition program similar to Kudos. Here are a few other ways to call out a win for a small chunk of change.

- **Food delivery:** Is your teammate always raving about her local Thai spot? Call 'em up and gift her with a pad Thai lunch. Bonus points here for supporting a local business!

- **Gift card:** Another way to prop up your teammate AND help a local economy thrive is by purchasing gift cards. If you know of a favorite clothing store, hobby shop, or, heck, an artisanal cheesemonger with your colleague's name written all over it, say thank you by letting them choose just the right thing.

- **Charitable donation:** There's no shortage of charities needing support. Choose one near and dear to your colleague's heart and make a contribution in their name.

Above all, whether your team is totally crushing it or can barely find the time or energy to check email, remember to practice empathy. Don't let everyday professional accomplishments go unnoticed or unacknowledged. Those "recognition-rich" teams may just be better off in the long run, as individuals and as a group. And that's a win no matter what else is going on.

This way, down the rabbit hole…
Dig deeper into some of the topics mentioned in this article:

· Building happy teams
· Research on effective teams

Keep being awesome