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## How to Talk to Your Employees About Coronavirus

Published: Apr 6, 2020 by [Annie Pilon](#) In [Employment](#) [1](#)



Nearly every small business has been impacted in some way by the [coronavirus pandemic](#). And many of their employees are seeing the effects as well.

Communicating with employees throughout this uncertain time is essential. But small business owners who have never had to navigate a situation like this before may be left wondering what to say.

### Talk to Employees About Coronavirus

Whether you communicate with employees through video conferences, daily emails, or personal phone calls, here are some of the topics that you may want to cover in the coming weeks.

### Let Them Know If They Can Make Changes to Benefit Enrollment

Small businesses and their employees are among the most likely to struggle financially during this time. If your team members are dealing with decreased hours, loss of tips, or a family member's lost job, they may want to change up their benefits to compensate.

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Typically, these changes are only made during specified enrollment periods. However, some carriers are allowing changes now due to the circumstances. So check with your providers and then share that information with your team. You might also allow employees to change details like 401(k) contributions.

Rob Wilson, employment expert and President of [Employco USA](#) said in a phone interview with Small Business Trends, “Some people might want to delete their dental coverage or reduce their life insurance for the time being just so they can continue to cover the cost. So bring your benefits team in and discuss the possibility of making changes that people wouldn’t normally need to make.”

## Explain Available Treatment Options

Some of your employees may also be concerned about being able to actually access treatment related to coronavirus, if necessary. However, it’s essential for those who are having serious symptoms to seek timely treatment regardless of any potential concerns about the cost.

Many major health insurance providers are waiving copays and any other costs involved in treatment for coronavirus. So check with your insurance provider to make sure, and then let your employees know so they can feel confident seeking treatment if necessary.

## Clearly Communicate Your Time Off Policy

Paid time off is a hot topic right now. Let your employees know that their time off will be at least partially covered if they need to take time away to seek treatment, care for a sick loved one, or take care of kids who are out of school.

Not all small businesses are able to offer paid time off on their own. However, recently passed federal legislation provides up to \$200 of paid sick leave per day for small business employees who are experiencing symptoms or caring for a loved one. If you’re unable to provide a separate sick leave plan, make sure your employees at least know that this option is there for them.

## Explain Layoffs and Furloughs

Unfortunately, some small businesses are also having to take the drastic step of laying off employees who they cannot afford to keep on staff.

Wilson says, “You want to be honest and paint a realistic picture of the future. If you have to lay off or furlough team members, just tell them what’s going on. Anybody who reads the news knows what’s happening. So whatever direction you need to go, just be honest and upfront with people.”

He also noted that rules about unemployment and benefits vary by state, so it’s important for small business owners to understand what the benefits of different options are and try to choose the one that works best for their team. For example, furloughed workers are sometimes able to continue receiving their benefits while also collecting unemployment. But other states only offer unemployment benefits to those who have been fully laid off.

## Be Transparent About the State of Your Operations

Hold conversations about layoffs or furloughs one-on-one. But also hold more general conversations with your larger team. Make them about the general state of your company. If you’re struggling, there’s no need to keep that a secret. People generally know what’s going on in the world. And many employees are already

worried about their future. So being honest about any potential struggles may give your team a better opportunity to brainstorm potential solutions.

## Stay In Touch

It makes no difference. Do you share specific information about changes to your company? Then staying in touch remains important. Remain in contact with your team throughout this period.

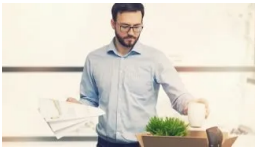
Wilson adds, "Staying in touch is so important, especially for those of us who are used to being in an office who are now working remotely. Communicate to your team and be there to answer questions, even if you're just providing emotional support."

*Image: Depositphotos.com*

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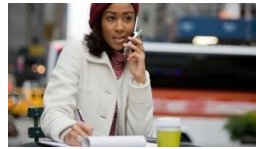
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Annie Pilon is a Senior Staff Writer for Small Business Trends, covering entrepreneur profiles, interviews, feature stories, community news and in-depth, expert-based guides. When she's not writing she can be found on her personal blog [Wattlebird](#), and exploring all that her home state of Michigan has to offer.