



The Coronavirus Email that HR will be Sending to the CEO on Monday, March 3

Insights

3.02.20

To: C-Suite.

From: Overworked VP Corporate HR.

Just got off the phone with one of our Washington State operations.

There have been two deaths, the first in the US, in Washington State, and the news is raising fears that the COVID-19 virus has been spreading unknown within the state.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/01/us/washington-coronavirus-nursing-home.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-03-01/coronavirus-west-coast-scrambles>

Employees are already calling and tomorrow morning, we're going to get hit with questions from scared employees. I know that the US is still doing pretty well so far with its responses, but this is what I'm hearing from our Northwestern offices ...

It's crazy here. People are starting to hoard food. Children's hospital turning away kids at urgent care. People are not taking mass transit.

I know that there has also been a new case in New York this weekend, and I fear people may react strongly there too. Panic doesn't help, but we must deal with the facts we're dealt.

I recommend that we get ahead of the fear and show decisive leadership. We have good people and they just need to know we're on top of things and sharing straight facts with them. Here's what I think we need to do.

Communicate as follows:

- Confirm that XYZ Company is actively monitoring these fastmoving developments and will do whatever is necessary to protect employees.

- Provide the Hyperlinks (and maybe the draft FAQ we got from counsel) and remind concrete actions to employees.
- There is no vaccine or magic bullet and all of us need to do the following:
 - Stay home if they are sick; regardless of whether they have symptoms matching the coronavirus or not. We are still in a robust flu season and many of the symptoms are the same – so stay home.
 - (Managers need to back up this message and in a kind way send employees home if they report being sick.)
 - Practice coughing and sneezing hygiene – always cover your mouth and nose when sneezing.
 - Wash your hands regularly – always before eating – count to 20 seconds and wash hands all over – 20-seconds is much longer than one thinks.
 - Carry hand cleaner in your purse or pockets – I’m serious – and use it.
 - Keep your hands away from your mouth, nose and eyes – that’s how most people get the virus – not by breathing it – the virus appears not to infect in airborne aerosol fashion very well.
 - When in public, including on public transportation, practice common sense separation and distancing – keep a reasonable distance from others in the public – 4’– 6’, but until the spread worsens – we DO NOT need to get weird and start refusing to be near people or to treat customers rudely.
 - Sick people are more susceptible, so even if the seasonal flu vaccine is only 30 – 40% effective, it’s worth getting.
 - When employees travel – wash and clean hands regularly – carry a few wipes and hand cleaner.
 - Freely bring concerns to designated management.
 - Don’t waste money on masks – they cannot be reused, which means that you can spend a couple of grand and even find them (you won’t) it’s not an effective strategy. Moreover, if you’re not trained and they’re not properly fitted (no facial hair) and you have clean hands when you put them on and take them off, they are ineffective. More importantly, the reason that the CDC and WHO are discouraging them is that there are not enough for healthcare workers and our industrial clients. If I end up in a hospital, I want the folks treating me to have plenty of masks preventing them from getting infected and maybe transmitting the virus or flu to me. Decide based on self-interest.

In turn, XYZ Company will:

- Increase stocks of waterless hand cleaner and Kleenex around the location.
- Provide wipes for keyboards (correct type for computer) and general wipes, and that employees should regularly use them.

- If schools close or steps are taken to limit public gatherings or public transit, the Firm will evaluate and take action.
- (Note - We should consider seeing if building housekeeping can do any additional daily or regular cleaning.)
- As it becomes necessary, take steps to limit contact with the public, limit travel, and otherwise address risk.

I know that Management is already factoring the virus into financial predictions and planning, but we also need to revisit – what-if – and practice or think through our actual reactions. (Why a Coronavirus presents special challenges)

- Build liquidity to use to react as needed.
- Our PTO, sick and vacation pay is presumably unfunded. If we see mass canceling of schools and other actions, we need to plan for a substantial financial hit.
- Figure out what we'll do if employees use up their PTO. Sick people may be reluctant to go home or stay home if its unpaid time.
- Prepare for how to allow nonexempt staff to work from home. A lot of wage-hour and state law issues.
- What do we do about retail and manufacturing employees who cannot work remotely?
- Start thinking about how we'll get people into office if public transit is affected or if employees begin to reject it.
- Think outside the box about how to facilitate people working whose kids cannot go to school and are too young to stay at home.
- Make some deals or develop contacts with food delivery because both XYZ and employees may develop a new newfound fondness for food delivery.
- Add some humorous “we're all in this together activity” to avoid further scaring employees – maybe schedule a few lunches in various locations where we pay for some lunch – find a way to lighten employees up without trivializing the challenges. Stressed people more readily get sick.

Above all, we need to regularly update employees because no one is well served by panicking. We've got to figure out as a team how to safely keep working and putting money in our wallets, so tailor communications that way. Some of the news outlets are being surprisingly restrained but others are already fearmongering.

The stark facts are worrying, so we must provide as much balanced objective data as possible.

We must also retain employee trust and not appear in any way disinterested in employees' wellbeing. As an example, many of us work at home and those of us who can do so, should not start

exclusively working at home. We've got the opportunity to show leadership in the trenches, or more accurately, on the floor.

We also have a chance to market our company. Some of our customers know that we are experienced because of our dealing with Katrina and other Hurricanes, weather issues with coastal cities, snow, and issues as diverse as offices near fires. Let's set an example and make sure our customers know that they can rely on us.

I hope and believe that this virus outbreak will be less than our fears, but it's important to be prepared. What's that old saw? Fortune favors the prepared?

And if you want to be further motivated, read [New York Times article](#) about the rate of deaths associated with seasonal flu, the deadly Spanish Flu, SARS, MERS, and now the predictions about COVID-19 – then multiply the percentages by 1000, 100,000, 1 million

The virus is going to spread – probably less in the US than in many other places – but the potential for some disruption is enough to move us to work with a sense of urgency.

Sorry to be dump this on you on Sunday night.

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