

Battling Burnout in a Time of Crisis

Long before the arrival of COVID-19, Americans were struggling to juggle the demands of work and home life. Burnout was an all-too-real consequence, as an alarming number of people found it difficult to maintain boundaries, particularly in our always-on society, where smartphones keep people tethered to work 24/7. For many employees, this creates an irresistible urge to respond to emails and “put out fires” at their child’s softball game, out for dinner with friends, or during family time. Not surprisingly, they’re overworked, overtired and overstressed.



According to Gallup, 76% of employees had experienced burnout in some fashion *before* the pandemic. Employees’ already stressed-out minds have surely reached the breaking point, as they’ve not only sought to cope with fears over a global pandemic but have found themselves working from home (if they were fortunate enough to have that option), often with children popping in and out of their makeshift home offices.

At Lincoln Financial, our employees’ wellbeing is always at the forefront of everything we do. Throughout our response to COVID-19, our priority has been protecting our people in any way we can as an employer. So, when we made the massive shift from roughly 1,500 employees working remotely to nearly 12,000 working from home in a matter of days, we knew we needed to expand our support in every way possible to ensure they felt physically, emotionally and financially safe.

Here’s how...

Communicate Regularly. From the start, we recognized regular communication with employees – and being responsive to what they told us – was going to be key to a successful work-from-home strategy. Once everyone had the necessary equipment, functionality and network support to do their job, we asked how employees were coping with this new reality. We found they were struggling to find balance. This was particularly true

for those with children home from school. Not only were they adapting to a work environment usually reserved for time with family and friends, they were suddenly expected to be full-time educators and caretakers as well.

- **Conduct Surveys.** Soon after transitioning to work from home, we launched what we call Feedback Fridays, weekly two-three question surveys asking employees to weigh in on important topics and let us know how they are doing. Early on in Feedback Fridays, we discovered a phenomenon we coined as “Blursday” – when the repetitive nature of life causes everything to run together in your mind, making it difficult to even remember what day it is. Mere weeks into what would become a months-long arrangement, they were already struggling.
- **Promote Resources.** Through virtual town halls and other communication vehicles, we ensured employees were aware of the many helpful resources available to them, including our Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which offers access to great tools like free counseling sessions and tutoring help for kids, along with our wellness resources and programs offered through our vendor partners, including access to telephonic wellness coaching, free virtual workout classes, meditations, and free webinars on anxiety and stress management. We also offered tips for establishing work-life boundaries and instituted an emergency leave policy, allowing additional paid time off for certain family needs.
- **Have Some Fun.** We also encouraged employees to block out some time for themselves each day to have lunch, play with their kids, walk their dog. Whatever they need to do, whatever feeds their body, mind and soul, we’re all in favor of it. We even celebrated their outside interests with a virtual “Lincoln’s Got Talent” competition on our internal social media app, featuring employees from across the country singing, dancing, painting, crafting, and more.

- **Encourage Time Off.** Feedback Fridays later revealed that employees weren't as comfortable taking vacation in the midst of COVID-19, due to closures and health and safety concerns. Understanding the importance of taking time to relax and recharge, we launched a campaign encouraging employees to take that time and find something fun to do. We even shared fun staycation ideas and had senior leaders share their plans on our internal social app.
- **Make Space for Meaningful Conversation.** Amid the pandemic, abhorrent acts of racism shook our collective humanity and refocused our national attention on the history of racial injustices in this country. This crisis presented the opportunity to connect with one another, listen, support and learn more about our personal and professional experiences as we all seek to cope and chart a path forward. We engaged in meaningful conversations around race through virtual town halls, discussion forums, and roundtables with senior leaders as well as outside experts. We established a toolkit to help to talk about race in the workplace and encouraged employees to reach out to their Black colleagues to find out how they're doing. We also hosted crucial conversations with senior leadership teams in every area of the organization to hear from our Black colleagues and to better understand how our people would like to see Lincoln respond.

Throughout these challenges, our message to employees has been clear: "We're in this together." Working from home with the stresses of a global pandemic and ongoing racial injustice crisis can lead to feelings of isolation and exhaustion, and ultimately burnout. Employees are hungry to be heard during this time. We received a tremendous amount of gratitude and relief – that we are actually listening, we care and were taking action based on what they shared.

Even though we're physically apart, we're connected by something bigger than ourselves: our commitment to "Be Lincoln" – to exude strength and resiliency, take care of each other and act with integrity. These guiding principles form an unbreakable foundation that dictates how we conduct ourselves with our clients, our stakeholders and each other.