

How Employers Can Respond to the Crisis in Ukraine

After two years living under the uncertainty and emotion of COVID-19 and its deep impact on the workplace, many employers had started shifting into the hopeful mindset of a new normal after the pandemic. That tenuous hope may need to be put on hold as a new threat has emerged: the crisis in Ukraine.

Leaders certainly don't have all the answers as we all grapple with concern for Ukrainian citizens and fears of a global conflict. But with most employees feeling at least a sense of unease, you do need to start the conversation – don't shy away from speaking about tough topics. Management teams can foster a psychologically safe environment by both naming these anxieties and showing care for employees, their families, and a return to peace.



Five steps to help support employees and the workplace amid this watershed moment:

1. **Name it.** Acknowledge what is happening and issue a statement acknowledging how the crisis is affecting your workforce and the world at large. Even if the invasion of Ukraine doesn't seem to impact your business directly, it's definitely lingering in the mind of employees; they are looking to you lead by example. Stick to the facts but make your message a genuine one.

Consider starting your message with this script:

"The Ukrainian crisis is on the minds and hearts of [Employer] and all employees. We know this is impacting people in different ways throughout our organization, and we want you to know that it's okay to talk about these concerns and ways in which we can take care of each other and ourselves. Our overriding concern is for the safety of people in the region and their families and loved ones around the world and what that means for you."

Depending on your company, you may want to make a stronger statement and include language such as:

"[Employer] stands with the people of Ukraine and the governments, companies and individuals around the world calling for the immediate end to the unlawful and horrific

attack on the people of Ukraine and their freedom. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has created a devastating humanitarian crisis in the region, and [Employer] leadership is monitoring the ongoing developments in Ukraine with great concern and hopes for a safe return to peace as soon as possible.”

2. **Immediately highlight the mental health resources and supports for employees and their families.** Acknowledging that your team may be feeling overwhelmed or want a safe, confidential place to talk is critical. It’s important to that their own health and safety is a priority, especially during times of crisis.

Your staff may have family in the affected area, be connecting this situation with past trauma, be challenged financially by the global turmoil, or experiencing a trigger to their existing mental-health condition. Remind everyone of the confidentiality of their EAP and other resources in an inclusive and supportive way, and include it up-front in the company statement or special town hall.

3. **Managers and supervisors: support them individually and in their connections with their direct reports.** Management carries a higher level of burden as they juggle their thoughts and feelings with those of their team. Send messages that highlight your manager-specific support systems and communication guides for assisting their direct reports.

EAP can help your supervisors balance the conversations with their staff and create a space for conversation without veering into “counseling support” territory, which is not their role in the organization.

Employees often feel more comfortable voicing their concerns (especially if they are personally affected by the crisis) with their day-to-day manager, which opens doors for leaders to model self-care and even do what they can to help (contributing to relief organizations).

Special Considerations

There are some employees that may be more affected or triggered by the Ukrainian crisis. These are folks with first-hand experiences with war, global conflict, and humanitarian crises; take particular care when speaking with them and **be aware of extra supports or space** that they may need.

Signs of distress in any employee include sudden increases in tardiness; appearing more distracted; a shorter fuse; or a higher-than-normal fixation on the news or global happenings.

Managers should keep an **open mind**, exercise **compassion**, and approach employees who may be struggling with **empathy, understanding** and **flexibility**.

4. **Encourage employees not to 'doomscroll' and to focus on what they can control.**

Consider limiting your exposure to media coverage of war and conflict. Alternatively, if you feel that you need to know more about the situation, be vocal about ensuring your sources are balanced and considered rather than gratuitous and graphic. As always, set clear [ground rules for civil discourse at work](#).

5. **If your company wants to help directly or promote reputable charitable organizations:**

Consider using this script:

“Helping those around us in a time of need has always been a core value of our organization. We have compiled a list of reputable nonprofits providing aid and relief to the people of Ukraine, and will update with additional information as it becomes available. [Employer] has donated \$ to [charity] and/or will provide a 1:1 match to any employee contribution.”

Some potential aid charities to highlight:

[Doctors Without Borders](#)

[International Rescue Committee](#)

[Mercy Corps](#)

[United States Fund for UNICEF](#)



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