

An Employee's Letter to HR

THOUGHT PAPER

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Dear HR Team,

Hope you and your loved ones are safe and doing great!

As we cross the midway mark of 2020, we have been seeing numerous challenges being hurled at HR's way. We would like to give you a 'shout out' for the outstanding efforts that you have shown through these trying times of COVID-19.

Honestly, while we used to make fun earlier, we now look forward to the "ethnic day" celebrations during Independence Day, the goodie boxes that we receive during Diwali, and the "Secret Santa" exercises during Christmas. We confess that we enjoyed each activity that you organized for us! Today, we want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and appreciate all your efforts to keep us engaged in the workplace. While we are all longing to go back to those days, the chances in the near term look bleak.

As the lines between professional and personal lives blur more than ever before, each one of us, including you all, are experiencing work from home very differently. While for some us limited connectivity is an issue, others are trying to stay productive while sharing a small area we call home with other family members working and studying remotely too.

We understand that the current circumstances are as testing for you as they are for us. Earlier where you could simply walk up to someone to solve their problems, to resolve so many varied problems remotely cannot be easy by any stretch of the imagination.

With this letter, I want to highlight some issues that can be addressed to smoothen the sail (as far as possible) for all of us. After all, it is no longer just about "employee engagement" but also about "employee experience"!

1. "Walk the Talk" on Flexibility and Work-Life Harmony

Work-life balance has been the biggest casualty of the current situation.

People are expected to be available for calls and meetings all the time with little consideration for responsibilities at home. Yes, we do not have to commute to work anymore, but our work hours have soared and our break time has been seriously compromised. With the earlier inertia wearing off, our productivity and capacity to focus are getting affected now.

While HR has done a commendable job of taking care of our mental well-being so far, you can go a step

further to **encourage people to take some downtime**. Instead of employees cashing out unused vacations, **guide them to take staycations** where they can pursue self-care and spend some quality family time. Bring this change in company policies and communications.

While work from home has become an increasingly acceptable practice, HR can support flexibility with **flex schedules which permit employees to take their personal time in hours and not just days**.

To ensure that people do not get judged for rooting for flexibility HR can develop policies **that enforce work-life harmony and coach managers to be more empathetic**. Having employees shut their laptops at the end of the workday (helping them mentally switch off from work), putting in place guidelines about mailing hours or planning an occasional "No mailing" and "No meeting" days will let it be known that the company is prepared to "walk the talk" on flexibility.

2. Design Personalized Benefits

It is high time that the HR fraternity starts focusing on personalized perks and benefits.

We're glad that our medical insurance covers family members (spouse and children) and it may suit employees who are in the middle of their career and have a family, but the same might not apply to freshers who are just starting. They might want a lower insurance cover and a higher basic pay-out. At the same time, employees with bigger family responsibilities might appreciate special insurance rates to enroll their aging parents and in-laws.

Having the **flexibility to choose how I wish to design my insurance coverage** would go a long way in making me feel less tensed about what to fall back on during difficult times.

Support in terms of cash in hand, extra paid leaves, or a temporary no-interest loan will be really helpful if a loved one falls sick. **Any financial help which can ease the extra burden during contingencies will really make me feel cared for.**

3. Empower Me Through Development Opportunities

We believe HR has got an immense role to play here. While you have been arranging for sessions, webinars, and courses that align with the organizational goals, HR may also consider **sponsoring a few courses of personal preference or a professional development stipend** that can help employees upskill themselves in areas that in the long-run will enable them to wear multiple hats.

Mentorship programs that give me access to company leaders and get to know what it is like to work in different roles within the company would help my overall development. Letting me set aside a **dedicated amount of time on projects that inspire me** will reduce the likelihood of burnout and may act as an incubating ground for true innovations.

4. Performance Evaluation Should Be Fair and Transparent

We understand that you need to continue processes like performance management even in these unsettling times. However, we need you to consider that some of us are finding the 'new normal' very hard to cope with and **would like to do the evaluation at a time when are available to give our full focus to the exercise.** You also need to assure us that the **evaluation will take into account the impact of extraordinary events around us** on our performance.

Please promise me that the performance appraisal will be a true measure of my performance and not a cover for company strategy of laying people off. I understand that tough times call for tough measures, but I **trust you not to fire me under the pretext of poor performance.** I want you to respect my right to know the true reason if I am let go.

If some of us deserve to be in the performance improvement plan, do make sure that there is a concrete plan to turn my performance around and it is not just a way to give us time to find the next job.

5. We Love to Hear From You

With so many rumors about pay cuts and lay-offs flying around, **we need you to be the source that we can rely upon for proactive, honest, and transparent communication.** This is the time we when look towards our senior leaders for guidance. Virtual town halls where we are addressed by senior leaders and where we can share our suggestions will **make us feel like participants and not bystanders.**

Keep us **updated about key leadership decisions and recommendations** via emails as and when they are taken. We know that these are likely to change with emerging situations, but being informed will eliminate our fears and help us plan better.

Basically, just keep me involved. Make me feel included. We feel valued when we are shared with and heard.

Yours Truly,
A loyal employee

P.S: Missed you on the virtual chai break.
Catch up soon.

About the Authors



Mainak brings over 24 years of experience spanning business and HR roles across geographies. This has given him a unique understanding of the link between HR and business strategy. He also holds a patent for HR capability development.

Mainak's experience includes human capital strategy, culture, talent development (performance, leadership development, career pathing, competency, learning, engagement, diversity) and talent acquisition (including on-boarding and background check). He has also implemented HRIS platform and HR metrics to improve performance.

Recently he has been helping start-ups set up efficient and effective HR teams and processes. In addition, Mainak is a recognized Executive Coach and Leadership Development expert.

Mainak's previous work experience includes stints/projects with Accenture (Consulting and HR), Hewitt Associates, AbsolutData, Heidrick & Struggles, Evalueserve, Sterlite Technologies and Upstox.

Mainak holds a MBA from the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, and is a certified executive coach.

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