

Special Session.

+ COVID-19: 3 Unique Challenges for the Brain

The coronavirus presents unique challenges for the human brain. Here are three reasons why COVID-19 is so hard on our brain's natural response.

1. We are social, emotional beings. When crisis strikes, the brain's programming directs us to gather and care for one another. But this time the appropriate response is the opposite: *physical distancing*. This can leave us socially isolated.
2. Our brains are not meant to quickly spot what is evidence-based versus anecdotal, especially when we're under emotional distress. Discernment requires time, yet the situation with COVID-19 is urgent.
3. The brain is hard-wired to create a narrative. We fill in gaps naturally, and in uncertainty our default is to jump to the worst-case scenario. The more we isolate ourselves, the more we perceive threatening situations as even more negative.

"This is the opportunity to simplify. The more consistency we can have with our employees, the better. Consistency and predictability will soothe employee stress."

– Kerry Goyette

+ How Should We Respond in This Time of Crisis?

How can we stay calm and not panic despite these unique challenges?

- **You** need a social boost. When we're with others, it takes no extra effort to emotionally regulate or responses. When we're not—like when we're isolating ourselves—it taxes the brain's precious metabolic resources to practice empathy and exercise emotional regulation.

Figure out ways to socialize virtually and with your family: your decision-making and mental stamina depend on it.

- **Your team** needs focus. As a leader, the people around you likely need help taking the next right step. They're overwhelmed, and subsequently paralyzed in the sea of "things they need to do." Your role is to help them focus on what's essential.
 - Eliminate the nonessential and remove red tape when possible.
 - Provide autonomy where you can (e.g. flexible schedules, having an employee own a project).
 - Make it easy for your team members to take the next right step.
- **Your organization** needs hope. Hope, it turns out, is essential to problem-solving. Without hope, we lack meaning and we struggle to move forward. Leaders have the opportunity to provide a shared goal and align their team towards a common mission.

This is when leadership is being revealed. You can't control the impact of COVID-19 fully, but you do have control over your response and how you lead your people.