

4 ways managers can help employees find career clarity during coronavirus

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The monotony of remote work has employees questioning the value they bring to the workplace, forcing many to tackle some uncomfortable truths about their careers, says Tracy Timm, founder of the Nth Degree, a career coaching company.

“Isolation is really increasing our unhappiness, and a lot of people are taking a critical eye toward their career and questioning if this is really where they want to be right now,” she says. “People are asking if their career path has been intentional or reactionary, and taking a microscope to the things that aren’t working for them.”

After many workers lost the benefits of the physical workplace, remote work has highlighted a lack of alignment between an employee’s values and the work they do, Timm says. To feel fulfilled at work, those things must be better balanced.

“Having great coworkers or a great boss or a really nice office can often mask other parts of the job that are otherwise not satisfying or fulfilling, and you overlook the fact the work that you're doing isn't really challenging or fulfilling,” she says. “Once all those trappings of your job and the environment you do it in are stripped away, you start to question, ‘Why am I doing that? Why am I getting up crazy early to get started working from home? Why am I sacrificing time with my family to do conference calls?’”

Managers can play an important role in helping identify how their employees bring value to an organization and adjust their tactics accordingly, Timm says.

“If someone is advocating for something that will make them better at their job or more productive, that will bring more value to the company,” Timm says. “Be objective in thinking about how a new project or an hour for lunch or more flexible work will make that person better at their job before you take it as a complaint.”

Timm shares her tips for helping employees finding career clarity to reenergize their work.

1. Determine core career values

Go back to the basics of what really matters in a job or in a career. When you figure out your core values, you can look objectively at your current work situation and ask, “Where am I getting these values satisfied? What’s missing?”

Put a value in the middle of a piece of paper and then look at your workday and think about the parts of your workday that align with that value. If something gives you satisfaction, that goes on the plus side. And then anytime you feel like your job is in opposition to that value or pulls you away from that value, put that on the negative side. You can start to get a sense of if your job is balanced or if you’re out of alignment and then advocate for yourself from an objective place.

2. Advocate for what you need to find career balance

Most people feel more empowered when they identify not only what they care about in a job, but also how they add value as a professional. If you can deeply understand yourself and the value that you bring to a company and to a job, then you feel much more empowered, much more in control, and likely more confident to go out and to make proactive changes in your career.

For example, if you value quality time for yourself, you can look at that objectively and you might not need much. You might just need to advocate for an hour off at lunch to feel like you’ve had a break in your day. It's a very simple tweak that you would have overlooked if you hadn't gone back to the basics. When you advocate for something from a boss or ask for something different from your job, like a new project or a change to your team, you have a leg to stand on when you're making that request.

3. Be willing to make a bigger change if your needs aren't met

This might be the tough love moment where it may be time to consider a bigger change if you want your job to be sustainable for the long haul and be the person you want to be in and out of work. There's a reason a lot of people are unhappy with their jobs, and it's because it's easier to stay in something that's comfortable and familiar than it is to challenge yourself and challenge your thinking. If you want a change, you may have to change your belief system as to what you want out of your job and then be intentional about doing something about it.

4. Take advantage of the 'white space' of COVID-19

We want to have purpose in our lives, and I don't think enough people look at their careers as a way to have that. But now, more people have an increased amount of white space in their day, giving them a deeper reason to question, "Why am I doing this? Is this really where I want to be?"

We're going to have more people come out of COVID who want their job to have meaning, and that could mean quitting and working at a non-profit or starting your own business or even just getting a promotion or a raise.