



Health and Wellness



When the World Is Too Distracting — and It Feels Impossible to Work

A curated list of HBR advice to help you support yourself, your team,
and your organization. **by HBR Editors**

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How do you stay focused when every news alert makes your stomach drop? When should you check the headlines, and when should you step away? How do you support your team members whose attention is understandably focused on world events? Do you need to redirect people back to work? What's the right balance between acknowledging everything that's going on and maintaining business as usual?

It is completely normal to feel distracted and overwhelmed at work, especially when there is a high level of uncertainty and emotion around the news and world events. And it's hard to know whether to give into those distractions, or to try to refocus (if that's even possible). Over the past several years, we've published a number of articles on what to do when you, your team, and perhaps your entire organization are consumed with what's happening outside of work. We've gathered a selection of these articles (and one of our *HBR IdeaCast* episodes) to help you navigate these moments. We've organized them into three categories: managing your own stress and anxiety, supporting your team members who may be struggling, and making sure your organization thrives while also allowing space for people to be human.

Managing Yourself

Is it even possible to focus right now? What can I do to try? These resources provide tips on making peace with why you're distracted and what to do if you want to refocus on work.

How to Stop Scrolling and Focus at Work

Is your phone your biggest source of distraction? Welcome to the club. Author and productivity expert Amanda Imber shares some practical advice for managing your phone when you want to focus.

How to Be Less Distracted at Work — and in Life

In this episode of the *HBR IdeaCast* podcast, Nir Eyal, an expert on technology and psychology, talks about the emotions behind distractions and a few important mental distinctions that help us stay on track.

What to Do When You're Feeling Distracted at Work

This article features advice from emotional intelligence experts Susan David and Rich Fernandez on how to acknowledge the feelings that

come with distractions, how to regain focus by relying on your values, and setting boundaries for yourself.

Supporting Your Team

Is your team stressed out and overwhelmed? It may be tempting to try and get them refocused on work but that's not always the answer. This set of articles talks about the best way to support your team when there's a lot going on.

How to Manage a Distracted Team

What employees need is a leader who is thoughtful and flexible. This doesn't mean you have to be perfect though. Authors Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy offer five strategies to help a team navigate the emotional ups and downs of a particularly trying time. Their last piece of advice is one that may be hard for some managers to stomach but is especially important: Plan for a dip in productivity.

Help Your Overwhelmed, Stressed-Out Team

Pushing someone who is already stressed out simply doesn't work. As a manager, you need to provide support and structure that will help your team avoid burnout. One important tactic covered in this article is to edit their workload in times of stress. What are the most important things that need to get done? And how can you eliminate low-priority work?

Leaders Don't Have to Choose Between Compassion and Performance

Compassion is critical if you want employees to feel supported. And, yet, many managers worry that showing compassion means letting up on performance standards. Fortunately, as professors Mark Mortensen and Heidi Gardner illustrate in this article, it's not a binary choice. They provide four approaches to doing both. This article was originally

published in 2022, at a time when many people were feeling “pandemic fatigue,” but the advice is still as relevant and useful as ever.

5 Ways Leaders Accidentally Stress Out Their Employees

When people are stressed out, you don’t want to make things worse. As Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic writes in this article (which was part of our 2020 “Managing in an Anxious World” Big Idea series): “As a leader, you are an amplifier of people’s emotions. If you do things right, you can bring out the best in people even in the worst of times. If you do things wrong, you will lower morale and performance even when things are fine.”

Leading Your Organization

If you’re a leader, you have an added responsibility of ushering your company through this challenging time. What should you be saying and doing (or *not* saying and doing) at the organizational level?

6 Strategies for Leading Through Uncertainty

To effectively lead others in increasingly uncertain and complex times, leaders need to turn inward first and make a few mental shifts to help themselves learn, grow, and evolve. Embracing the discomfort of not knowing and distinguishing between complicated and complex are two of the strategies that the authors suggest.

Leading a Company That Can Thrive in a Chaotic World

When things feel chaotic (which is often these days), leaders can’t just play defense. They need to be proactive about equipping their organizations to thrive. This article features six strategies from a collection of CEOs on what they do when the outside world feels like chaos.

How Business Leaders Can Reduce Polarization

Increasing polarization can be a threat to your organization and often leaders struggle with whether to speak up on political issues or not. Martin Reeves and his coauthors argue in this piece that it's most important for CEOs to reduce the harm of polarization first within their own companies, and then take action within their broader communities by focusing on issues and situations where they have self-interest, credibility, and influence. They include six actions that CEOs can take.

What Employees Need from Leaders in Uncertain Times

How can leaders help their people flourish during extreme uncertainty? Author Timothy Clark says that leaders need to double down on trust and transparency, while communicating vision and focusing on opportunities.

Leading Through Anxiety

If all of this makes you incredibly anxious, you're not alone. Morra Aarons-Mele, author of *The Anxious Achiever*, wrote this advice-dense article back at the beginning of the pandemic and it's an excellent playbook on managing your own anxiety when others are looking to you to lead.

As much as we wish we could, we can't eliminate uncertainty or control what's happening in the world. But we can control how we respond, and one of the ways that we can respond is to help create workplaces where people feel seen, supported, and able to contribute meaningfully no matter what's going on.

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This story is by the staff at Harvard Business Review.