



Data Insights Show Three Approaches to Fundamentally Address Shared Perspectives on Recent Events of Injustice And Unrest

Collectively and individually, we're experiencing multiple threats to safety, health, and basic security. In the midst of an ongoing pandemic, acts of injustice and racism, divisiveness, and increasing unrest, people are stressed, saddened, afraid, and angry. The impact on mental health is profound, and it is lasting.

JAMA says that “Large-scale disasters are almost always accompanied by increases in depression, post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD, substance use disorder, a broad range of other mental and behavioral disorders, domestic violence, and child abuse.”

The impact is not only felt in the immediate aftermath – it persists over time. To better understand what people are experiencing and what they need, eMindful invited employees to share their top two concerns via a pulse survey.

The need for social justice was the leading concern, triggered by recent acts of injustice and deeply felt as outrage, sadness, and fear – the fear experienced simply by being “a black woman in America,” – along with concerns for others: “Fearing for my non-white friends in a time of peril, and scared about this divided nation filled with hate and fear.”

One respondent shared the felt sense of oppression, intensified by helicopters circling overhead. Others expressed concerns related to systemic racism and “lack of national leadership”.

Many conveyed a deep sense of care for one another: *“Being able to express true empathy for those who are experiencing difficult situations.”* Some expressed the desire to show solidarity and support.

They expressed desire for meaningful change, for healing, and for understanding one another through “meaningful conversations with people of diverse backgrounds,” and “understanding others who are different than you.”

Some spoke to the need for change on a personal level – to be “connected to self and others” and to “unearth my own implicit bias.”

The continued disruption and personal loss related to COVID-19 was a top concern as well, along with concerns of safety for oneself and loved ones.

The magnitude of the stress is beyond measure. Respondents described feeling “powerless and confused”; overwhelmed by the news, the media, and the “negative things happening in the world.” They described coping with “grief,

stress, and exhaustion”; and “with anxiety and feelings of despair, while still attempting to meet the demands of everyday life.”

They expressed their attempts to avoid “falling apart from all the pain, anger, and frustration”; to “focus when the world is on fire.”

Given the immensity and depth of these challenges and concerns, how can leadership support employees right now?

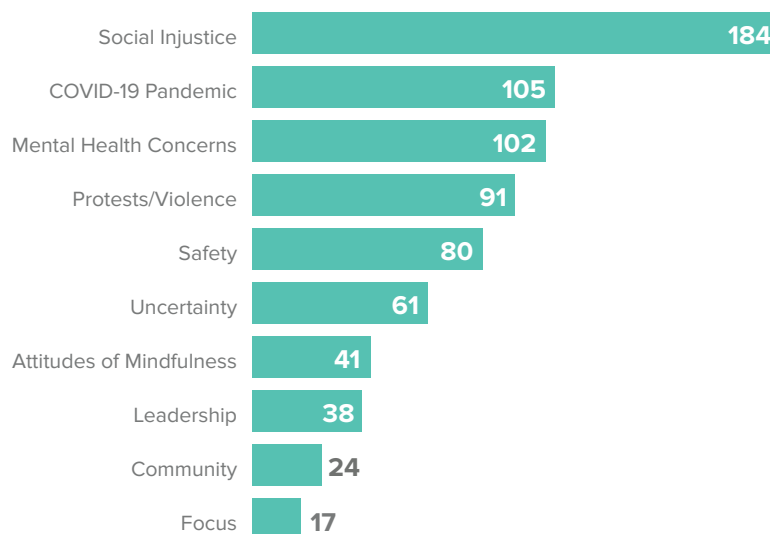
Based on the survey responses, eMindful offers three key imperatives:

ONE: Create a sense of physical and psychological SAFETY.

The pulse survey identified safety as one of the top concerns. For leaders, this means continuing to guard against the threat of COVID-19.

For in-depth guidance on reducing risk for employees and customers, see the recent article from McKinsey & Company: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/risk/our-insights/reopening-safely-sample-practices-from-essential-businesses#>

What are your top 2 concerns right now?



It also means upholding *psychological safety* – establishing a workplace in which employees feel psychologically safe to speak up and show up authentically, without fear of embarrassment or retaliation. It means opening up dialogue for people to share what they’re experiencing, how they’re doing, and what they need. Building a sense of safety also means actively affirming, empowering, and advocating for those who are marginalized/oppressed. Harvard Business Review says leaders across all levels can validate, affirm and support people of color and give employees the space to be angry, afraid, disenchanted, or even disengaged from work.

How can mindfulness contribute to a sense of safety?

First, the skills of mindfulness allow us to discern what’s actually happening versus our projection; to discern real threat from imagined or distant threat.

In the case of COVID-19, mindfulness reminds us of the need for ongoing vigilance to guard against the real threat of the virus. It helps us recognize what is within our control versus what’s beyond our sphere of influence – as is often the case with threats portrayed by the news.

“I cannot stop watching it all on TV, and I’m an emotional mess from it.” Pulse survey respondent

Second, mindfulness brings awareness to habitual reactions and patterns, *allowing us to consciously choose how we respond*. For instance, perhaps a coworker makes a comment that’s insensitive or divisive. Rather than not saying anything (our default response), we can choose to step forward to voice our concerns in a respectful way.

Third, mindfulness supports emotional stability. Specific practices strengthen *non-reactivity*, allowing us to remain calm, make more thoughtful choices, and communicate in a way that is clear and respectful.

Mindfulness practice for supporting clarity and skillful action:

The practice known as “STOP” takes only a minute or less and is a way of countering reactivity, reminding us to pause before responding. It involves these four steps:

1. Stop what you’re doing
2. Take a breath
3. Observe your thoughts and emotions
4. Proceed

The last step: Proceed – doesn’t necessarily mean acting. It might mean making the choice to let go rather than react.

Mindfulness practices such as STOP can help leaders and employees respond more skillfully, thoughtfully, and mindfully – contributing to a shared sense of physical and psychological safety.

TWO: Find and enact ways to lessen STRESS levels.

Chronic stress disrupts focus and productivity, depletes energy and overall wellbeing. When we’re stressed, we’re less able to manage our emotions. We’re reactive. Our perspective narrows, making us less open to new ideas and less open to change.

Survey respondents expressed just how tough it is right now to feel hopeful, to focus, to find peace, to sleep.

“It is difficult to stay in the moment when the future is so uncertain.” Pulse survey respondent

Leaders can provide employees with resources to support physical and mental health. They can allow space for employees to care for themselves and lay the groundwork for mindful stress management.

Leaders themselves are under exceedingly high pressure as they contend with crisis on a daily basis. Communication and decision-making are incredibly complex, the risks real and unprecedented.

According to researcher and psychologist Richard Boyatzis, it’s critical to defuse stress at

regular intervals throughout the day, not simply after work or on weekends. He points to strong neurological evidence for building *renewal* into everyday life – activities that engage the parasympathetic system such as connecting with the breath, spending time in nature, listening to music, sharing a laugh, and spending time with loved ones and pets.

All of these can be practiced mindfully. There are also specific mindfulness techniques that are calming and can be woven into everyday life.

Mindfulness practices for managing stress:

- **Checking in:** Taking a moment to check in with yourself. Asking “How am I doing in this moment? What do I need right now?” and then activating the parasympathetic nervous system with a simple practice like following the breath.
- **Mindful movement:** Movement is an especially effective way of releasing stress. That might mean walking or running for a few minutes while focusing on the body and the breath. Here, you can pay attention to your surroundings. You can feel the contact of the feet with the ground, and feel the rhythm of the feet. You can bring attention to the way the breath moves with the body.

By practicing stress management throughout the day, we're better equipped to respond to challenge. We build resilience. This is especially important right now as leaders strive not only to manage their own stress but also to calm the collective stress within the organization.

eMindful offers an array of stress management practices and guided meditations (link to eMindful stress management programs).

THREE: Build SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES.

The world feels so very divided right now. This is the time to build connectedness; to create a culture based on care and compassion. This is the time to strengthen inclusivity and the sense of belongingness. To ensure that every employee feels valued, accepted, respected, and cared for. “Inclusion is not bringing people into what

already exists, it is making a new space - a better space - for everyone.” George Dei

Many of the pulse survey respondents conveyed a deep sense of caring and the importance of: “Creating safe spaces for others” and expressing “true empathy for those who are experiencing difficult situations.”

Connectedness is a fundamental need. When we feel a sense of belongingness we're able to bring our unique strengths and skills to work. We feel that we're part of something bigger than ourselves. Collectively, we're able to rise to challenges, support one another through difficult times, and grow and thrive together.

Inclusive leaders:

- Strengthen the connections between people
- Value differing perspectives and experiences
- Demonstrate commitment to inclusion, examining/revising policies when needed
- Engage in courageous conversations, calling out language or actions that are dismissive/diminishing of others
- Are aware of their own biases
- Make sure that everyone has a place and feels welcome
- Practice mindful and respectful communication

Inclusivity is part of a caring culture, observed at *every* level of an organization, through small actions like greeting one another by name, asking how another is doing/how their day is going, showing genuine interest, appreciation and respect, and listening without interrupting.

“Inclusive leaders widen and expand the circle of belonging. And, ALL of us have the opportunity to widen the circle.” Uneeda Brewer

Mindfulness helps create the conditions for connectedness:

It strengthens the qualities that bind us together, qualities such as *openness, non-judgment, kindness, patience, compassion,*

humility, and gratitude.

“Showing appreciation for another’s unique viewpoint demonstrates respect. Being sensitive to what others are going through creates bonds.

Leadership is not an affair of the head.
Leadership is an affair of the heart.”
James M. Kouzes

Mindfulness practices for strengthening connectedness:

Mindful communication: Pause to listen mindfully and fully. Listen with openness and curiosity. Lean into humility. Tune into the emotional tone of what’s being shared. Begin and end meetings with heartfelt expressions of appreciation.

Loving Kindness: Begin by breathing into the space of the heart. Bring to mind someone you appreciate and care about. It could be someone who is struggling or suffering. From your heart,

offer these words: May you feel connected... May you find joy... May your difficulties be eased... May you be held in compassion... This practice can also be used to direct warmth and kindness toward yourself.

Leadership author James Kouzes says “**challenge is the crucible for greatness.**”

It’s hard to capture in words the immensity and depth of the concerns felt right now. Employees need a sense of safety, a sense of hope, and supportive communities that are rooted in compassion. These times are challenging us all to come together to create a kinder, more inclusive, and more mindful workplace and world.

At eMindful, we offer programs to support employee’s wellbeing, self-care, and connectedness. To learn more, [go to eM Life](#).

