COVID-19 BBI/Six Core Newsletter:
The Critical Role of Leadership in Times of Uncertainty

It's easy to focus on what's urgent in times of crisis: ensuring safety and well-being of youth, maintaining adequate staffing and connections with families, and securing needed supplies. But leadership plays a critical role in managing the wellbeing of people, and leaders can emerge from anywhere in your organization, not just the top. Here's our Top 5 things leaders at all levels can do to support each other during this time.

1. Work and think "outside the box" to encourage creativity, speed, and flexibility

Necessity is the mother of invention. **In responding to COVID-19, you've likely changed not only *what* you're focusing on, but *how* you're working together.** You may have flattened hierarchies or formed new crisis management teams of people who don't usually work together. These are great ways to respond quickly and flexibly. **Encourage *all* staff to be leaders by offering up ideas and solutions and creating forums for feedback. Daily huddles where staff have a chance to hear directly from leaders, offer ideas, and ask questions are great ways to foster innovation and open communication.** When the crisis has passed, take a moment and reflect not just on *what* you accomplished, but *how you worked together in new and different ways.* Maybe these new ways of working together prove effective at generating ideas quickly and improving engagement from leaders and staff. Reflect on what you were doing differently, whether it worked, and why it worked to think about which of these new structures you might want to keep.

2. Be present, visible, and available

Situations of crisis often create unique opportunities for leaders to roll up their sleeves and step outside their typical roles, patterns, and ways of interacting with staff. **One of the most important things leaders can do in times of crisis is be present and visible and available to all staff** – whether it's scheduling special all-hands meetings, walking the floor with front line staff, or finding new ways to connect with staff (even if it's virtually), showing staff that you're available lets them know you're invested and they're not alone, which can be reassuring. It also presents a unique opportunity to build new connections and deepen trust and relationships between leaders and staff – which can have benefits far beyond the current crisis. **If you see a leader stepping up to the plate and out of their "normal role" – let them know you appreciate their support!**

3. Provide information, direction, and transparency

"Information is the oil that greases an organization and keeps it running smoothly" – this is especially true in times of crisis where there is lots of uncertainty, stress, and a lack of sense of

direction. **By providing tactical guidance on actions that staff can take now (whether big or small!) you can help restore hope and a sense of control. Once you have a plan, communicate it (ideally through multiple channels), repeat it often, then reinforce it through behavior and action (modelling, praise, positive reinforcement).**

4. Elevate those around you

We lead best when we show up with respect, appreciation, and gratitude. **Take a moment to publicly acknowledge the good deeds of one or two people around you.** In times of crisis, praise for even the "ordinary" tasks can help acknowledge the effort it took to complete an ordinary task under unordinary circumstances. Offering praise for things like showing up for work, completing a shift, or showing kindness to others shows that you recognize how others' actions are reflective of your organization's values (reliability, trustworthiness, confidence in decision-making). **Say thank you by: 1) acknowledging what they did (get specific!), 2) expressing your gratitude for their actions, and 3) connecting their actions back to the greater cause to show how seemingly small actions can have a big impact on the larger goal/mission.**

5. Practice empathy and self-care

In times of social distancing, it can be easy to lose a sense of community. **Take a minute and check-in with someone to see how they're holding up. Let people know they're not alone in what they're feeling** – whether it's stress, anxiety, or loss of control. Practicing empathy can help foster connections and a sense of community in times of social distancing. Especially for staff that may be offsite and not physically in the facility, quick telephone check-ins, text messages, and technology in any form can let people know you care and are thinking of them. And don't forget to show the same compassion for yourself. **Prioritize a few minutes for yourself** -- walk outside, eat a snack, or listen to your favorite song. **Self-care isn't selfish -- it can help you reset and recharge so you're able to effectively help others.**

Resources and Additional Reading:
- https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/03/covid-19-leadership
- https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/how-to-lead-through-a-crisis/
- https://mchwdc.unc.edu/resilency-and-adaptive-leadership-during-covid-19-crisis/
- https://hbr.org/2020/04/4-behaviors-that-help-leaders-manage-a-crisis