

In times of Covid-19 crisis, top companies give priority to employees' wellbeing

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Mumbai/New Delhi/Kolkata: Take it with a pinch of salt if you will: but leading corporations say employees' safety and wellness – physical, psychological and emotional – is their priority even as the apocalyptic spread of the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted life and businesses alike in India and elsewhere.

ET has spoken to nearly two dozen top corporate employers including TCS, Dabur, Flipkart, Ola, Axis Bank, Bank of Baroda, Vedanta, RPG Group, EY, KPMG, Panasonic, Siemens, Deloitte, Microsoft, Wipro, ITC, AMD, Tata Steel, Schneider India, Dalmia Bharat Group, Accenture, Swiggy, Motilal Oswal Financial Services, RBS India, BigBasket and Welspun Group, and all of them said saving human capital and wellbeing of employees is the most crucial task before their managers and HR leaders.

And they have come up with novel ideas – ranging from doctor on call, psychological counseling and online meditation and fitness sessions to virtual team lunches and dedicated 'work for home' hours to help in household work – to keep their employees motivated and engaged.

“People are our biggest assets, and that becomes more important in such times,” said Madhu Srivastava, group chief human resource officer at diversified miner Vedanta where managers conduct regular online team huddles. The company also offers psychological counseling helplines to people facing anxiety and stress-related problems.

Welspun Group is encouraging its employees to focus on themselves and their families, its chairman BK Goenka said. “We are...constantly sensitizing leadership to be tolerant towards mistakes if any; rise to the cause of humanity ahead of everything,” he told ET.

At Axis Bank – where nearly 88% of corporate office staff and several of the field staff are working from home – managers are told to be in regular touch with team members to keep them motivated. “It is time to be more empathetic. Managers realize that,” said Rajkamal Vempati, executive vice president and HR head of the private lender.

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Axis Bank offers virtual meditation sessions, online learning modules, and informal virtual team catch-ups among others to keep employee morale up.

Big conglomerates and new-age companies alike are putting employee well-being ahead of productivity issues, and have come up with various initiatives such as virtual connect sessions including chai and lunch breaks, insurance plans for Covid-19, doctors on call and mental counselling helplines, and online fitness and learning sessions. Many have also paid their employees advance salary before the end of March.

Cab hailing company Ola is encouraging its employees to dedicate specific four hours of their everyday time to 'Work for home'. During this time, they can do their household work.

Similarly, Microsoft is emphasizing the need to balance family and household priorities with work, and has provided resources for employees with disabilities.

Joydeep Dutta Roy, head of strategic HR and HR integration at Bank of Baroda, said the public sector lender has exempted any employee above 55 years or with an underlying medical condition from coming to office irrespective of the nature of their function as a humanitarian measure.

Industrial and services conglomerate RPG has undertaken groupwide physical, psychological and emotional wellness drive, including online access to doctors, nutrition advice, zoom calls to ensure social connect, and online mindfulness sessions, said Azfar Hussain, group head, organization and talent development.

Ecommerce major Flipkart said employee wellbeing is its prime focus area now, and is organising informal social connect session such as pasta live and chai break.