

— HR'S GUIDE TO —  
**BOOSTING  
EMPLOYEE  
MORALE**  
—— DURING ——  
**COVID-19**  
( AND INTO OUR  
**NEXT NORMAL** )

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# I. Intro

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The COVID-19 pandemic has caused global anxiety in almost every sector of life—but none so much, as the workplace. In fact, **69 percent of U.S. workers reported** that the coronavirus pandemic is the most stressful time of their entire professional career, moreso even than other national tragedies like 9/11 and the 2008 recession.

And according to our recent survey, HR professionals are well aware of the struggles that their employees are currently facing—with **45 percent of respondents reporting** that employee morale is their top HR concern at the moment.

While times like these are difficult for everyone, HR is facing more than its fair share of challenges. Supporting employees, pivoting to accommodate new business needs, having difficult conversations, cutting costs, and more—there's a lot being thrown on this department's plate. But through it all, everyone is doing their best to take these changes in stride and remain optimistic for the future.

Now, as we reflect on multiple months of mandated virtual work, HR and people teams around the world are looking back on their most successful morale-boosting activities—and searching for new ideas to keep their teams happy, healthy, and engaged.

Even as we do this, it's important to remember that there are certain things that employees need more than others at this point in time.

So, Namely & Blueboard teamed up to look at employee morale through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Read on to learn all about the psychological concept, how it applies to employee morale and HR, and—don't worry—tons of practical tips and ideas for acting on it both today, and as we transition into our next normal.

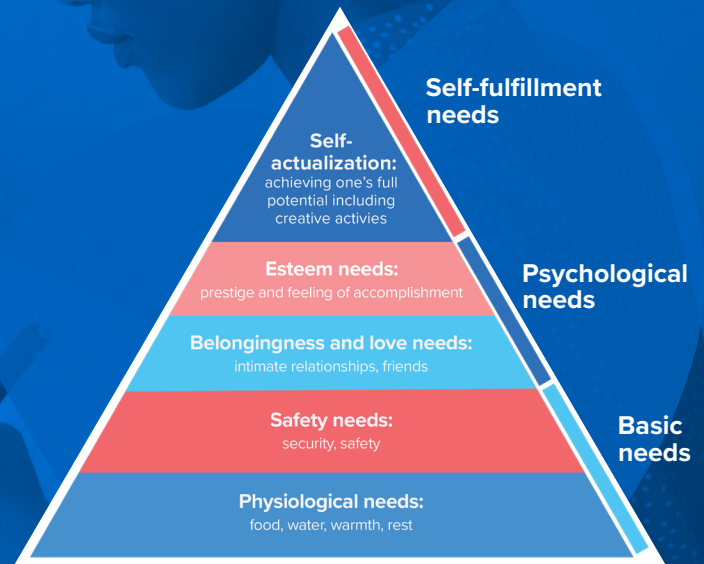
## II. Our New Hierarchy of Needs

In 1943, psychologist Abraham Maslow wrote his seminal paper describing the human “**hierarchy of needs.**”

He posited that human needs can be arranged in a pyramidal manner with the most basic, important needs represented at the bottom of the pyramid.

From the bottom of the pyramid upwards, the needs are: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.

These needs are applicable during normal life and working times, but as we find ourselves in unprecedented and stressful times, following this hierarchy becomes more important than ever.

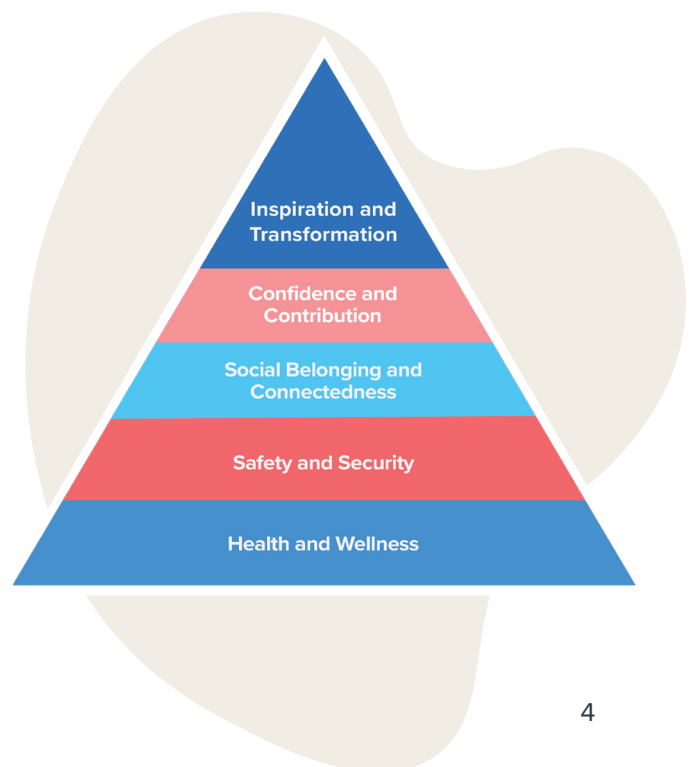


Still, has our hierarchy of needs changed in response to the pandemic?

**It appears it may have.**

To help visualize the changes, **One Workplace** reframed the way we need to think about the basic physiological and psychological needs of our employees, within the context of COVID-19.

In the following sections, we'll break down the five levels of our new hierarchy of needs and share ideas to boost employee morale for each one—starting with the most basic needs that address health and wellness.



# i. Health & Wellness

Physiological and psychological health is the foundation of any person's well-being. As employers, taking time to tend to this shows that we truly care about and value employees. Employees who feel supported and trust their leaders are more engaged and motivated.

During difficult times like these, it's imperative that you talk about health and mental health openly on your team and actively provide resources for employees. Additionally, it may be time to expand wellness programs and make space for health and wellbeing in the workday.

**Here are a few ways to promote your employees' health and wellness:**

**Check the boxes of the activities you did this week to take care of yourself.**

- ☐ Worked out at home
- ☐ Gave back/Supported local businesses
- ☐ Took a walk around the neighborhood
- ☐ Sat in on a free show/concert
- ☐ Baked something new
- ☐ Flexed my creative skills
- ☐ Joined a virtual hangout

**Tag 2 friends who would love these ideas:**

Tag us to be featured! @namely\_hr

Blueboard shares Friyay Check-In templates to encourage employees to think about all the ways they can take care of themselves. For more free quizzes and checklists, follow Blueboard on **Instagram.**

# 1 Mental Health Time & Resources

During difficult times, ensure that you're consistently checking in with your employees about their mental health. This can mean having more one-on-ones with employees to see how they're doing, or offering time off during the day for employees to workout, take a nap, go on a walk, or even do something fun.

Offering free trainings for topics like stress reduction, work from home, and parenting during a pandemic can also help mitigate some of the fears and concerns that your employees may be experiencing.

There are also many digital resources available to help employees during this hectic time. Telehealth companies offer both primary care and telepsychiatry, which can include anonymous virtual group therapy and individual therapy.

**“One of our perks is that we give employees up to an hour each day to do something positive for their physical or mental health, such as going on a walk, reading a book, taking an exercise class, or doing a meditation (no admin or work allowed!). As we are a small team, we used to track this daily on a whiteboard in the office, but now we just check in each morning to see what each team member is planning to do that day.”**

— Napala Pratini, Co-Founder at Habitual

## 2 Fitness, Yoga, & Meditation

Encouraging your employees to focus on moving their bodies and minds doesn't have to mean offering a paid subscription to online fitness courses like [Obé](#) or meditation programs like [Work From Om](#). It can also mean taking advantage of and promoting free classes online like [OrangeTheory Fitness](#), [Popsugar Fitness](#), or [UCLA Health Meditation](#), or tapping employees who have a passion for exercise to lead classes via Zoom.

At Blueboard, employees who are also certified yoga, HIIT, and sculpt instructors on the side have been offering virtual classes to their teammates. It's a great way for teams to stay connected, healthy, and to give these employees opportunities to grow their voice across the company.

## 3 Ergonomic Considerations

Remember: many of your employees may not have been fully equipped to work from home. That means they may not have access to a desk, a keyboard, a mouse, etc, and they may even be working from bed or the couch. Consider offering a stipend to allow your employees to purchase the equipment they need to work most comfortably and efficiently.



# 4

## Flexible Scheduling

Your employees may have any number of complications that come along with working from home—particularly if they have children. Since daycares are closed and students across the country are learning virtually, your employees who have children may need to adjust their working hours or extend deadlines. If your employees need a longer lunch or can't start working until 10 AM because they are caring for their children, allow them to alter their schedules accordingly. Giving your employees the ability to work flexible hours can decrease their stress levels and increase their productivity.

# 5

## Walk-and-Talk Meetings

Since gyms and other fitness centers have closed due to the Coronavirus, your employees may be cooped up in their homes as they work remotely. Therefore, encouraging your employees to exercise outdoors is critical to their physical and mental health.

To help your employees stay active and get a break from working inside, suggest that they take conference calls that don't require sitting in front of a screen outdoors. During these Walk-and-Talk meetings, employees can stroll around their neighborhoods, nearby parks, or even backyards for a change of scenery and some fresh air.



## ii. Safety & Security

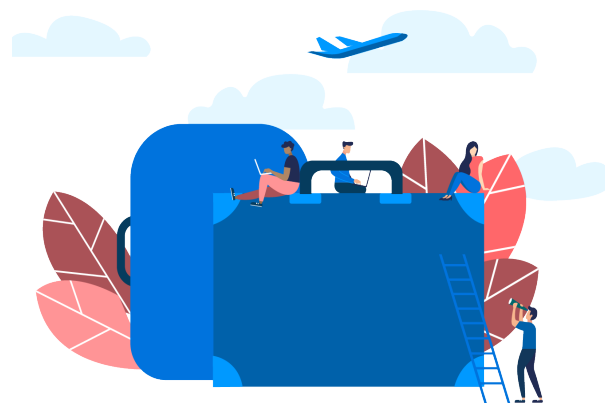
As the Coronavirus continues to spread globally, so do the feelings of fear and uncertainty. When your employees struggle with such anxiety, their psychological states suffer. During this difficult time, they want to know that your company is actively thinking about a clear path forward that keeps them safe, productive, and connected.

**Here are a few ways you can make your employees feel safer and more secure during the COVID-19 pandemic:**

1

### Clear Communication

When it comes to safety and security, transparency is key. By establishing a regular cadence of communications with your employees and constantly keeping them updated, you can ease their anxiety. Address employee questions as they arise and frequently host company-wide meetings or weekly Ask Me Anything (AMA) sessions with your leadership team. Your employees will feel much more secure knowing that you're keeping them in the loop throughout this trying time.



2

### Section 139 Disaster Relief Payments

During this pandemic, your employees may be worried about their finances. Some of your employees may be facing new expenses related to COVID-19 and possibly are now the sole providers for their families because their spouses' jobs have been impacted. To help these employees, consider offering them Section 139 Disaster Relief Payments.

**The Families First Coronavirus Response Act** expanded the application of these payments. Now, Section 139 payments can be used to pay employees who are suffering hardship due to COVID-19. Some expenses that may fall into the scope of this new legislation include medical bills, temporary housing, food, funeral expenses, and more. For more details on covered expenses, read **H.R. 6201**.

Note that these payments are exempt from all employer and employee Federal, State, and Local Taxes (with the exception of the state of Arkansas), and are deductible business expenses for an employer.

# 3

## Supportive EAPs

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are voluntary programs that offer free and confidential services that address a variety of issues, such as alcohol and substance abuse, psychological disorders, and grief. If your company has an EAP, encourage your employees **to get involved** so they can focus on their mental health. Having this support can make your employees feel safer throughout this difficult time.

# 4

## Safe Return to the Office Plans

As states begin to loosen their COVID-19 social distancing restrictions and stay-at-home orders, companies across the country are beginning to discuss **what going back to work will look like**. According to **a recent Namely** survey, one of the top concerns that most responding companies had in regards to returning to the office was employee safety.

To get ahead of this transition back, you should create a safe return to the office plan. 42 percent of respondents to Namely's survey have already created such a plan. These plans layout how workplace aspects like WFH policies, office design, and even office snacks will be going forward.

If your employees seem worried about returning to the office once it reopens, consider allowing them to continue working from home if it will make them feel safer and more comfortable. Only 10.6 percent of respondents to Namely's survey reported that they expect all of their employees to return to the office after it opens back up.



## iii. Social Belonging & Connectedness

As human beings, we crave **propinquity**—our natural tendency to develop deep human relationships. But due to COVID-19 social distancing, people around the world are now lacking face-to-face human interaction. Therefore, we need to adapt how we replicate physical proximity to each other, along with the frequency and quality of our interactions - especially in the workplace.

**Here are a few ways you can keep your employees connected and boost employee morale while they're working from home:**

1

### Virtual Team Bonding

When your team is dispersed, it's especially important to keep your employees connected. From virtual team lunches and **happy hours** to online workout and yoga sessions, you can keep your employees united and give them a sense of belonging - no matter where they are.

Small doses of team bonding throughout the week can also boost employee morale. Consider allocating the first five minutes of your weekly team meeting to discuss binge-worthy Netflix shows or book suggestions so that your employees can bounce quarantine ideas off of each other.

2

### Emphasis on Collaboration

With the impact that COVID-19 has had on workforces across the country, **teamwork** is more important now than ever before. Try to assign collaborative tasks amongst your team. If you have a group project, schedule some time for your team to hack it together via **Zoom or Skype**. This will not only keep your employees connected to one another but will also make your team stronger than ever post-pandemic.

# 3

## Company-wide Activities

In addition to hosting collaborative team bonding activities, it's also critical to keep your employees connected across your organization. Luckily, using **remote technology** makes virtual company-wide activities possible. Create a company Slack channel that your employees can use to make quarantine suggestions, participate in Throwback Thursday photo challenges, and share links to online workout classes. Try throwing virtual company-wide contests via Slack or on your HR solution's news feed. From submitting creative ideas for things to do during quarantine to designing company-related Memes, you can host a variety of contests and offer the top winners prizes to make them more competitive.

As for company-wide events, you can host virtual book clubs, talent shows, cooking classes, and other fun activities that will keep your employees connected while working remotely

# 4

## Support ERGs

**Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)** are employee-led interest groups that raise awareness of issues facing people of a specific demographic, race, religion, or sexual identity. By **starting ERGs**, your employees can stay connected and support one another - especially during this difficult time. For instance, starting an ERG for **parents and caregivers** will enable your employees who have children to share experiences, provide resources, and serve as a unified voice at your company. This ERG can meet virtually on a weekly basis and create a Slack channel, where they can share insights and even bounce ideas off of each other for things to do with children during this quarantine.

# 5

## Employee Milestone Celebrations

To keep your employees connected while they're working from home, **continue celebrating their milestones**. From work anniversaries and **birthdays** to personal accomplishments, you can recognize your employees by switching to a virtual recognition system. Send your employees **meaningful rewards** and host virtual celebratory events to keep them connected with one another.



## iv. Confidence & Contribution

As we rebuild confidence in our health, safety, and relationships during this difficult time, our own individual contributions will begin to feel meaningful and impactful again. Our collective self-esteem as organizations and as a society will reinforce our behaviors and improve our work. So how can you help your employees regain confidence?

**Here are a few tips to help boost your employees' self-esteem so that you can get through this pandemic together and come out even stronger:**

### 1

#### Core Values

Core values lay down the foundation of organizations. They define your business' priorities, shape your company culture, and motivate your employees by giving them a purpose. While having core values is always important, they become even more crucial **during a time of crisis**.

To help your employees rebuild confidence, emphasize your core values throughout this pandemic. Align your company's mission and values into pre-existing initiatives and reinforce them through new ones. If one of your company's values is "Give", donate to local food banks, homeless shelters, or COVID-19 specific initiatives, like **Pizza vs. Pandemic** and **NY Tech Cares**. Lead by example and encourage your employees to join you in demonstrating your core values. Excited to put your values into action? See ideas and best practices shared from HR leaders in this **Blueboard webinar recording and recap**.



## 2

### Honest Feedback

As previously mentioned, being transparent throughout this pandemic is key. And while it's important for leaders to be transparent, it's equally as important for employees to be as well. With all of the sudden changes due to COVID-19, it's understandable that some of your employees may have lost confidence over the last few months.

To help them gain it back, ask your employees for feedback on how they're doing. Are they struggling with anything and if so, how can you support them? Having these honest conversations will help you adjust their **schedules**, deadlines, and goals - which will reduce their stress levels and help rebuild their self-esteem.

## 3

### Awards & Recognition

Recognizing your employees not only gives them a sense of belonging, but also boosts their confidence. And while we're away from the office, those working hard behind the scenes might not be seen and valued as often as during normal times, which can impact their long-term engagement rates.

In addition to sending them meaningful, **personalized rewards** or hosting virtual celebratory events, create spaces and opportunities for public recognition events during team meetings or company-wide town halls. At Blueboard, we host a weekly FriYay company meeting with space for leaders to shout out employees going above and beyond. This weekly outlet also serves as a place to reinforce the actions and behaviors more critical for driving our business forward - modeling for the entire company what great work looks like.

Encourage your employees to recognize one another and share their successes with the rest of your organization. Give rewards that align with your **core values** to employees who embody them. Recognizing both tangible and intangible actions that build community, culture, and drive the business forward will boost both your **employees' morale** and self-esteem during this difficult time.



# v. Inspiration & Transformation

The Coronavirus pandemic has made people all over the world reflect deeply on their wants, needs, and goals. As we consider what self-actualization may look like, we spot opportunities for positive growth and change. It's motivating to have a goal and to put work into achieving it, and even better to share the inspiration and transformation process with others. So how can you motivate your employees during this difficult time?

**Here are a few ways you can help them feel inspired:**

1

## Leadership Spotlights

Whether you host virtual fireside chats or allocate the first 10 minutes of some company-wide meetings to Q&As, you can spotlight leaders within your organization. Allowing leaders across your company to share information about their career path and personal accomplishments can inspire your other employees. These spotlights can even give your employees insight into other departments that they wouldn't have otherwise.

2

## Mentorship Program

Building a virtual **mentorship program** will provide your employees with the opportunity to make connections, develop their leadership abilities, and learn new skills. Depending on the goal of the program, mentorships can either be within the same team or across different departments. Regardless of the relation, having a mentor during this challenging time can inspire employees to enhance their skills and develop new ones.

3

## Growth Opportunities

Another way to keep your employees motivated while they work remotely is through online training and courses. Ask leaders from different departments to host online training sessions and provide your employees with links to external resources, like webinars and e-learning sites. From social media and digital marketing classes to management training, your employees can take a variety of courses on sites like **Coursera** and **Skillshare**. If your employees take an online course and find it useful, encourage them to share what they've learned with the rest of your team. Inspiring your employees to grow and set new goals for themselves will keep them motivated throughout this trying time.



# III. Conclusion

**Remember:** this is an adjustment period for both employees and employers. Make sure you are doing your part to maintain and encourage open communication with your team so they can feel appreciated and supported. Be patient, understanding, and flexible as you and your employees work to navigate this new work environment and embrace a new normal.

Finally, it's important to note that each person comes to work with a different perspective. You can't assume you know them all or that what is important for one group is (isn't) important for all. Spending time checking in at a micro and macro level is critical to make sure you are focusing on the right things.

Create opportunities for employee feedback through a variety of different methods, and ensure you take a pulse during and after periods of change. If you prioritize what will make the impact on employee productivity and/or retention, you'll see the biggest wins.

## Thanks for connecting with us.

This eBook was crafted for you from our teams at Namely and Blueboard.  
We'd love to stay in touch!

If meaningful rewards and recognition are on your mind as a tool for elevating above and beyond performance, **connect with the team** at Blueboard. **Connect with the Namely team** to learn more about how to engage your whole company, select world-class benefits that fit your budget, and stay compliant with ever-changing laws.

# About Namely

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Namely is the #1 HR Software company that empowers midsize businesses to build better workplaces. Its cloud-based software brings HCM, benefits, insights, payroll, and time into a single-view platform to help modern HR teams make data-driven decisions about their people and understand what's really going on in their workforce. The Namely ecosystem includes powerful integrations with market-leading applicant tracking, identity management, ERP, compliance, E-Verify solutions, and more. Serving more than 1,400 clients with 230,000 employees globally, the company is backed by leading investors, including Altimeter Capital, GGV Capital, Matrix Partners, Scale Venture Partners, Sequoia Capital, Tenaya Capital, and True Ventures.

For more information, visit [\*\*www.Namely.com\*\*](http://www.Namely.com).

# About Blueboard

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Blueboard is a leading employee recognition and incentives platform powered by hand-curated experiences (both in-home, and out in the world). We make it easy for companies to give meaningful employee rewards, incentives and gifts—from one-of-a-kind to once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Hundreds of companies like Pinterest, Google, Otis Elevators, GoPro and USI Insurance use Blueboard to reward their top performers with experiences - think local adventures like skydiving, couples massage, learning to surf, or luxury incentive travel in lieu of cash or gift cards. From helping people connect with family and friends, to escaping the everyday, Blueboard employee rewards are the best way to inspire and care for your top people.

For more information, visit [\*\*www.Blueboard.com\*\*](http://www.Blueboard.com).