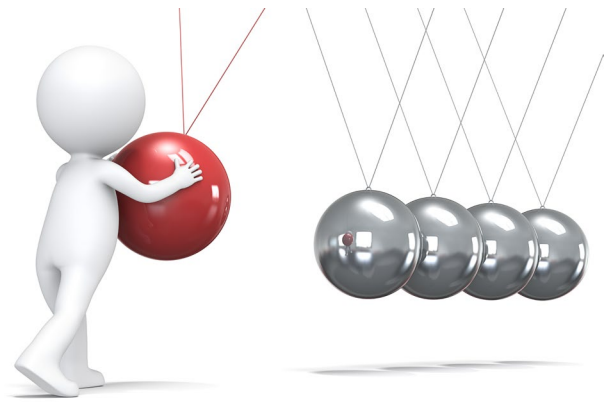**Northwestern** | OFFICE OF **HUMAN RESOURCES**

MANAGER RESOURCE TOOLKIT

Leading Through Uncertainty with Empathy, Clarity & Connection.

Use this checklist to support reflection, spark conversation, and foster connection across your team.

MESSAGING & MINDSET

☐   Acknowledge the reality: "This is a difficult time." Avoid forced optimism.

☐   Be transparent: Share what you know/can. It's ok to say, "I don't know."

☐   Communicate consistently, even if there are no new updates.

☐   Show vulnerability: Share something small first — it builds trust.

Sample Phrases

- "That's a great question. Right now, I don't have an answer, but I'll let you know when I do."
- "You're not alone in feeling uncertain. I'm here to navigate this with you, even when the path isn't clear."

CHECK IN WITH INTENTION

☐   Create space for non-work conversations — not just status updates.

- Add a few minutes at the beginning or end of 1:1s for human check-ins.
- Consider a casual "walk and talk" — in person or by phone — to encourage casual, open conversation.

☐   Ask meaningful, open-ended questions:

- **"How are you doing — really?"**
  Why it works: Shows genuine care and invites honesty.

  Tip: Ask this in a private 1:1 setting.

- **"What's been weighing on you lately?"**
  Why it works: Surfaces stressors that may not be visible.
  Tip: Just listen. This isn't about fixing.

- **"What's one thing that would make this week a little easier for you?"**
  Why it works: Gives you insight to remove barriers and offers meaningful support.
  Tip: If possible, take action — small changes can have a big impact and build trust.

- **"What do you need more of, or less of, from me right now?"**
  Why it works: Invites feedback and strengthens your leadership responsiveness.
  Tip: Reinforce that feedback is welcome and valued.

☐ Follow up — it matters. When someone shares something important, check in again:

- "You mentioned feeling stretched last week — how's that been going?"
- A short message can mean a lot: "Just checking in — how are things today?"
- Offer help when appropriate and share resources in a considerate manner: "No pressure, but here's something you might find useful."

SUPPORTING TEAM MORALE & ENGAGEMENT

☐ Use Peer Shout-Outs in meetings or Teams (try the "Praise" feature).

☐ Weekly "Wins & Wonders" check-in: What worked, what we're wondering about.

☐ Create space for personal connection (start of meetings, quick posts, photo shares).

☐ Host mini-skill shares (e.g., "How I manage my inbox")

☐ Try a fun check-in prompt:

- "Give us your weather report" (e.g., cloudy, sunny with a rainbow)
- "If your week was a movie title, what would it be?"
- "What's one small win you had this week?"

Make sure remote staff get the same face time, recognition, and inclusion in informal moments.

Create A Supportive Environment

Acknowledge that uncertainty can impact emotions and build trust amongst your team by managing their responses constructively.

- Listen with curiosity, not judgment – Check out these courses on how to strengthen your active listening skills — with practical tools to build trust, pick up on nonverbal cues, and deepen communication through empathetic, responsive conversations.

o **Active Listening for Better Leadership Communication** *Instructor: Heather Younger	48 minutes*	o **Active Listening: The Secret to Effective Communication** *Instructor: Ximena Vengoechea	1 hour.*

MANAGER SELF-CARE & PEER SUPPORT

☐ Join Manager's Corner (Teams channel) and connect with other managers to share and support.

☐ Agree on boundaries with your team (e.g., no weekend emails, respecting Teams availability status)

☐ Take a screen-free break or walk — invite a colleague to join.

☐ Tap into free Management Consultations through Northwestern's EAP SupportLinc (Group code: northwestern). Managers are in a unique position to coach and support staff. Gain insight and tools to address concerns before they escalate.

LINKEDIN LEARNING: WATCH, LEARN, LEAD

If these don't meet your needs, explore the full catalog (18,000+ courses) in myHR Learn.

For Managers

- **Leading in Uncertain Times** – Britt Andreatta| 46 minutes
  Explore how uncertainty impacts your psychology and brain and learn strategies to manage it effectively.

- **Building Resilience as a Leader**– Gemma Leigh Roberts|50 minutes
  Build a resilient mindset, team, and organization with actionable strategies designed to help leaders navigate change and lead through challenges.

- **Nano Tips for Navigating Difficult Conversations** – Melanie Whitney|19 minutes
  Get quick, practical tips to handle tough workplace conversations with confidence, from preparation to follow-up — all while fostering psychological safety.

- **Managing Project Uncertainty** – Cyndi Snyder |Dionisio| 54 minutes
  Learn tools to assess and work with various types of uncertainty in project management.

- **Leading with Stability during Times of Change and Disruption** – Erin Shrimpton| 34 minutes
  Understand how to create a sense of stability in your team to help them thrive during disruptions.

For Teams

Tip: Consider watching one of these courses as a team, then set aside 15–30 minutes to debrief together. A shared learning experience can spark connection, surface new ideas, and lead to more meaningful change.

- **Managing Stress for Positive Change** – Heidi Hanna| 53 minutes
  Learn how to use stress as a catalyst for positive change and improved performance.

  Debrief Focus: Identify stressors within the team and develop strategies to transform stress into a positive force.

- **Resilience Skills to Navigate Disruption and Uncertainty**

  Dr. Taryn Stejskal| 68 minutes
  Learn how to turn change and challenge into growth with practical tools to build emotional intelligence, practice resilience daily, and develop your personal resilience blueprint.

  Debrief Focus: Identify personal resilience strengths and areas for growth and explore with the team what the team blueprint could look like.

- **Protect Your Well-being Through Change and Uncertainty** – Erin Shrimpton| 32 minutes
  Discover actionable guidance on optimizing well-being and avoiding burnout during times of change.

  Debrief Focus: Develop a team action plan to protect well-being and prevent burnout during periods of change.

- **Reduce Stress and Anxiety by Managing Your Nervous System** – Jay Fields| 36 minutes
  Learn practices to regulate your nervous system and respond to stress with greater calmness.

  Debrief Focus: Practice and discuss techniques for managing stress and anxiety, and how the team can support each other using these techniques.

- **Navigating Rapid Workplace Change as a Team** – Dr. Britt Andreatta|66 minutes

  Discover strategies for teams to manage and thrive during times of rapid change. Explore the psychological impacts of change, practical steps for adapting, and ways to support each other through transitions.

  Debrief Focus: Discuss the impacts of change on your team, identify practical steps for adapting, and develop ways to support each other during transitions.

FAQ'S

(Tough Questions)

Q: How do I help a team member who feels overwhelmed?

Acknowledge their stress and offer flexibility if possible. Walk through what is on their plate and assist them with prioritization. Connect them to available resources, like the [Employee Assistance Program](#).

Q: How can I keep my team engaged without resources, such as money or additional staff?

Use peer recognition, free learning tools, and regular communication. Focus on development, and support growth through new experiences and projects, rather than relying on cost-based solutions, not expenditure.

Q: How do I handle low morale or disengagement from a team member?

First, check in with the person privately to see if something specific is affecting their morale. Approach the discussion with curiosity and offer a comfortable space for them to share. Ask them what would help them feel more connected or motivated at work. While they might not be in a decision-making role, giving them more ownership over their tasks or projects can help them feel more invested and aligned with the team's goals.

Q: How can I create a sense of stability when things feel uncertain?

Focus on what you *can* control—clear communication, consistent expectations, and acknowledging hard work. Be transparent about what you know and what you don't know, but provide reassurance that you're all in this together. Small wins and recognition can also help maintain morale.

Q: How do I address concerns about workload during this time of uncertainty?

Have an open conversation with your team members. Ask them if their workload feels manageable or if something specific is overwhelming. Offer solutions or ways to reprioritize tasks, if possible, and let them know they can come to you if things feel unmanageable.

Q: How can I ensure my team feels heard during challenging times?

Make regular space for feedback. Whether through 1:1s, team meetings, or anonymous surveys, consistently ask for input on how things are going. Acknowledge the feedback you receive, and act on it when you can and note when you can't address something. Feeling heard can significantly boost morale.