



GALLAGHER BASSETT

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LEVERAGING EMPLOYEE STRENGTHS IN A CRISIS

Supporting clients to manage traumatic events is a difficult task, but how often do we question who is the best fit for the job? Jon Winsbury discusses this topic with Insurance Business.



IDENTIFYING EMPLOYEE STRENGTHS IN A CRISIS

Responding to crises is the bread and butter of insurance and broking – year in and year out. Supporting clients to manage traumatic events is a difficult task, but how often do we question who is the best fit for the job?

Jon Winsbury (pictured), head of international at Gallagher Bassett, says employers should look at frameworks when identifying employee strengths.

“No two catastrophes or disasters are the same, and, similarly, every individual has a unique personality, motivations and strengths,” he explained. “There are multiple frameworks that can be used to understand these variables, Myer Briggs being a well-known example, but to distil this information, people can essentially fit into one of two broad categories: outgoing Type A personalities and more introverted and methodical Type Bs.”

Individuals who possess Type A personalities are often seen as your natural born salespeople – leaders who dream big and are natural creators. Conversely, individuals who possess Type B personality traits are commonly described as introverted, diligent and encompassing higher attention to detail. They also often have strengths around executing and completing tasks.

“Under normal circumstances, one of the objectives for a leader is to challenge your staff to develop in areas outside of their natural strengths; challenge your extroverts to be more methodical and your introverts to step outside their comfort zone,” he said.

“But what I’ve found is that in times of crisis, where demands increase and the pressure is on, people inevitably revert to their inherent disposition, demonstrating the behaviours that come most naturally to them.

“This makes it business critical to understand your people, their strengths and weaknesses, and recognise who is most likely to accomplish specific tasks successfully. Assigning duties and project tasks to people with the right skillset is key to thriving during high pressure situations.”

In a crisis, it’s also crucial for managers to be conscious of their team’s wellbeing, Winsbury says. He says burn out and compassion fatigue can take their toll on employees who are working in a high-pressure environment, so ensuring they’re playing to their strengths enables them to perform at their best “consistently and sustainably.”

“Values are the foundation of our business, and in times of crisis being guided by them is so important,” Winsbury continued. “We serve as an extension of our clients’ team, brand and reputation, so understanding their values and what they view as strengths ensures that we deliver a service that reflects their expectations and quality for their customers. We’ve achieved this by creating a rapid recruitment and training

program which is deployed during ramp-up to scale a team to respond to catastrophic events that incorporate our clients’ values.”

Having the ability to recognise what people do and the natural personality they may revert to during a crisis is “vital,” Winsbury says. Thankfully, there are many great tools available that can be used to grasp a good understanding of personality traits and skillsets.

“These tools should not be used by leaders to pigeon-hole employees, but to have a good base to assign tasks to people who are naturally able to tackle the specific tasks at hand,” he cautioned.

“When we recruit people into our business, we conduct testing to identify a candidate’s strengths logically, technically and emotionally. This provides a baseline upon which our talent development team can investigate further during the interview process to ensure that the candidate has strengths that will be complementary to their team to produce a diverse, well-rounded cohort.”

In addition to technical strengths, throughout a crisis it’s also vital to understand the social, emotional and cultural strengths in your team.

“Who intuitively improves group morale? Who goes out of their way to ensure that teammates feel connected? Who notices if a teammate is struggling and offers them guidance? Who is a great ambassador of our values? Empowering these people to play to these strengths is invaluable in a high-pressure environment,” he added.

“In times of crisis, vulnerabilities are exposed and can be improved, frameworks are tested and interrogated, and people have an opportunity to rise to a challenge.”



HOW CAN MANAGERS DRIVE SUCCESS FROM THEIR STAFF AMID A CRISIS?

After managing claims from every major catastrophic event in Australia since 1998, Gallagher Bassett has used those experiences to “perfect” its strategy on managing staff amid a crisis and driving their success.

In the opinion of Jon Winsbury (pictured), head of international at Gallagher Bassett, managers frequently put the wrong foot forward when they focus on employee weaknesses, which he says is a “performance killer.”

“Particularly during a crisis where workloads can stretch and pressure is applied, it’s important for everyone, especially managers, to know and focus on the strengths of each person,” he explained. “It’s important for everyone to contribute to the workload and be placed in a position where each can play to their strengths.”

Winsbury says employees “thrive” when constructive feedback is given, especially in challenging circumstances. In his experience, the key is to create an environment where regular constructive feedback is welcome.

“Constructive feedback should always inform, explain, coach and encourage,” he continued.

“It’s about having an open conversation while actively listening to what your employee has to say because the more we listen, the better feedback we can provide.

“With people experiencing fast transitions to working from home, it’s essential to have a structure in place to have conversations regularly where feedback is one part of our engagement.”

From day one, Winsbury claims Gallagher Bassett has had a strong culture of “developing [their] talent”, meaning staff expect regular coaching, mentoring and feedback, which act as key pillars of the growth mindset that improves their performance and “ultimately opportunities for career progression.”

“Taking into account the personality of the team member you’re providing feedback to, and tailoring your communication based on this is important, as is focusing on areas for improvement, not on mistakes,” Winsbury added.

“Our leaders also highlight and promote examples of great service and performance

from within their teams to model the values and service that are integral to who we are and what we do.”

The switch to a remote workforce has only further emphasised the importance of intelligent management, which involves identifying employee strengths.

When people are working in a remote environment, they don’t have their usual team surrounding them. This can then lead to people reverting back to personality types, whether they be extroverted or reserved.

“Under duress an individual is more likely to revert to their natural inclinations, so innate risk takers will be more likely to take more risks, and risk-averse people will become increasingly risk averse,” Winsbury explained. “Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your team is essential in making sure you’re encouraging risk-averse people to think through mitigation, and natural risk takers to think about risk and assess opportunities.

“Investing in the right tools and technologies is important to bridging this gap and ensuring that teams are able to stay connected and function cohesively despite being geographically separated.”

