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*COVID changed everything. There's no more playbook for managers, teams, or working parents. Instead, we're all working together to develop the best solutions on the go.*

*Kunik, in partnership with Ama La Vida coaching, hosted a Q&A focused on providing practical tips and strategies. Below are our suggestions from this recent workshop.*

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**Question:** "How do we balance doing right by our teams and our people while also making sure we fulfill our goals as an organization/team?"

- Schedule 1:1 check-ins to talk about life rather than work. Do this with everyone on your team. You might be surprised by what you find
  - Be sure to ask how they would like to hold this meeting. Zoom fatigue is real - perhaps a phone call would be more welcome?
  - Fact: Kunik members reported that simply being asked questions about their challenges by their manager make them feel understood and heard.
    - Instead of "How are you" try "How are you holding up with what you've got going on" or "Tell me more about X"
  - Personalize it - share your own struggles to get your team to open up
- Build empathy, encourage your team to understand each other's challenges
  - A group call or team email sharing some thoughts based on the convos goes a long way
  - Try group coaching sessions. They enable sharing in an open but structured way, are high impact, and build trust & morale



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**Question:** “How can I tread that fine line between being empathetic and goal oriented now?”

- There are two main elements here, work and personal obligations. Juggling both can be incredibly hard for both managers and teams
  - Personal: One repeated concern is “*will my boss forget that I’m still attempting to manage my kids and my career?*” This is a legitimate concern that can be addressed with consistent communication.
    - Don’t let check-ins be a one-off, schedule time to connect with your team and keep asking questions
    - Encourage your team to talk. The best way to avoid work issues is through consistent, clear communication.
  - Work: be realistic and continually reassess
    - Review goals. Are the same KPIs applicable? Are timelines and projects still relevant?
    - Assess the team. Can you leverage skills in new, more effective manners? Can work be shared?
    - Prioritize. Be clear about what priorities are in place. The more each team member knows about what everyone else is working on, the more collaborative people will be.



**Question:** “What is the best way to ask a parent what they need?”

- Be proactive - Asking questions consistently is the best way to stay on top of challenges before they become a problem
  - When in doubt: ***More listening, less talking***



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- Leverage the resources you already have. Ask HR what benefits are available and make sure your team knows what you have and how to access them.
  - Lead by example. Have you tried one of these? Let your team know!
- Missing something? Now is a great time to talk with HR about adding a service. For instance, mental health impacts the entire workforce.



**Question:** “My work has a lot flex, but flex seems to be code for you can just work really late into the night, which isn’t sustainable. How do I talk to my team about that?”

- Flex time is a powerful tool, but it can also be misused
- There are two core aspects: how each individual handles flex time and the company culture around it. As a manager, you can influence both.
  - Is it consistent across teams? Can / should it be?
  - Who is leveraging flex time well? Ask what they’re doing
- A lot depends on company/industry, but a few things to consider:
  - Ask everyone on your team what hours are best/realistic for them
    - This is going to change regularly, keep checking in
  - Can you make a ‘no meeting day’ weekly for your team?
  - People fear that flex time = less work. Data shows the opposite is true. First and foremost, **trust your team**
  - How much work needs to happen together? Can everyone have a different schedule?
  - Create a weekly stand-up meeting to set expectations for the week
  - Keep a close eye on burnout. Is there anyone who looks like they’re really struggling? Talk to them.



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**Question:** “How can parents communicate their needs to their team and managers and still make it clear that they're dedicated to/focused on their work?”

- Working with teams as a whole, to understand everyone's needs, is key
  - We highly encourage you to do this through group activities or coaching - it creates a safe space where people can share, connect, be vulnerable, and learn about their peers
  - Share what's going on with work. When people lack information they make assumptions. From company wide efforts and goals to individual projects, the more we know what everyone is working on, the more likely we are to function as a unit
  - Talk to the employees who might feel resentful - what's really bothering them? Are there ways you can continue to encourage them? Do they need more recognition of their work?
  - Do your teammates view each other as allies? That's a powerful way to promote both collaboration and empathy



**Question:** “What advice are you giving to your members on getting through this?”

- Control what you can
  - Every company culture - and manager - is a bit different. Depending on yours, determine whether they are someone you can speak to about your challenges or not. *Again, who is an ally you can confide in?*
  - There are some things we can control, and others we can't
    - Recognizing the difference is crucial for self management. This is a new situation for everyone, but there are coaches who can help
    - There is no 1 solution that works for everyone: surround yourself with resources, experts, and support. The more you can streamline the things you can control, the better



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- This is not a time for perfection on any front. What can you strip away? What can come off your to-do list? Bring everything back to the most essential things for you, your family, and work. Focus on those.
- Now is a time to recognize and talk about how to establish personal boundaries - communicate and adhere to them. They must be practical and realistic.
- *Take a deep breath. Decide how you want to show up at home and at work and what you need to do to best achieve your goals. This takes awareness and practice.*



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