

Leadership skills are frequently tested during uncertain times

Lisa Konarski, Director, SIA Prevention Services

Our leadership skills are being tested. As leaders we're used to encountering change, developing strategies and providing guidance to our staffs. However, the changes we've experienced in recent months have been dizzying. As soon as one strategy is created, new and updated information is provided, requiring us to adapt. How do you move forward as a leader when the world is in turmoil?

Communication is more important than ever. Employees working from home may feel isolated and distanced from the day-to-day workflow. All staff want to know how to conduct their work and what to anticipate in a changing environment. Therefore, whether you meet with a socially distanced small group, large group or one-on-one, or whether your communication is virtual or by email, consistency is key. You'll build trust by regularly meeting with your group.

We may be experiencing uncertainty, but we're also learning what we're capable of accomplishing.

When you meet with your staff, be transparent and share what's real. Everyone's experiencing constant change, so your staff will understand the need to adapt as new information becomes available – as long as you let them know. Acknowledge when you're uncertain and assure them that you'll provide information from credible sources when its available. Not every interaction needs to be formal, either. Asking and sharing about weekend plans or how kids or pets are adjusting builds camaraderie and trust.

Good communication aids in creating and maintaining a positive morale. Understand that your staff members have anxieties of their own, most of which you're likely not aware of because they aren't workplace-related.

If you know your staff members and are checking in with them regularly, you'll sense when you need to follow up with a particular employee. Additional direction with an assignment, or an opportunity to just be heard, may be all that's needed. People like to know that others care.

Self-care is essential, too. You cannot maintain your responsibilities, respond to changing demands and care for your staff if you're not maintaining your own physical and mental health. Exercise, eat right and rest. Seek assistance if you're struggling emotionally or just need to talk. You know what you need to do and now's the time to do it.

Continue to plan for the future. We may be experiencing uncertainty, but we're also learning what we're capable of accomplishing. Pause when you can to examine what you're achieving and think of ways to apply this new information in the coming months and years. Yes, you've made mistakes. As Oscar Wilde stated, "Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes." No matter what your leadership role may be in your school district, the ultimate priority is the successful education of our children.





Ergonomic considerations for both districts and remote office staff

Lita Chang, Ergonomist, SIA Prevention Services

Working from home has become the new normal because of COVID-19. With regulations changing constantly, SIA has developed a Virtual Ergonomic Evaluation Program to help meet district needs. The following information will help districts plan and prepare for the office needs of employees working remotely. We recommend having a policy in place to help reduce employee expectations that districts will pay for certain equipment to be used at home. Here are some guidelines:

- Before obtaining equipment for employees, consider a virtual ergonomic evaluation to ensure the employees' needs are met.
- How are employee equipment requests and employee ergonomic evaluations to be handled for those working from home/remotely?
- If employees are taking equipment from their work sites home, is this being documented and tracked?
- Do employees receive reimbursement on purchases of remote work equipment? If so, specify a budget and document each purchase.
- Consider a standardized list of what equipment will be obtained for employees and provide options for items such as desks, chairs, keyboards, etc. Be specific about what will be purchased or not purchased.

Whether working from home or at a worksite, SIA offers Virtual Ergo Evaluations for members in our workers' compensation pool. Your district liaison can submit the required evaluation form to SIA or, if you're uncertain who your liaison is, contact Lita Chang in SIA Prevention Services, lchang@sia-jpa.org. Remember, working remotely doesn't have to be a pain in the neck!

- Are employees expected to return equipment obtained for remote work when they return to their work sites? If yes, specify to the employees which distributed equipment needs to be returned.
- If equipment is obtained for the employees, will they pick up the items at their district office or will the items be mailed or delivered?
- How are employees to assemble items such as desks, chairs, keyboard trays, etc., obtained for home use?
 - o Are the items to be direct-shipped to the district office, or assembled and then delivered or picked up by the employees?
 - o Are employees expected to assemble the items at home on their own?
 - o Are the employees or the district paying for assistance with assembling these items?

Visit our webpage for additional handouts on ergonomics for the remote office at

<https://www.sia-jpa.org/resources/hot-topics/covid-19-remote-work-and-wellness-resources/>.

SIA's Leadership Academy is planning for the year ahead

The third-annual Leadership Academy mini-conference was held on July 30 and this year it was virtual. Participants engaged in interactive exercises throughout the day designed to enhance their leadership skills.

There were two featured topics. The first was *Developing Brave Leaders and Courageous Cultures*, presented by Katie Fredericksen using the work of Brene Brown's *Dare to Lead*. The second was *Creating a Psychologically Safe Workplace*, presented by Tyler Wade. Both speakers will expand on their presentations in upcoming Leadership Academy sessions.

SIA's Leadership Academy is a collection of courses offered through the year, each designed to help managers become more competent and confident leaders.



We're currently developing our schedule for the upcoming year and anticipate the sessions will be offered remotely. For more information about the Leadership Academy, or to be added to the contact list, email PreventionServices@sia-jpa.org.

September 30 – Covey's 6 Critical Practices for Leading a Team

October 21 – Managing People with Diverse Styles and Temperaments

December 4 – Creating a Psychologically Safe Workplace



Designed with school district leaders in mind.

Prevention Services is now offering virtual workshops

Deborah R. Camacho, MS, SIA Prevention Services

Although we'd much rather be offering our numerous workshops face to face, we've adapted to the new normal of "Zooming" our information from our home offices to yours. We understand there may be "Zoom" fatigue, so we're continuing to work on ways to shorten the time frames, offer various time slots, record workshops when possible, and most importantly be here for you, our member districts. If there's a workshop that you had on the schedule before COVID-19 hit in March, reach out to us so that we can chat with you about how to implement something virtually. Things have changed. What was important in January is suddenly less important today, with kids and teachers distance learning and staff having to adapt to new ways of working. Our Prevention Services Department may not be in the office, but we're working hard from our home offices on ways to help you through these challenges.

Currently, the following workshops are available virtually:

Slips Trips & Falls - A training focused on common hazards and how to avoid them, as well as an emphasis on overall health and wellness.

The Road to Relaxation & Stress Management - A look at the mental and physical effects of stress and how to help combat them through some easy-to-learn-and-practice relaxation techniques.

HeartMath - Evidence-based tools for calming the nervous system and facilitating clear thinking for optimal health.

What Color is Your Personality - Learn the different types and strengths of each personality style and apply them to everyday interactions to improve communication and appreciation of yourself and others.

Growing in Resilience - Discover a model to help you focus on your innate strengths and build habits to strengthen weak spots.

Coming Soon...

Where is Your Cheese? Navigating the Maze of Change - A story about four characters learning how to deal with unexpected change. The lessons learned from this story are more pertinent than ever during this pandemic, and being able to apply these lessons can benefit your district employees, colleagues, friends and family as we navigate this new normal.

If you're interested in any of these workshops, contact PreventionServices@sia-jpa.org.



Upcoming training

'3 Steps to Calm Anxiety'

Date: October 16, noon to 1 p.m.

Presented by: Michele Mariscal, SIA Prevention Services
A highly interactive, on-camera, experiential workshop

During these times of loss, it's important to recognize how you may have some grief to process. It may feel like increased anxiety. In grief, our brain – part of the neurological system – can feel like it has turned to mush. You may even begin to feel as though you've lost your mind, as thinking often becomes garbled, confused and slowed. This in turn makes planning, organizing and remembering difficult. The result may be that you become unsure of yourself and your ability to make decisions.

Take the opportunity to learn tools and techniques to help you feel better and think clearer by:

- Learning and practicing techniques that help calm anxiety;
- Discovering how loss is cumulative and can lead to anxiety and depression;
- Determining what myths you may be harboring that make it harder to process difficult emotions.

You can register for this session at: <https://bit.ly/2Rif44>. If you have any questions, contact Michele at mmariscal@sia-jpa.org.

Designed with school district leaders in mind.





Take the necessary steps to protect your eyes

Working from home may offer fewer distractions and more focused time to work. However, this focused time may mean more time spent looking at the computer, resulting in your eyes feeling the strain. To help relieve eyestrain, try these techniques:

- Take breaks. Simply getting up and walking away from your computer can rest your eyes.
- Optimize office lighting. The light in your office shouldn't be overly bright or dark. Try not to have any lights shine directly on your computer monitor.
- Adjust your monitor. The top of your computer monitor should be about eye level. The screen's brightness should be about the same level as the ambient light in your work area.
- Try the "20-20-20" rule. Look away from your screen every 20 minutes, focus on an object roughly 20 feet away, and stare at it for 20 seconds.
- Make a conscious effort to blink more often. We don't blink enough while using the computer, which can lead to dry, itchy eyes.
- Keep your smart phone's screen at least one foot away from your face. It's much harder for your eyes to focus on objects that are closer up.

Source: VSP

COVID-19 information and resources

In an effort to assist our member districts, SIA has two website pages dedicated to answering questions about COVID-19:

The *Coronavirus Guidance for Schools and School Districts* page is a thorough collection of up-to-date information and links to governmental and regulatory resources. District staff also will find numerous tools to help meet jurisdictional requirements.

The *COVID-19: Remote Work and Wellness Resources* page provides links to resources for employees, including information on mental and emotional health, home office ergonomics, financial tools and more.

Both pages can be accessed from the "Hot Topics" section on our home page at www.sia-jpa.org.

Personal and professional webinars are available for all SIA members

Through our EAP provider MHN, SIA is offering a variety of free webinars that are open to all SIA member district staff. Each month this fall we're offering two sessions – one that will focus on enhancing personal growth and the other that will help improve your professional skills. Each session will be offered twice on the day indicated, first at 9 a.m. and then at 2 p.m. The trainings offered will be:

9/16: Coping with the Stress of Change

9/23: Overcoming Procrastination

10/14: Coping with the Stress of Economic Uncertainty

10/28: Fitness: Putting Your Health First

11/4: Workplace Communication in the Digital Age

11/18: Enhancing Wellness through Resilience and Work-Life Balance

To register for a session, visit the SIA website at www.sia-jpa.org or contact Teresa Franco at tfranco@sia-jpa.org for more information.

SAFE Credit Union offers financial education for district employees

To assist with personal financial education, SAFE Credit Union is offering free webinars for SIA school district member employees. All sessions will be from noon to 1 p.m. and the upcoming sessions include:

September 9 – Budgeting

September 16 – Advanced Budgeting

October 14 – Emergency Savings – Even in Challenging Times

November 4 – Smart Holiday Spending

To register for a session, visit the SIA website at www.sia-jpa.org or contact Teresa Franco at tfranco@sia-jpa.org.

The material in this newsletter should be part of your Injury and Illness Prevention Plan (IIPP).

Keep a copy of this newsletter in your IIPP binder.