

Shipping Company Case Study

Introduction

It's July, 2020 and Marge Thornbury, Vice-President of Human Resources at Allied Shipping Services (Allied), has never felt more pride in her work. She and her senior colleagues at Allied have worked tirelessly over the past months to address COVID-19 and she feels good about their efforts. But Marge is also concerned. For she sees an entirely new class of issues facing the company going forward and knows that how they handle this new work environment will effect everyone: employees, customers, suppliers and investors.

Background

Allied is a global ocean freight carrier company with approximately 500 employees. The majority of its workforce is based at headquarters at a major port on the east coast but has smaller branches in six other US cities.

Realizing the potential impact of COVID, Allied's senior leadership team began aggressive planning in late February. The team was led by the US President and included all department heads and held regular meetings as the situation played out in the US.

Allied's analysis and planning ultimately lead the company to take a number of important steps. These included:

- Deploying laptops/equipment to all US employees. Where a laptop was not available, employees were requested to utilize home computers to ensure continuations.
- While Allied was designated as an essential employer due to the nature of the business, the decision was made to allow all employees to work from home.
- IT made themselves available to train employees on how to utilize the tools being provided because Allied employees were unfamiliar with work from home protocols.
- Instruction manuals were developed by HR to ensure that all employee phone information was up to date so communications could work seamlessly.
- In March, most employees began the work from home program. There were a handful that needed to return occasionally due to their job duties but these had to be approved by HR and leadership.
- HR and the President began on-going communication with employees to ensure constant connection and to keep the lines of communication open.
- Employees were provided with training on using Microsoft Teams. Managers were expected to use this tool as much as possible to ensure face to face contact persisted.
- The facilities staff had the building (and branch offices) sanitized and cleaned regularly

- For cost savings purposes recruitment was halted and training was temporarily postponed.
- Employees were communicated with regarding legislative issues (FFCRA) and the company arranged for one of its 401K advisors to do Q&A sessions for employees.
- Employees worked from home April, May and June. In the first week of July it was determined that approximately 25% of employees, based on job function, would be expected to return to the office.
- To prepare for employees return, the facilities/HR group put out signs for reminders of social distancing and hand sanitizing, closed the gym, put restrictions in common areas, put out cleaning supplies, and leased a nurse for morning temperature checks. In addition, masks and sanitizers were purchased for employees.
- Employees were required to maintain social distancing. The facilities team measured cubicles from chair to chair to ensure that it was safe to return. Masks were required in all common areas and signs placed outside the building to remind employees where to stand should there be a line to the nurse at the front door.
- HR developed detailed written protocols which were provided to employees. These included entering and exit strategies, COVID 19 reporting and handling protocols and HR contacts.
- Allied did not lay off any employees during this time – the cost cutting initiatives were done globally to ensure that employee jobs were kept intact.

The Situation

Allied received positive feedback from employees regarding their response to the pandemic, the transition to remote work, and their efforts preparing the workplace for a return. Marge is comfortable knowing the steps Allied has taken over the past few months. But she also knows there's more to do, especially given the vast range of new issues, questions and uncertainties going forward.

Sure enough, Marge receives a visit from a supervisor stating an employee's spouse tested positive for COVID-19. Due to exposure concern, the employee is sent home. As she reviews the protocols created for this type of situation, she receives a phone call. An employee heard a rumor that an employee has tested positive and does not know why HR did not communicate anything to employees. The employee has talked with other coworkers and they are refusing to return to work.