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EXPERT VIEW on HR: Caroline McEnergy

Caroline McEnergy, Founder of The HR Suite

this on top of all the other concerns they might have about staying afloat.”

The businesswoman and author, says delivering bad news is always difficult, but employers must strive to be as open and honest with staff as possible.

“Be kind when laying-off or reducing hours as many staff members will be emotional,” she says. “It’s very important to keep proper communication channels open. Speak to people over the phone or on video call but don’t do it via email or letter. And you need to identify objectively justified business grounds if you have no pre-agreed process of selection outlined in their contract of employment.

“Do it as sensitively as you can as people need to hear your voice, because this will show that you are treating them with dignity and respect. It will be difficult, but people do understand as everyone is in the same boat and are all doing what they can to weather the storm together. So do your best to be sympathetic, clear, factual, and as helpful and considerate as you can.

IN THIS EDITION OF ‘EXPERT VIEW,’ WE SPEAK WITH CAROLINE MCENERY, HR SPECIALIST, WORKPLACE RELATIONS COMMISSION ADJUDICATOR AND FOUNDER OF THE HR SUITE IN KERRY AND DUBLIN.

Having headed up her own HR company for over a decade, Caroline McEnergy of the HR Suite says the current crisis is very difficult for employers, many who are having to make hard choices with regard to reducing wages and possibly even laying off staff.

But while these tasks are undoubtedly unpleasant, the HR expert says getting the right advice can make the process easier for both employer and employee.

“There is no doubt that we are going through a very trying time,” she says. “Jobs are at risk, hours have been reduced and many people are working remotely for the first time and are finding it challenging – we are in uncharted waters and not everyone can manage

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“Of course, some people will take it badly as many are not just worried about their job, but also their families, loans, mortgages and more. Everyone has a lot on their plate, so acknowledge that you know how hard it is for them and that you will do all you can to help them through it, whether that is providing letters for banks and credit unions or some sort of future plan.”

The HR expert says she is ‘really delighted about the positive government packages’ which will not only help employees but will also be hugely beneficial to employers.

“The new National COVID-19 Income Support Scheme is there to support employees on lay-off,” she says. “It’s really proactive that they have put the emergency payment plan in place for twelve weeks as this will be of support to many people and will help everyone both mentally and financially in relation to how they will cope in the weeks ahead. Additionally, the wage subsidy scheme has been introduced for eligible employers, i.e. those whose turnover is down by 25% and meet other criteria also. I wish we didn’t need all of these schemes, but they are very positive and will go a long way to helping employers and employees navigate through this difficult unprecedented time.”

“The fact that the redundancy payment scheme has been suspended until the end of May

also alleviates another concern for employers.”

With so many companies in crisis at the moment, McEnergy and her team are kept busy offering advice. She says the most important message to get across to employers is the need to communicate with staff and to keep morale up by focusing on getting through this.

“Verbal updates for staff are crucial”

“I can’t emphasis enough the importance of communication, whether staff are in the office, working from home or have been laid off, verbal updates are crucial as is acknowledging the

difficulties which people are going through,” she says. “Also, there are a lot of people who are working to get us through this crisis and as a society, we need to keep morale up for them as we are dependent on them to help us all – the front line health workers, the retail staff, the Gardai and everyone else who is keeping society going – they are all heroes and we need to do our bit by staying positive.”

“It really is wonderful to see how Ireland has stepped up to the plate. We are a great country and have shown how we can stand together during these difficult times. The HSE call for help was a huge indication of how, as a nation, we work as one and when business opens again, and it will, I believe we are all going to continue to support one another. to get our economy going again.”

“I would advise employers and employees to mind mental health, get lots of fresh air, have a bit of structure to the day and be assured that this is short term and we will definitely bounce back very positively as we are all working together.

“Karma is a brilliant thing – the more we give during this time, the more we will get back in droves.”

Key advice:

- Communication is key – keep staff informed, either in person, by phone or video link.
- Make sure to involve people working remotely and those on reduced hours in future plans.
- Avail of all the government income support you are eligible for.
- Ensure both employees and employers take breaks, get fresh air and have a routine.
- Stay positive as we will come through this.

To find out more about Caroline McEnergy and her business, please visit <https://www.thehrsuite.com>

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