



FROM THE QUARTERLY PARTNERWELL PULSE REPORT

# Things Are Certainly Uncertain

As a leader at work, you may be thinking to yourself right now, ***“How do I alleviate stress and uncertainty for my team? What is my role in supporting individuals through these challenges?”***

You are not alone. Managers, leaders, and employers are struggling with how to support their workforce in times of high stress, high burnout, and lots of uncertainty.

Uncertainty arises when we face situations with imperfect or unknown information, making it difficult to predict, control, or plan for the future. This lack of clarity can be distressing for both employees and leaders.

## UNCERTAINTY CAN WORSEN BURNOUT

As leaders we cannot always change the situation that is impacting our teams or the environment in which we find ourselves, but it is important to be aware of how uncertainty can worsen burnout. We have already been concerned about burnout rates. For years, research has highlighted elevated burnout rates among the US workforce, with estimates showing that about 76% of full-time employees experience burnout on the job.<sup>1</sup>

Identifying and addressing the impact of uncertainty and burnout is crucial for maintaining wellbeing, especially in

a world characterized by constant change and ambiguity. If you're concerned that individuals on your team may be experiencing burnout, reach out to them, be an advocate, encourage self-care, and lead with empathy. As a leader, fostering a culture of support and psychological safety can help your team navigate uncertainty with resilience.

## HUMAN BEINGS NEED STABILITY

Many managers have recently shared their concerns, asking, ***“How can I help my team navigate change and uncertainty?”*** For starters, it's hard work. We crave stability and a predictable future. Focusing on the things we can control and leading from a place of empathy will help support your teams.

A sense of stability is essential for overall wellbeing and is a fundamental psychological need. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs highlighted that our desire for safety, security, and stability form the foundation for personal growth and fulfillment. Stability is positioned just above physiological needs like clean water, food, shelter, and sleep, necessities that must be satisfied before individuals can pursue higher-level aspirations. In our change management article, we highlight the critical role one's job has in creating a sense of stability.

Now, thinking about a leader's responsibility in an ever-changing world – what is our role? And how can we support individuals through stressful, uncertain times? Leaning into validation, empathy, and vulnerability might help.

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Creating trust with our teams is personal and unique, just like supporting individuals through uncertain times. Building trust with our teams takes time, but if done right it can create lasting connection. Research shows that when employees trust the leadership of their organization, they are four times as likely to be engaged.<sup>2</sup>

### SUPPORT DON'T SOLVE METHOD

The Support Don't Solve Method<sup>3</sup> can be a helpful framework to remember in times of uncertainty and high burnout. It is a five-step process that outlines tips on how to support and empower others. The five steps include: Validate, Empathize, Inquire, Motivate, and Reconnect. Below we dig deeper into steps one and two. This framework is unique, as it gives you the outline to help employees while protecting your own wellbeing.

Step one in the framework highlights how powerful validating one's emotions and experiences can be. Validation is about seeking to understand the emotions the other person is expressing, regardless of whether you agree with their perspective. It reassures them that their feelings are acknowledged and valued.<sup>3</sup> In its simplest form we are striving to connect with one another and create space for people to talk about their concerns. You are not solving their problems. We need to strive to create a safe place for individuals to express themselves and voice the things about which they are concerned. The goal is to stay in the listener role and build trust.

When we focus on validating one's experiences, we need to ensure we are leading from a place of empathy, which is step two of the Support Don't Solve Method. We can never

truly step into someone else's shoes and grasp their exact experience, but we can likely relate to their emotions. We all may experience different situations of uncertainty in our lives but all of us have felt fear, anxiety, dread, loneliness, etc., which are common emotions tied to change.

When we think about creating an environment where people feel comfortable sharing, it requires a certain amount of vulnerability and boundaries. Brené Brown wrote: "Vulnerability without boundaries is not vulnerability. It might be fear or anxiety. We have to think about why we're sharing and, equally important, with whom. What are their roles? What is our role? Is this sharing productive and appropriate?"<sup>4</sup> It's essential to keep this in mind and honor the fact that each of us have different boundaries. We cannot care for others at the expense of ourselves.

Incorporating the Support Don't Solve Method when speaking with individuals who are struggling can be a helpful tool in your manager toolbelt. You do not have to solve their problems; they just need to know that you are there for them, while maintaining your boundaries.

Interested in learning how you can support your middle managers?

Reach out to the PartnerWell team:  
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1. Gallup. (2022, June 13). U.S. workers' high burnout rate still alarming. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/393500/workers-highest-burnout-rate.aspx>
2. Gallup. (n.d.). Develop leaders and managers at all levels. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/216209/develop-managers-leaders.aspx>
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4. Brown, B. (2018). Dare to lead: Brave work. Tough conversations. Whole hearts. Random House. Quoted in Goodreads. (n.d.). Brené Brown > Quotes. Retrieved February 11, 2025, from <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9837040>