

## Op-ed: Ensuring Employees' Well-being In The Eye Of A Storm

BY RON GARROW



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When disaster strikes, many people ask: How can I help?

In the aftermath of Hurricane Florence, we've seen this selfless response countless times across eastern North Carolina. In heroic first responders saving lives. In nonprofit organizations providing food, shelter and comfort. In people and businesses donating money and volunteer time. In neighbor helping neighbor.

As a newcomer to Wilmington, I'm struck by the resiliency of the people and organizations of our region in the face of such adversity, as our thoughts continue to be with those suffering in the wake of the storm.

In the spirit of opening a dialogue on ideas for supporting employees when disaster hits, I'd like to share some of the measures we've taken at PPD, while providing uninterrupted service to our clients globally before, during and after the storm. Such a dialogue might, perhaps, help us all prepare for future hurricanes that we hope will not come, yet may.

Of course, there's no "one-size-fits-all" approach to anticipating and meeting employee needs, and different organizations find the right mix of initiatives for their organizations and their employees. Here are a few approaches that have been well-received within PPD:

**Meet near-term needs immediately.** We placed a high priority on our managers staying connected with their team members in the impacted areas to help ensure they and their families were safe. We accelerated payday to put money in employees' pockets sooner and relaxed our paid-time-off policy so employees wouldn't have to use vacation days to deal with the hurricane and recovery. When gasoline became scarce, we brought in 6,000 gallons to distribute free to employees to keep their cars and generators running. One employee, whose fuel supply was low, said when she learned about the gas truck, she nearly cried.

**Be in it for the long haul.** When homes flood or are hit by trees, recovery can take weeks – or longer. We're providing financial assistance to impacted employees for non-work-related costs – such as transportation, lodging, meals, clothing and damage to homes and cars – and for work-related expenses encountered if, for example, they evacuated.

**Help employees help each other.** Many employees naturally want to help colleagues impacted by a disaster. We established a GoFundMe campaign to assist employees with extraordinary hardships, launched with donations from our leadership team. Thanks to the generosity of our employees around the world, we've surpassed our initial \$100,000 fundraising goal.

**Care for the whole employee.** An event like Hurricane Florence not only can impact physical well-being, but also emotional health. Employee assistance programs can provide employees with confidential educational sessions to help them process their feelings and reactions, and provide tools and resources to facilitate coping.

A final word of appreciation to the many businesses and organizations doing the right thing for their employees, with thoughtful and innovative support programs for those struggling through difficult times. As employers, our mantra must be: Our employees' well-being comes first.

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