

HR Insights

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Managing in Times of Social Unrest

Social injustices, civil rights and discrimination issues affect all employers and employees across the country. Numerous recent events have led to unrest, which has permeated all areas of society, including the workplace.

During these times, employees may be experiencing poor mental health and low engagement. To support employees as effectively as possible, promote employee safety and prevent workplace conflict, employers are faced with the challenge of how to effectively manage employees during these times of social unrest.

What Is Social Unrest?

“Social unrest” is a broad term that is typically used to describe situations in which a group of people come together in the form of a protest, strike or riot to effect change about an issue. These gatherings are often called in response to things like social and racial injustices, politics and discrimination. However, in some cases, these peaceful gatherings can escalate and spiral out of control.

Social Unrest and the Workplace

Social unrest can affect employees in many different ways and will affect each employee differently. It may be difficult for some to focus solely on work. For example, they may be experiencing many different emotions due to the social unrest, resulting in low engagement and difficulty focusing. The emotional stress some employees may be experiencing can have negative effects on their work, their personal lives and their work relationships.

Others may be looking to your leadership to see how they will respond to social unrest. For example, employees may be looking to see whether your organization will be making policy changes to address the social unrest or how you will be supporting employees during these times.

In some cases, your business may be located in an area that’s experiencing social unrest. As such, you may have concerns for the safety of your business and your employees. First and foremost, make sure you stay informed via local authorities, news outlets and social media about potential events or issues that could lead to social unrest within your community. This practice will allow you to be more aware of when social unrest is most likely to occur and take a proactive approach to protecting your business, which may include altering business hours, assessing property vulnerabilities and avoiding unnecessary conflict should an event occur.

Addressing Social Unrest in the Workplace

Being prepared to address social unrest in the workplace can help equip managers to deliver the support and resources that employees may need. In addition, creating and communicating a plan today can help set expectations for your

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company as a whole.

It's important to remember that every employee is different and will be affected by social unrest in their own unique way. While they are entitled to their own opinions and feelings, there are steps you can take to ensure that their concerns are acknowledged in an acceptable way, that they feel supported and that workplace conflict is avoided. Some best practices to consider include:

- **Establish a culture of inclusion**—Recent events have led to social unrest. In response to these events, promote and prioritize inclusion in the workplace.
- **Review or establish an employee assistance program (EAP)**—An EAP is an employer-sponsored program that offers services or referrals to help employees deal with personal problems. Your EAP should include resources that help employees navigate emotional stress that they may be experiencing due to social unrest.
- **Communicate your commitment to supporting employees**—When employees feel that their managers and company care about them and their needs, they are more likely to remain engaged and happy. Simply stating that your organization is committed to supporting employees and their mental health in the midst of social unrest can go a long way.
- **Create a formal policy and process for workplace conflict resolution**—Sometimes, social unrest will cause conflict between co-workers due to differing beliefs. Having a formal policy and process designed to address these issues can help deal with conflict swiftly and fairly, which can help de-escalate a situation and prevent future conflict.
- **Establish and set the tone for appropriate workplace behavior**—Employees and customers will have their own opinions on social unrest, but it's important that managers and leadership establish clear-cut rules for acceptable behavior in the workplace. Be sure that your guidelines encourage

respectful behaviors and that managers lead by example by following these guidelines.

- **Follow OSHA guidelines**—Regulatory language in [guidelines](#) from OSHA should be followed to ensure that your organization is providing a safe place for employees during periods of social unrest.
- **Create a plan for protecting your business during times of social unrest**—As previously mentioned, it's possible that your business may be located in an area experiencing social unrest. To proactively mitigate the risk of potential damage and to keep employees as safe as possible, create a plan to protect your business. In addition to staying informed, consider the following guidance:
 - Assess property vulnerabilities.
 - Protect your property by utilizing security cameras, locking doors and windows, and installing glass break sensors and an intruder alarm system.
 - Remove valuables.
 - Alter business hours.
 - Educate employees about avoiding unnecessary on-site conflict and responding appropriately in situations of social unrest.

Remember, not every business is the same. However, it is important to encourage and promote a safe, inclusive and supportive workplace for all employees.

For More Information

Navigating times of social unrest can be challenging for employers and employees alike. For more information on supporting employees and protecting your business, contact AHERN Insurance Brokerage today.