

## **Managing to Get Through This**

By Eric Berkman

*How CIOs and IT staffs react in times of trouble*

Four months later, the date Sept. 11, 2001, remains burned into America's collective consciousness. We've all heard the new day of infamy described again and again as "the day that everything changed." The terrorist attacks were traumatic enough, but since then we've seen new fears emerge: widening anthrax exposure, the uncertainty of the military conflict in Afghanistan and anxiety over what's next.

Not surprisingly, these months of grief and disquiet have had an impact on the workplace; people can't just leave their worries at home when they head to the office. David Hunnicutt, president of the Omaha, Neb. — based Wellness Councils of America, says it's normal for employees to feel that their well-being is threatened — a sense that is manifested in distraction, feelings of economic insecurity and fanatical searches for information. "This all has the potential to impact the work world in terms of less productivity, less quality being produced and inevitably more mistakes," he says.

On the other hand, some CIOs report that the current climate has actually galvanized their staffs with a sense of camaraderie and renewed focus—perhaps as a way of coping with the enormity of events. Either way, things *have* changed in the workplace. And while CIOs may be wrestling with demons of their own, they need to adapt their management techniques to help their employees — and their companies — get through the tough times.

### **Out of Focus**

Steve Van Wyk, CIO of Morgan Stanley's Individual Investors Group (IIG), faces unusual challenges in keeping his

IS staff focused on work these days. Rather than complain, however, he counts his blessings. On the morning of Sept. 11, Van Wyk was scheduled to meet with the group's president, John Shaefer, at IIG's offices on the 66th floor of Two World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan. But the night before, Shaefer had moved the meeting to Morgan Stanley's Times Square headquarters — which placed the pair safely uptown when the two hijacked jets smashed into the Twin Towers.



In the anxious environment after Sept. 11, Steve Van Wyk, CIO of Morgan Stanley's Individual Investor Group, has sought to calm employees and bring them together.

Although nearly 40 Morgan Stanley employees died in the attack, every single one of Van Wyk's 900 IT workers got out of the building before it collapsed. Most were in shock, but without any time to reflect or grieve, they regrouped at IIG's recovery location 10 blocks away and got to the task of restoring IIG's IT environment. "People knew their responsibilities and performed them in an admirable way," says Van Wyk, who worked the first 48 hours without sleep and did not return to his home in Chicago for two weeks. "But there were tears and people breaking down at different times."

Months later, Van Wyk and his staff are still struggling. There is lingering depression, sadness and shock. IIG employees feel displaced; the World Trade Center is gone, and they're making do in temporary work space elsewhere in Manhattan. And persistent fears over taking the subway and coming into the city are creating anxiety in some employees over whether to show up for work at all.

Amid all this, Van Wyk is doing what he can to help workers come to terms with the events. He's sponsoring regular departmental meetings to give employees time to talk, and the company continues to offer free counseling sessions. Van Wyk says the company has really come together. Understandably, though, productivity is not what it was before Sept. 11.

#### **Tension Tamers**

How to calm anxious employees

- Encourage employees to talk, either in groups or one-on-one sessions.
- Offer counseling services.
- Constantly communicate the actions that your company is taking to help.
- Try to understand what different things different people need.
- Reward employees who work extra during crises.

- Try to accommodate employees who are uncomfortable flying.
- Remember that people need routines.

The traumas and tensions of recent months are felt across the entire nation. Hundreds of miles from ground zero, Lisa Harris is dealing with some of the same issues that Van Wyk faces. Harris, CIO of Gevity HR, a \$3.1 billion human resources outsourcing company in Bradenton, Fla., was preparing for a major infrastructure upgrade when news of the 9/11 attacks hit. The physical upgrade was scheduled for the coming weekend, which meant that Harris's staff had to work around the clock with coding, testing and upgrading scripts at a time when they'd much prefer to be with their families. Making matters worse, a major tropical storm hit south Florida on Friday, Sept. 14, closing Gevity's offices, but the IT staff still had to make it in for the upgrade, which went ahead on schedule.

People were tense and highly emotional that weekend, even breaking out in tears, Harris says. The upgrade was ultimately successful, but it's come at a cost; Harris says her staff is still working toward recovery. Employees haven't regained their focus. "Our programmers will pick up a task, and because they're not 100 percent sharp, they don't execute as quickly as they did prior to Sept. 11 and the upgrade," she says. Employees are also having trouble multitasking, she says. "It's almost as if they can only do one thing at a time."

Her team's fatigue has forced Harris to become a more nurturing manager. She's tried to understand what individual team members need, whether it be a pat on the back, a day off, a less stressful assignment or just more interaction with her. She's also working with other executives to properly reward employees who gave so much of themselves during the upgrade. "I'm doing everything from sitting down in their cubicles and asking if they're OK and how I can help to working on special just-in-time bonuses for folks who went over and above," she says.

## Communications Upgrade

Worries about job loss — already a concern among employees before Sept. 11 — loom greater now. When they can do so honestly, CIOs should assure staffers that their positions are safe. Joe Gagliardi, CIO of Unisa of America in Miami, tells of a young man in his organization who was recently promoted. The man sees that he's highly paid even as other people can do his job in an emergency situation, and he's nervous. "I think he feels like his salary is sticking out there like a sore thumb, just waiting for the ax to come," says Gagliardi, who has responded by reassuring the man — and others — that he's doing everything he can to hold on to employees. "I need to stop the terror where I can, one person at a time," Gagliardi says.

Among foreign-born workers, anxiety about the future is particularly acute. Bill Miller, vice president of IS at Harris Corp., a \$2 billion communications equipment maker in Melbourne, Fla., has an employee from the Middle East who worries about being stared at or singled out if he flies. So Miller is allowing him to make eight-hour drives instead. "I'm not going to make a guy get on a plane if he's uncomfortable," says Miller. "Even if it means he's going to be away from the office longer. You've got to work these things out."

Andrea Anania, executive vice president and CIO of \$20 billion insurance giant

Cigna, has faced a unique form of anxiety in her employees: They work in a downtown Philadelphia setting eerily similar to the World Trade Center. "Not only are we in a tall building, but our headquarters are located in a set of twin towers," she says. Fear among Cigna employees in Philadelphia was so great after Sept. 11 that some simply stayed away from the office for a day or two, with the company's permission. The company's constant communication of the actions it is taking to safeguard employees — such as requiring all employees to sport visible ID badges, conducting random checks of people entering the building, and communicating evacuation procedures — has helped the tension abate somewhat, Anania says. "There's definitely been nervousness, but at the end of the day, it is what it is," she says. "People do work in skyscrapers. And most people are now thinking that if there's going to be another attack on our shores, it'll be different. Germ warfare or something like that."

### **All Together Now**

Some CIOs have found that the uncertainty of recent months has actually galvanized their workforce, instilling an increased sense of teamwork and focus — which they hope will last. Sue Kozik, CIO of Lucent Technologies in Murray Hill, N.J., has seen this response in her employees and surmises that it might be due to the therapeutic effect of staying busy. "The workplace provides a routine, and people need to get back to that," she says. "It's how people are coping." Gagliardi adds that he's buried his employees in work in order to preempt any post-9/11 malaise that might set in.

Bob Mayo, CIO of Subaru of America in Cherry Hill, N.J., says his workplace has become a "kinder and gentler" setting where he's noticed less bickering and infighting. For example, Subaru recently launched an initiative to replace vehicle computer systems, which has forced the IS group to beef up its staff by taking people from other departments. "In the past, people have been territorial about losing key individuals," says Mayo. "But today, post-9/11, we're seeing a new kind of team unity."

Harris Corp.'s Miller sounds a similar note. Workers no longer go at colleagues' throats over problems like conflicting project approaches. "Someone standing in the way of your project timeline used to be the bad guy," he says. "Now when we've seen just how terrible people can be to each other, maybe we're beginning to understand that we were spending too much time sweating the small stuff."

### **Taking It Personally**

It's not only IT staffs for whom the workplace has changed, of course; CIOs have felt the impact as well. Though none of them are saying their career is any less important than it was before, several CIOs acknowledge that they've taken a hard look at the balance between work and personal life. Harris of Gevity HR says that she's once again taking a few minutes out of her day to call her husband — something that fell by the wayside when she got too busy. "Work's important and I love my job," she says. "But I love my family more, and the events of Sept. 11 have helped me put it into perspective again."

Everyone seems to be cutting down on air travel. "I've been traveling for 20 years

— I'm a million-mile traveler," says Kozik. "But I'm not anxious to get back on the scene. There's a little bit of fear, but it's more the hassle factor. So I'm looking at options that might make me more productive, like audio and videoconferencing."

But Kozik knows this can't continue forever. She has IT employees in four locations, and she feels she needs to see them all regularly. "My commitment is to be a visible leader, and I want them to know I'm still there," she says. "We're in the middle of a transformation, and I want to pump them up, keep them focused and not let the crisis stop them from thinking they're making a contribution."

*Do fears of terrorism continue to affect your staff? Tell Senior Writer Eric Berkman about it at [eberkman@cio.com](mailto:eberkman@cio.com).*

PHOTO BY MARK BOLSTER

### **Management Briefs: Employee Assistance**

#### *The Worth of Wellness*

Employee assistance programs (EAPs) and wellness programs can be useful tools in helping your workforce stay on track during uncertain and anxious times.

EAPs are typically part of a company's health insurance plan and administered by the HR department. Their services include short-term individual counseling, written materials on health- or wellness-related topics, and in some cases forums for employees to discuss issues affecting their well-being. Wellness programs, on the other hand, are typically volunteer organizations, sometimes supported financially by the company. Broadly defined, their focus is on health education and promotion, including such activities as educational forums, exercise programs and lectures.

Both EAPs and wellness programs have been important in helping employees cope with the terrorist attacks, anthrax fears and the uncertainty caused by U.S. military action in Afghanistan, says Thomas Guck, psychologist and director of behavioral sciences at the Creighton University School of Medicine in Omaha, Neb.

"The thing that's important and unique about the 9/11 issue is that it's ongoing; it's not a finite thing where you're dealing with a flood and the problem's over and done with and people get on with their lives," says Guck. "9/11 is an evolving process with so many different dimensions. An employee might have a son or daughter in the military being shipped out to Afghanistan. And there's the anthrax scares. EAPs and wellness programs can be helpful by [making participants] aware of how these things are evolving and finding the right balance between helping employees be vigilant about the issues and getting on with their lives."

Executives play an important role in ensuring that their employees know about and take advantage of these resources if they need them, Guck says. "And they can help make sure that no stigma is attached. That can be really important."

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### **Coping at Cigna**

Andrea Anania, executive vice president and CIO of Cigna, a \$20 billion insurance company based in Philadelphia, says EAP-style mental health counseling has been critical in helping her employees cope in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Cigna has a business division that provides employee assistance programs to its subscribing companies. The services are provided free of charge to Cigna employees, and the company has been making sure the services have been used in the past few months. "We've had seminars made available to everyone on the premises, and we've had training sessions with managers to help identify people who may be struggling and to encourage them to attend the counseling sessions," says Anania. "We've definitely seen an increase in the number of people drawing on these services."

Anania has personally encouraged some IT workers to take advantage of the counseling. For example, one of her employees in Connecticut knows a young girl who lost both her parents on Sept. 11. Anania recognized that the employee was having difficulty dealing with the situation and directed her to the counseling service. The service helped enough, Anania reports, that the employee referred coworkers who also knew children orphaned by the attacks.

*-Eric Berkman*