

# The Impact of Continuous Listening During Changing Times:

## A Hospitality Story



**WSA** | Celebration Story

**Organization:**  
Resort Group

**Industry:**  
Hospitality

**Employee Count:**  
20,000+

### The Landscape

Organizations around the globe have been impacted by the pandemic of 2020, a historical social justice movement, and the uncertain times that lay ahead. Leaders find themselves in uncharted territory, faced with questions, situations, and scenarios, for which there are few answers or processes. In previous times, questions around the most important levers to pull to impact workforce productivity and positivity could be answered by relying on proven practices, research, and history. In today's ever-changing world, those levers vary from employee to employee, and they are no longer solely focused on the work environment—leaders must take an employee's personal life into account. In fact, the two are so closely intertwined with critical components of the experience like safety, security, well-being, and creating a larger impact on the world around them that the actions a leader takes, and the direction an organization's executive team puts in place affects all aspects of the employee experience.

The hospitality industry has been one of the hardest-hit industries, in fact, according to *McKinsey*, full recovery of this industry could take until 2023, or later, with \$534M lost per day. According to *Economic Modeling*, every day the hospitality industry is shut down, 16,782 U.S. employees and \$923,120,128 in earnings are affected. The numbers are astounding.

So, what are leaders left to do? How do they respond when the responses are so personal? Not only broken up by individual life circumstances, but by industry and role. It's a complex web, but it isn't a complex answer. Let's look at it a bit closer through the journey of a larger well-known resort group.



*A continuous listening strategy can be highly effective during times of uncertainty and change.*

### **The Story of a Well-Known Resort Group**

In May of 2020 when the pandemic first hit, a well-known resort group was forced to furlough a large portion of its employees without pay. The essential workers who continued to come into work did so without staff and managed an increased scope of work under new policies and procedures that had to be learned and applied quickly to ensure a safe work environment.

Employees' primary job duties included overseeing maintenance and caretaking the facilities. However, due to lack of resource availability, their job scope crept up to full, and sometimes, beyond full, capacity—creating an impact on energy-levels as well as work-life balance. The sense among these employees was “you’re asking me to do things differently while doing more and with less staff.”

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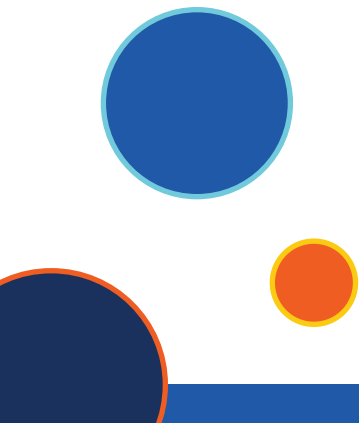
### **Leadership Took Action**

The leadership team quickly recognized the need to move to a continuous listening approach for these employees. Initially, the resort group had decided to undertake engagement efforts and measurements on their own but soon requested a partnership with Qualtrics to gain expertise on creating a continuous listening program. Midway through these efforts, Workforce Science Associations (WSA) was brought in as an advisor to help leadership understand the story behind the numbers and to sort out the data that was truly important from the data that was merely interesting.

The resort group instituted a weekly pulse survey across the organization to understand capacity, well-being, and safety.

Key takeaways from the initial surveys included an 80 percent favorability from employees in being proud to work for the resort group, a 69 percent favorability in more frequent communications, and an even higher desire for more frequent communications than what the resort group had already implemented.

From the first to the second survey, results also unveiled a decrease in “I have been able to balance my work and personal demands.” This rang especially true for leaders who managed people with a higher negative rate among people managers versus individual contributors. The ability to manage a work-life balance was not only tough for essential employees working without staff but became a speed bump for managers as they began to bring people back to work.





*Validating the right listening strategies and leadership actions to meet desired objectives is critical to engagement efforts.*

Additionally, employees continued to emphasize they wanted a safety-first approach from leadership and rated high on how they were handling these efforts.

Employee energy and stamina continued to be a struggle as new policies and procedures were introduced, and people leaders continued to try to achieve balance as the demands on employees fluctuated and teams continued to be reduced.

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### **The Role WSA Played**

The resort group had pulled all of the right mechanisms into action. However, they needed validation that these were not only the correct moves to make but that they were taking the appropriate actions from the feedback.

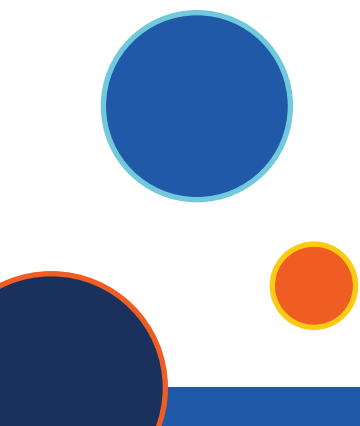
Dissecting the feedback, a bit closer, it became apparent that the stressors on the essential employees weren't all company-related. The crisis had not only changed work-life balance for leaders and individual contributors, but it had also changed personal lives. This meant that the concerns of their employees were intertwined between professional and personal—a much higher overlap and connection than we've seen in history. It also meant that there were many outlying factors outside of leadership control.

Once the return to work began, the stressors and the issues impacting sustainable energy and well-being began to shift away from concerns about what was happening outside of the organization. The shift of concern became internally oriented. People were less fearful of job loss and more concerned about accomplishing the work safely with less staff than before the crisis. The focus on safety shifted to be less about PPE's and standard operating procedures to concern about contact with customers/guests. People were satisfied with the resort's efforts to be safe, but the concern was whether or not guests would follow the safety guidelines.

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### **How the Journey Unfolded**

The deep concerns and stressors on employees through work and home life mandated that leaders have a caring attitude toward employees and be open to communication—leaning heavily on effective listening and responding to those feelings or needs. When leaders are sensitive to the stressors affecting employees outside of work, it elevates the sense of belonging and meaning for employees. Which makes sense—we all want to





*Employees wanted to feel like they had a voice in the changes affecting their lives and their livelihoods.*

feel like our voice is heard and that we have input in the changes affecting our lives and our livelihoods. In fact, when leaders can admit the things they don't know, openly communicate about the things they do know and ensure they are bringing employees into the conversation, it not only creates an effective listening program, but it elevates a sense of belonging, loyalty, and belief in the future vision of an organization.

*A majority of employees weren't worried about themselves as much as they were worried about others.*

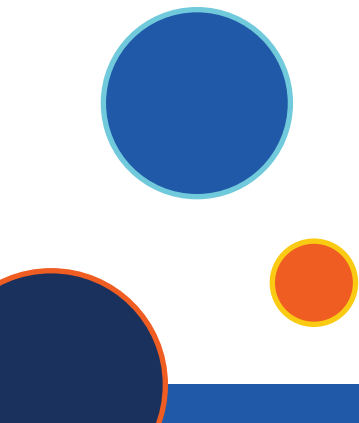
One lever of showing compassion and comfort during these times is safety and security—a component that became even more critical for the resort group as they began bringing employees back to work (the truth of many organizations today). The resort group used this opportunity to once again survey employees and inquire about their safety and security concerns. It ensured their action planning process to bring people back to work and took the employee voice into consideration.

Interestingly, the data showed that a majority of employees weren't worried about themselves as much as they were worried about others. In fact, there was only 13 percent of the employee population who didn't feel safe returning to work. Those who were comfortable coming back requested that proper operating procedures around how they come back to work be put into place and be well-defined.

They felt safe with the policies the resort group had put into place, but they did not feel safe with customers—because they couldn't control what the customers were doing. What if their disregard for policies or less attentive attitude toward safety and security harmed them or their families?

With this input in mind, the resort group furthered their communication to ask what resources would help equip their staff when either coming back or continuing to work from home, so they felt they had the tools to do their jobs effectively.

Even though communication and listening were strong, leaders and managers were still struggling with work-life balance as they tried to ensure each employee was equipped for their new work-life approach.





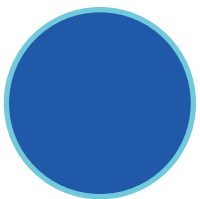
*Uncertainty still exits, but there is an increased belief in the organization, a stronger sense of belonging, and an elevated pride in the company's mission.*

### **The Results of Taking Action**

The beauty of this journey, from May to the current state, is the sense of well-being across the organization increased from the first survey, conducted in May, to the fifth survey, conducted in June. Even though managers and essential workers were feeling unbalanced with work and life and had taken on more responsibilities to their daily jobs, the communication cadence and drive of leadership to continuously ask, listen, and then take action brought forth an increased belief in the organization. Employees also felt a sense of belonging, a stronger sense of pride in being part of the company's mission, and a strengthened commitment to the company vision.

For the resort group, as for many organizations, this journey is still in motion. The resort group has currently seen well-being decrease because of the introductions of customers back to the resort group and the unknown it presents to employees around safety and security. But the resort group can recognize what factors are impacting employees externally versus internally because of its effectively listening strategies. This gives precision to the insight on not only what actions need to be taken but if action can be taken by leadership that will strengthen the sense of well-being overtime or not.

It's the kind of insight every leader needs during times of uncertainty—because when we don't know what the future holds, how do we know, as leaders, how to make the best decisions?





**The “employee voice” is a critical lever to pull during times of change.**

Even when things are uncertain and change is inevitable, allowing employees to have a voice and be heard increases pride in the organization, trust in leadership, and a sense of well-being across the workforce.



**Transparency from leaders leads to transparency from employees.**

Stressors affecting employees' lives aren't always within a leader's control. When leaders are open to actively listening and responding truthfully, even if they don't have all of the answers it can be a powerful change component to a sense of security and trust in the organization.

**About WSA**

We believe in the power of applying the right science to make people and organizations successful. We believe in empowering business to measure what matters when it matters—so they, in turn, can motivate their people to work harder, stay longer, and care more. We believe that behavioral science is the ingredient for ensuring that employees stay focused on the right things at the right time and with the right momentum. We believe that employee's lives are never better than when they are highly engaged and using their talents to contribute to a company they believe in. And we know that you need a partner who has workforce performance down to a science.