

What To Say In A Crisis

bù qū bù náo

“不屈不挠” - unyielding; indomitable



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Foreword



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Unyielding has been used to describe the Chinese approach to both business and life and this idiom is well used across China. Traditional Chinese culture typically discourages seeking help. We all hope China and its people can continue to be unyielding but we also all know many who will suffer long term negative impacts of the Covid-19 crisis in the weeks and months to come.

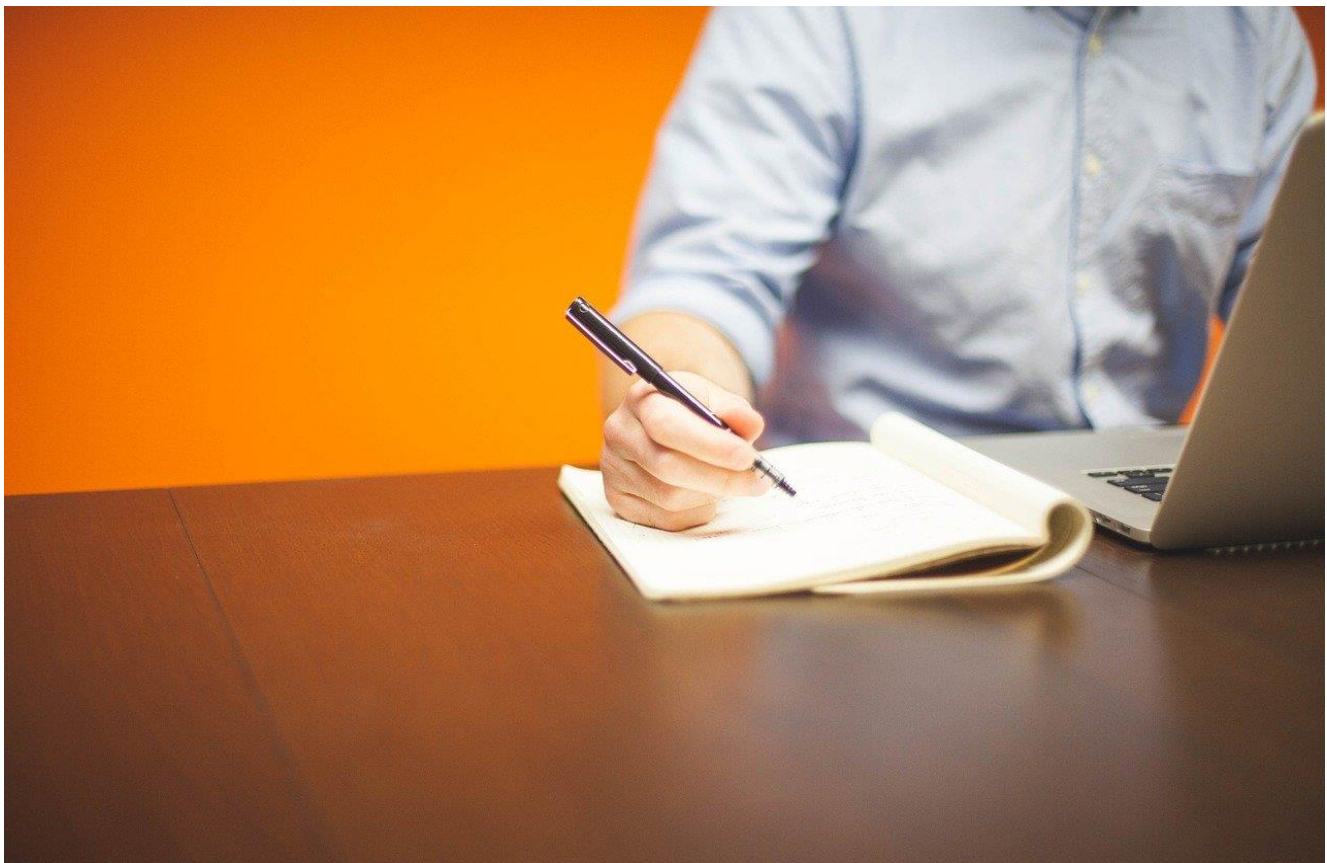
I found myself really wanting to make sure I say the right thing...to colleagues who are concerned about scared elderly relatives, to colleagues with children preparing for school exams and to friends who are facing redundancy and an uncertain job market. A recent Chinese Psychology Society survey found that 42% of 18,000 Chinese citizens tested positive for having anxiety related to the epidemic. I wanted to know what I can say that will demonstrate empathy and comfort colleagues and friends.

We contacted Chinese across different age ranges in different regions and asked them what they are saying to each other and what they find comforting. Hope this little guide helps with your interactions over the coming days as China really gets back to work!

WHAT TO DO

Even though there is universality to crisis, culture plays a strong role in how crisis is managed and one approach is simply keeping in mind that coping mechanisms are different and what appears common sense as a way of reassuring a colleague in one culture, may not always be what is appreciated in another.

As a good example of this first responders in crisis situations who need to build rapport very quickly with vulnerable groups, ask for permission to say or do or ask certain things. Is it ok if I...? can smooth the way for you to ask about a topic that may be uncomfortable for you or your colleague. Here are our 3 key areas to help you focus your efforts right.



No Bonding By Complaining

In some cultures, it is common to bond and build rapport through complaining or moaning. Criticism of China's handling of the coronavirus situation or even just a communal moan is not advised in China however informal this may be on your side. Any attempt to start down that road with colleagues will be viewed as naive, not supportive even if your Chinese colleagues hint at this in their own conversations.

However, preserving collective experiences and feelings can be helpful when it refers to the great efforts made by teams and colleagues.

Provide Space

Basically, give employees the chance to define what they need from you as an employer at this time.

As in other areas of communication between Eastern and Western cultures (you knew we were going to help you generalize about this!), Chinese are likely to wait for their Western colleagues to open up the space to discuss feelings and negative emotions. There is no need to fear approaching personal conversations providing you give time to the topics once raised. Privacy is less of a focus in Chinese culture generally speaking and most of your colleagues will perceive your enquiries as well meaning and supportive.

For local HR who are expected to support foreign assignees and their families, some easy briefing sessions from ICUnet on what foreigners are wanting to hear during this crisis time could be very helpful.

Be A Team

Many people post crisis feel powerless to change their situations so providing a strong sense of purpose through work as well as recognition of individual efforts is a welcomed approach.

Provide meditation and relaxation time if you can and where you are comfortable, share your own challenges with overcoming the difficulties that have been presented in the past weeks and months. This enables team members to feel comfortable sharing.

Finally, if you are worried about a colleague, ask those around him or her for advice on how to best support. There is no need to be the lone hero. Chinese culture allows for community rescues.

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