



## COVID-19

# How Victorian HR professionals are handling lockdown the second time around

By **Edie-Louise Diemar**

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With many reporting that lockdown 2.0 feels different from the first, *HRM* asks HR why that is and how they're coping.

On August 2nd, [Melbourne](#) entered stage 4 restrictions, the rest of the [state](#) is under stage 3. Both levels force people to stay home unless leaving the house for essential business. Melbourne has a curfew between 8pm and 5am.

At the time of writing, Victoria has recorded over 300 new COVID-19 cases.

Though the numbers are declining, strict isolation rules remain in place.

Earlier this week, [Premier Daniel Andrews](#) refused to say when restrictions on the state would ease, saying there was no magic number for when they could lift restrictions.

When the country entered lockdown earlier this year the messaging from authorities, and private businesses alike was that we are all in this together. But as Victorians re-entered isolation, that feeling was lost.

*HRM* sought out Victorian-based HR professionals to see how they're coping this time, and asked, why does lockdown 2.0 feel different and what advice do they have for other HR professionals in the same boat.

### **Missing out and the fear thereof**

Karen Gatley, founder of leadership and people-management consultancy Corporate Dojo, believes the second lockdown feels different because people are beginning to yearn for the things they're missing out on.

"First time it was like, "yippee I don't have to commute, I have more time at home, I can wear tracksuit pants to work". It was all about what you could get out of this new situation. As it's gone on we're feeling like "okay, well what don't I get?"

She says it's worth considering some employees might be entering this lockdown in a different position to the last one.

"The restrictions have been fairly sudden so you might have an employee whose partner has just lost their job and they've gone from a two-income household to one."

"Unfortunately, there isn't an easy solution to helping everyone. But I think in the workplace you need to focus on making sure employees feel like they belong and that there is a sense of empathy from management about what they're going through."

## **Emotions are high, energy is low**

Christopher Ouizeman CEO of Drake International thinks the nature of this lockdown is different because everyone is unsure of when it will end. Plus, he says, it doesn't feel like the nation is supporting Victorians.

"I think people in Victoria feel very vilified right now. Some employees are feeling a lot of guilt about the circumstance but more often than not there is a sense of anger and they want someone to blame."

Ouizeman says while many are angry that anger isn't necessarily being converted into energy -employees are just tired.

"This time I have noticed the energy levels are much lower," he says.

"People have been psychologically damaged by the pandemic and you can tell that by their behaviours and interactions with others.

"Optimism seems to have disappeared. People's general demeanour is a lot flatter than they used to be."

Ouizeman says rewards and recognition could help combat the issue but acknowledges leaders and HR, who usually dole out these initiatives, are equally burdened right now. He says additional help from professionals or trainers might be preferable.

"We have had record numbers of employees from all sectors seek out our EAP. We also offer wellness training which helps us pinpoint the area an employee needs help with and allows us to take an individualised approach to helping them."

## **Parents are overworked**

Sharna Peters, co-founder of shilo.people, says for many working parents the lack of [childcare](#) options is what has made this lockdown particularly difficult.

"Managers are expecting the same output despite parents trying to juggle caring for kids and work. To combat this some employees are working longer hours to make up time and that's not sustainable."

Andrews [announced](#) restrictions on which children can attend childcare and Peters says that is just adding pressure to parents.

"Companies are really leaning on HR at the moment which means workloads are bigger and more is expected of us," she says.

"A lot of people in the HR profession are women, a lot of them have children and it's really hard.

"I've spoken to some women who are not coping, they're crying at work and then they've got their kids tugging on their leg. You can't work like that."

Peters says more needs to be done to support parents but in the meantime, she suggests facilitating ways for employees to communicate and support each other.

"We've got a group chat with other working parents and we use that just to share tips and ideas," she says.

"I had one idea to keep my 11-year-old occupied recently because she is very bored. And I shared that with the group in the hopes that it'll help others. We've got to keep talking and sharing - it's all we can do right now."

### **The struggle is real but might be hidden**

Felicity Law CAHRI believes some employees might be [reacting](#) out of fear during this lockdown. She says some employees are pretending everything is okay because they worry their head will be on the chopping block if they show weakness.

"People are worried they will lose their jobs and often do not want to let their superior know that they are not coping. This is particularly true for more senior managers who report to executives," she says.

"Managers and HR people are expected to assist others with this situation without acknowledgement that they too are people."

Law says HR needs to fit their own mask first before [helping others](#) and she has a couple of methods she employs.

"Make sure you maintain self-awareness and use your own support network to stay well mentally. This includes finding time to disconnect," she says

"I choose one source to rely on for updates and information. Understanding facts about the situation enables perspective and leaves energy and time to support others which, in turn, keeps the business ticking over."

**TAGS : COVID-19, isolation, wellbeing**

