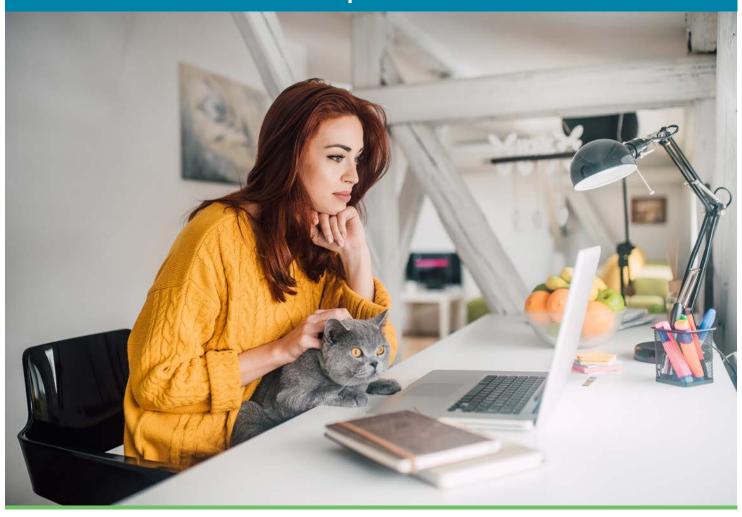# COVID-19: Virtual workplaces, the new norm

Could remote working be the new normal for work workplaces? We're getting a taste of what that looks and feels like right now.

As we publish this article, a coronavirus called Covid-19 is evading containment around the world.[1] The fast-spreading virus is causing many employers to switch to remote working with employees staying home. The move to socially distance and isolate is a bid to "flatten the curve" and stop the virus from spreading to an even more unmanageable point.[2] What sounds like the plot to a thriller is a chance to explore the strength of our communication, discipline and self-care skills while attempting to produce a continuing amount of career successes from our comfortable, and somewhat, distraction-filled homes.

How will we deal with it? What happens if we experience economic and productivity slow downs? How can we be as productive working from home? These questions are top of mind for many of us. This article is all about the advantages of having a remote workforce, and the key factors employers and managers must consider for their virtual work environments to be successful.

HomewoodHealth.com

Homewood
Health | Santé

Advantages to working in a virtual environment

In the case of a global health crisis, when conditions are worsening and the risk of infection increasing, we need to slow the spread of disease as quickly as possible. Working from home is one of the best ways to protect your workforce.

Beyond the immediate, there are a number of benefits to working remotely that you may discover and enjoy during this time.

1. A properly functioning remote workspace should help workers get critical tasks done without the usual office distractions and pressures.

2. Being able to control the environment we work in allows us to adjust the "tone" of the space (vibrant, or cozy, or minimalist) until it becomes a place that puts us in a productivity mindset each time we enter.

3. At least one peer-reviewed study shows a link between a worker's sense of autonomy and job satisfaction. Those who feel more in control of their work lives associated with informal flexibility and working at home tend to remain with their companies for longer durations and feel less stressed.[3]

4. In a separate report from Owl Labs, findings show that remote workers are not only happier and more engaged, but they're 13% more likely to stay at their current job for the next five years than their office-bound counterparts.[4]

5. Commuting takes up a lot of time, is expensive (even public transport), causes a lot of avoidable stress at the beginning and end of the day, and contributes to the pollution of our planet. Enjoy more free time and no lines when you work at home.

6. With more time and access to the home, it is more comfortable (with practice) to strike a work-life balance while working remotely as compared to what is achievable within a traditional workplace. Take a break, prepare your meals, and engage in some afternoon stretching or exercise without reducing your productivity. Done consciously, you may find that engaging in healthy alternative activities during the day increases, rather than disrupts, your productivity.

What do employees need to know?

In challenging times, employees need to think about their health and safety first. Once their well-being is considered, then comes staying effective and productive as an organization, with the ultimate aim of coming out the other side in good shape. Here's what employees need to know when entering a phase of required isolation and remote working.

1. Do not panic, even if you fall ill. Seasonal illnesses may present themselves that have nothing to do with the pandemic illness. Though you may not need immediate medical attention, you should call your doctor to report the illness. Once you've done that, check in with your HR department or supervisor to update your current status (ill, not ill, self-isolating, etc.) with that part of the team.

2. In the case of a pandemic like Covid-19, Health Canada will provide a list of tips, like staying away from family members who are vulnerable or who have underlying health conditions, covering your coughs, and washing your hands afterward and frequently.[5] If you live with other people, you should regularly clean high traffic zones and the communal surfaces often touched doorknobs, faucet handles, toilets, remote controls and the like with a household disinfectant or soapy water.

3. Find your perfect workflow. With some willpower and a steady routine, any worker can learn to overlook distractions around the house. Turn this period into an opportunity for self-reflection and discovery. Since you have control over your surroundings, make adjustments each day that benefits your ability to focus on tasks for long periods. You will find that there's a right way and a wrong way to set up your ideal office. You may find some insights that you can implement in your employer's work environment.[6] Keep natural light top of mind as it plays an important role in maintaining a positive outlook.

Whether you have done it in the past or not, you can and will survive working remotely. You may have different needs than your co-workers when it comes to technical issues or emotional support. Always ask for what you need, and make sure your requests are being heard and addressed. The remote office may not last for most of those who are self-isolating, however, it can be a positive and rewarding experience.[7] Beyond the health benefits, monetary savings and reduced carbon footprint more, your participation is having a positive influence on reducing the risk of infection and the overall recovery.

References

1. "How COVID-19 Spreads." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/transmission.html

2. "Flattening the Coronavirus Curve." Siobhan Roberts. The New York Times. March 11, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/science/coronavirus-curve-mitigation-infection.html

3. "Autonomy in Paid Work and Employee Subjective Well-Being. Daniel Wheatley." Work and Occupations, 2017.

4. "State of Remote Work 2019." Owl Labs, Global Workplace Analytics. https://www.owllabs.com/state-of-remote-work/2019

5. "Here's Who Faces The Greatest Risk Of Severe Illness From Coronavirus." Nell Greenfieldboyce. March 4, 2020.

6. "People are getting creative with their work-from-home setups." Harmeet Kaur. CNN Business. March 16, 2020. https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/17/business/work-from-home-setups-coronavirus-trnd/index.html

7. "State of Remote Work 2019." Owl Labs, Global Workplace Analytics. https://www.owllabs.com/state-of-remote-work/2019

Need more information or assistance? All calls are completely confidential.

1-800-663-1142 | TTY: 1-888-384-1152 | International (Call Collect): 604-689-1717
Numéro sans frais - en français : 1-866-398-9505

HomewoodHealth.com

Homewood
Health | Santé

Tips and Tricks for Remote Working Conditions

When we are called upon to work remotely from home due to circumstances beyond our control, it will take some adjustments. For some folks, it may even require a few lifestyle modifications to get the most out of a given workspace. Still, the time and stress avoided by not having to commute may turn those who are new to remote working into advocates for this flexible workflow.

At the time of this publishing, the coronavirus, Covid-19, is rattling health care systems and stock markets around the world. It is also making it challenging for office environments to continue with "business as usual" while congregations (concerts, symposiums, weddings, and even funerals) of 50 or more people being cancelled or postponed due to "social distancing."[1] Remote working during a health crisis is employed when conditions are increasing, and we need to "flatten the curve" (a global effort to slow the spread of disease to ensure that medical facilities and resources remain available) as quickly as possible.[2] This flu, though it is relatively harmless to most healthy individuals, spreads exceptionally fast and can be dangerous to at-risk populations who have compromised immune systems due to age (the very old and very young), especially those who don't self-isolate.

Due to this, business events all over the world are becoming stream-from-home affairs. Even fitness centres are telling clients to stay home and enjoy some free at-home workout sessions instead.

In this article, we highlight the best work-from-home advice for workers who are new to this type of workflow. Whether your at-home conditions are due to Covid-19 or another issue, the most important thing you can do is put your health and safety first. Remember the air mask demonstration on the plane. "Put your mask on first." Because if you're not able to breathe, you're not going to be able to help anyone else.

1. Set regular working hours. The only way to stay productive is to focus on working like you usually do.

2. Plan and structure your workday. Try to group meetings and set aside chunks of time for individual tasks and email.

3. Mark the times where you are OOO ("out of office") by blocking your calendar and adding an OOO notification to prevent people from thinking you're unresponsive.

Homewood
Health | Santé

4. Try to avoid distractions. It will be hard with other family members and pets at home and many other things you could be doing in your house, but staying focused is critical to your team's success.

5. Set aside a designated work area with a flat worktop and everything you need to be productive. Let your family members know that when you are in your workspace, they should avoid disturbing you. If you believe you can't be productive from home, please discuss with your manager and HR department, so they can determine how to assist you best.

6. Dress similarly to how you would look at the office to help maintain your usual level of productivity. No need for a full suit, but you should dress with the mentality that you'll be talking to the same people you would if you were in the office—some by video conference.

7. Over-communicate with your co-workers, managers and anyone that reports into you. It is a challenge to realize how much information is informally communicated in an office because you happen to be sitting near someone. Since you will no longer be near your team, please make an effort to consciously over-communicate using one of the many free messaging tools we have at our disposal.[3]

8. Be aware of your need for social interactions. For many workers, one of the hardest things about operating in isolation from home is that they don't get the social interactions that are important for their happiness. Be aware of this and don't be afraid to video conference with your peers regularly. One idea may be to plan "virtual lunches" over video conferences with the team to give people a chance to interact.

9. If there's a specific cost that you think is an absolute requirement for you to be able to work from home, make sure you discuss with your manager first and obtain written or verbal approval before incurring the expense.

10. In the case of a contagious virus, insist on curbside pickups and drop-offs for all courier deliveries, as well as food deliveries.

References

1. "Stay home, save lives: How Canada could avoid the worst of COVID-19." Kelly Crowe. March 14, 2020. https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/coronavirus-canada-social-distancing-1.5497789

2. "Flattening the Coronavirus Curve." Siobhan Roberts. The New York Times. March 11, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/science/coronavirus-curve-mitigation-infection.html

3. "The Best Business Messaging Apps for 2020." Jill Duffy, Ben Moore. March 20, 2020. https://www.pcmag.com/picks/the-best-business-messaging-apps

Need more information or assistance? All calls are completely confidential.

1-800-663-1142 | TTY: 1-888-384-1152 | International (Call Collect): 604-689-1717
Numéro sans frais - en français : 1-866-398-9505

HomewoodHealth.com

Health Risk Services Inc.

Your Benefits Partner