BOSTON COLLEGE Center for Work & Family CARROLL SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT	**Remote Work and COVID-19**

Table of Contents

Preparing for Remote Work:

[What's Your Company's Emergency Remote-Work Plan?](#) (HBR)
- Steps to preparing your organization to respond flexibly to possible disruptions
    - Acknowledge that most or all of your workforce may need to work remotely. Gather a team now that includes business leaders, IT, HR, communications, and facilities to plan how operations will continue in different scenarios.
    - Map out jobs and tasks that could be affected. Note which duties can and cannot be done without a physical presence in the office, as well as ones you aren't sure about. Be willing to experiment with things you aren't sure can be done remotely.
    - Audit available IT hardware and software, and close any gaps in adoption and access. Assess employees' comfort level with different applications. Provide training and practice where there are gaps. Determine if there are any data security issues and try to address them beforehand.
    - Set up a communications protocol in advance. Outline how everyone can be reached and on what platform, how employees should communicate with customers and clients, and how and when teams will coordinate and meet.
    - Identify ways to measure performance that could inform broader change. Collect data that will allow employers to analyze what worked, what didn't, and why after the fact. They may decide to keep certain elements of flexible work even after the threat of coronavirus is over.

[COVID-19: Steps to prepare a remote work policy](#) (HRDive)
- To prepare for a period of mandated remote work, employers need to develop and test work-from-home policies before they're necessary.
    - Identify the roles that are most key to operations. Then employers can take inventory of what those workers need to do their jobs away from the office.
    - Initiate a test period, with tech support standing by to address any issues that arise.
- The right tech only accounts for half of remote work success. The other important thing to communicate is the "norms" and expectations of remote work to employees.
    - The unified use of one platform will be essential.
    - As employers develop these remote work policies, it will be crucial to write them down and distribute them to workers through email, the employee handbook, company intranet and wherever else the organization stores information.

[8 strategies to set up remote work during the coronavirus outbreak](#) (Fortune)
1. Start from the top
    a. The CEO and leadership must be present in online tools and channels, communicating proactively, and engaging in conversations.

2. Reinforce the company's mission, purpose, and values
   a. When employees have a vision that they can rally behind as a group, alignment becomes easier across time zones.
3. Be open and authentic
4. Promote a digital company culture
   a. Create space for culture and interpersonal relationships to happen spontaneously, as they would in a physical space.
5. Use the right tools, and use them all the time
   a. Use every digital tool you have available to facilitate communication.
6. Create remote-first experiences
   a. This includes spontaneous "high fives", celebrations, etc., as well as consciously allowing remote or virtual attendees to speak/ share their ideas.
7. Be creative when handling conflicts and problems
8. Show compassion

[How To Manage and Operate A Remote Workforce](#)
- Communicating a shift to remote work
  - Whether this was a shift you were planning, or you now have to react to Coronavirus rapidly, the first step should always be clear communication from leadership.
- Video communication is essential
  - Although this may seem like a "nice to have" feature, it's a critical factor in success. Human beings, ultimately, feel more connected when we can see each other. Whether we realize it or not, vast portions of how we communicate come through our body language, eye contact, and other forms of nonverbal communication. We recommend video calls leveraging Zoom, Google Meet, or Skype for Business, not just for group meetings, but every one-on-one chat between team members.
- Quickly implement these remote working basic tools
  - Encourage team members to focus on leveraging cloud-based documents that multiple team members can access, edit, and collaborate on simultaneously (for example, the Google Drive).
  - Implement a company-wide business chat platform.
- Over-communicating is key to this new way of working
- Running great virtual meetings
  - Require all attendees, if possible, to join via video.
  - Consider shortening meetings to encourage greater focus on the problem at hand.
  - Focus on "working sessions" versus meetings when possible.
- Remote work culture can be just as strong as office culture

Supporting Employees during Remote Work:

[COVID-19 Has My Teams Working Remotely: A Guide for Leaders](#) (Gallup)

- **Individualization is key.** Managers need to ask each team member to describe the conditions under which they perform best, their concerns about their workflow, and their emotional response to the situation.
- **Set expectations early and clearly.** Make expectations crystal clear: X is the work you should do, Y is the quality standard, Z is the deadline. Executives should provide higher-level expectations aligned with the company's purpose: We'll keep our customers engaged by doing X, we'll maintain our standards by doing Y, we'll fulfill our mission by doing Z. The more detail, the better.
- **Communication.** Employees who are accustomed to working in-house may feel cut off from the resources, information or relationships they need to do their jobs well, so plan for more conference calls. Managers will have to be diligent about communicating productively -- coaching high performance requires frequent conversations, and there won't be chance conversations in the hall.
- **Support your managers.** They may worry about disruptions to the workflow they're accountable for. Some may feel they have to be physically present to be good coaches, unsure that they can engage workers from a distance. Invest in management development and coaching ahead of the budget plan, and be affirming about the situation and understanding about altered deadlines.

[Companies Can Help Employees Working Remotely During The COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
Challenges from remote work fall into two broad categories: task-oriented and social.

- **Task-oriented:**
  - *How to communicate and share information when employees are no longer convened in the same office*
  - *How best to enable employees to collaborate in real time*
    - In both cases, setting up systems well in advance is the key to success. Instant messaging platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, or Zoom, that allow employees to chat with each other almost instantly are one way to work around these challenges; document-sharing platforms such as Dropbox, Microsoft Teams, and Google services are another.
- **Social**
  - *Separating people from their coworkers can create a sense of isolation for some people*
    - To mitigate the sense of isolation, it is important for companies to build in time for the type of conversations that people organically have at work -- but that aren't about work. One example is "virtual pizza parties".

[Tips for Staying Productive and Mentally Healthy While You're Working From Home](#) (Time)

1. **Location is key.**

a. Find a dedicated and comfortable spot to work that you can associate with your job and leave when you're off the clock -- that means get off the couch, and definitely out of bed.
2. **Find a buddy.**
   a. Social interactions can alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness. Consider finding a colleague you can reach out to when you're feeling the need to chat with someone.
3. **Have a plan.**
   a. When working alone, you should keep a more structured daily schedule than usual. Time spent alone is better if it's structured. Examples include scheduling multiple breaks throughout the day to play with a pet, take a long walk, or grab the mail.
4. **Think about how you're communicating.**
   a. It's important to go beyond email and use other digital tools that can better replicate the in-person office experience and provide for clear communication.
5. **Remember everyone works differently.**
   a. Not everyone employee actually wants to work from home, making this shift extra stressful for some. It's key to communicate as much as possible and help employees struggling with the change.

[Working from home is a lifesaver--and a game changer](#) (CNN)
- Many solutions to mitigate the spread of coronavirus involve the use of technological solutions like Zoom conferences, remote work on Slack or Google Hangouts, and files on Google Drive.
- However, it may be hard to reduce this dependence on technology after the fact. When the coronavirus subsides, work may not resume as it was before. Companies may decide to keep flexibility in place once telecommuting infrastructure has been established.

Other Considerations for Remote Work:
[COVID-19, Work-from-Home Policies, and Maintaining Wage and Hour Compliance](#)

[Working from home because of coronavirus? Don't give your company a different kind of virus](#)

[How do I compensate hourly workers during the coronavirus pandemic?](#)

Corporate Examples:

[List of companies asking employees to work from home](#) (Business Insider)

Additional Resources:

[COVID-19 U.S. Employment Law Update and Guidance for Employers](#) (Sibley)
[5 Ways to Manage Coronavirus Concerns When Employees Can't Work From Home](#) (US Chamber)