

## The joys of working from home – the leadership challenges

March 28, 2020

The message we are hearing from our national leaders is that we are all in this together and we are trying to build a bridge as we run over it to the other side. Those of us with flexible workplaces and in less crisis-affected sectors are very grateful to still have a job while many of our friends and family are hurting badly. Many of our own team members' families will be affected by job losses increasing stress in the home.

Talking to many executives this week, we are all trying in our own way to work from home for an extended period. This is a big change for most of us. We are used to formal and informal meetings and incidental interactions that positively engage our best energies to help us all succeed together as teams and organisations.

### The big side step

Leaders at all levels along with team members will need to adjust quickly to this new normal. Humans are social and tribal. We work best in teams – real teams not virtual teams. We now use MS Teams that was developed for multi office locations for large organisations, not for single person home offices. *We must adapt!*

As leaders we need to remember that we all have different home environments. I spoke to two CEOs this week that told me their organisations have audited their team members' home office set up to better understand the expected performance and risk profiles. Some staff will be home alone, others trying to home school children or many other distractions. *We will adapt!*

So, the next three plus months could be lonely and isolating for some while, for

others, more like a mash up of a Daddy Day Care and a Griswolds style staycation movie. I can almost hear the desperate cries for help now! Some executives are already exhausted from the endless multi person zoom calls and multitasking tech. *I hope I will have adapted soon. Bring me the G&T please. Make it a double!*

### 7 steps to be your best work-from-home self and coming out the other side sane

So how do we set ourselves up for the lock down so that working with kids at home is closer to summer camp than prison camp or being home alone less like solitary confinement!

Listed below are some useful tips I've distilled from colleagues and my own experience along with sources I've listed. Many of these are from long-term home office-based consultants so I've tried to adapt them to the current situation. The ideal is to try to keep to office-based protocols wherever possible but remember we are humans not robots.

**1. Define your working space** – set up one optimal space. Look for privacy, good lighting, maybe background music. Classical is considered good. Best practice is to lock away your work papers and pc when done for the day.

**2. Dress at home code** – maybe not the usual suit but certainly get out of the pjs. Not a good look on the VCs. Although Jacinda Ardern managed the dress code well for her recent [Facebook live Covid 19 National Q&A update](#) Leaders take note.

**3. Solid routine and day planning** - Sources suggest trying to group similar activities e.g. calls / VCs and then have focused times for your own projects. Don't let the work hours bleed into your personal time. I'm still working on this one!

**4. Communications** – mix up voice and video call. As we know Zoom and Skype have taken off. Effective group VC participation means being very present and non-verbal cues can still be missed. Avoid too many group VCs in one day – they can be very tiring.

Avoid being overly consumed by email reactivity. We often over compensate to be in touch with our teams instantly with IM systems enabling this. Stay with an office arrangement of meetings, emails, calls and tasks that we mostly do in sequence not parallel. Many sources suggest having the mobile on silent during your focused task periods or at least screen your calls to voice mail. Try to have set times for phone call and email returns.

**5. Distractions**- with school children at home many will need to be masterful in their planning and execution. Some sources suggest shorter shifts cycling between the home office and back into the home school family setting. Multi-tasking is difficult at the best of times, if not impossible; so try one project at a time. The kitchen and constant daily news are definitely to be avoided. Nothing good will come from either.

**6. Taking breaks and get outside** – some suggest include working in hourly block patterns of 50 mins on and 10 mins break. I'm a walker /talker so planning for walking calls and even VCs if you can do the steady phone cam well. You won't be getting as much incidental exercise as when you were commuting or walking around the office so you need to factor this in. Time flexibility allows you to plan your 'me' time.

**7. Physically distant not social distant catch-ups**– if you are a home-a-loner then these will be crucial to your mental well-being. You don't want to end up in extended solitary confinement. Add in

some exercise. Enjoy a regular walk/run/cycle with your best 1.5m socially distanced buddies.

### **The leadership challenges only get bigger.**

*As senior leaders we will need to demonstrate greater patience and flexibility than we may have ever needed before. Productivity may drop and frustration with remoteness will grow. Team member burn out during this very stressful time will increase. Regular and extended one-on-one check-ins with front line staff and key team leaders, in particular, will be very important. Many leaders will also be struggling. In my conversations, it is great to hear that many senior leaders are reaching out to their peers to seek advice and just share their common concerns. Competitors are now compatriots against this common foe.*

Furthermore, just as we get good at this work from home mode, in a few months hopefully, we will have made it to the other side and be asked to return to the office. Many may prefer this new way of working or a hybrid of both. How we work will change irrevocably and leaders will be called on to change their thinking and adapt the most, as per normal really!

### **Additional sources**

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2012/08/16/how-to-succeed-at-working-from-home/#799f7d38281d>

<https://www.lifehack.org/357238/10-things-you-need-successfully-work-from-home>

<https://medium.com/swlh/how-to-self-isolate-and-stay-sane-b78538a125ba>



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