

RSC

Covid - 19

**Building and
Sustaining
Healthy Teams**

**Be ready to run
again**

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The last two weeks have all been about getting everybody set up to work from home in the words of the UK government #stay home #protect the NHS #saves lives. The most amazing thing is how quickly we can respond and how agile even the largest of organisations can become when there is no other choice. I have had several conversations with CEOs who have talked about seeing the reality of how quickly people can adjust to change when lives are at stake and how many have managed to make things happen that under normal circumstances would say it was impossible. So, let's make sure that we don't forget our ability to adapt so that when we come out the other side, we are ready to run again.

The Key Challenge - Building strong cohesive teams when the odds might be against you

I hope that this short and simple guide, will provide you with some food for thought, some practical ideas and some hope that teams and individuals might be stronger and fitter and ready for whatever the future may hold.

Be Authentic

Organisations, teams and individuals will be looking to their leaders to lead in a way that will build trust, collaboration and resilience during this unprecedented time of change. You may well have done the easy bit in getting the team set up and ready to work remotely - well done. Now the real work begins on how we engage and stay connected to the people that we work with; never before would you have had to lead from a position like this and hopefully never again.

Those of you who are familiar with any of the great leadership writers like Patrick Lencioni, Stephen Covey, Nancy Kline you will be aware of the need for leaders to be vulnerable and now more than ever vulnerability might be your greatest strength.

This is not business as usual and whilst remote working may be common practice it is not in the current situation the world is facing where our personal and professional lives are colliding - make sure your whole self turns up – let others know how you are feeling, what changes are you facing, what new activities /ideas can you share, what are you reading, what is being most helpful for building your own resilience and staying sane!

Build unbreakable bonds

Now is the time to be bold, to have courage and to be creative in how you interact and engage with the people that you work with, everyone will have a story to tell about this season, its impact on them and those that they love, stories of loss as well as gain. Leaders can be at the forefront of leading the way by encouraging storytelling, the highs and lows and I would like to bet that nobody will look back and say, 'we wish we hadn't done that!'

Address Fears

I have had countless conversations in the last two weeks with managers and leaders who have expressed how difficult they have found being confronted with people's fears and anxieties on a large scale and for most finding that these conversations are at very different level from normal work chats!

Firstly, and most importantly **LISTEN** - do not dismiss fears and anxieties just because you don't relate to them. Personality types are all different, those who are prone to worry will of course find it difficult to be objective and rational in the reality of COVID 19. Change always brings loss – acknowledge this.

Lead Upfront

Have a conversation about hopes and fears in this time – it gives the chance for everyone to voice them. For the more optimistic type who might find it easier to talk about hope it will give them opportunity to encourage others who find it easier to talk about fear and vice versa. Even the most stoic will have fears and worries and anxieties and we all have things that keep us awake at night, even if only occasionally.

Fact and Fiction

The digital age means we have access to the enormous amount of information and to use a Trump phrase 'fake news'! Stay ahead of the game, know your facts versus fiction and encourage those who are afraid, to look at the logical objective factual information, this relates to information about work as well as the wider fears that everybody faces.

Personality Profiling Tools

If you use these and have information on your team individuals then go back and have a look at it (most will never have studied them) identify those who may be more prone to worry, take things to heart, be overly concerned about things they have no power to change. The Cubix PAPI profiling tool that many of our clients use has a very helpful element on resilience, core composure and optimism - it's been very helpful as a guide to prepare for remote working management. If you don't really know your people - now is the time to invest because it will pay dividends for the future stability of the team.

Effective remote working

How can you run a virtual meeting that engages, maintains morale and get everybody to contribute when the environment they are working in is very different from the one that all have been familiar with?

Agenda

I am staggered how often I hear that people either receive an agenda the night or hour before a meeting or don't have one at all. So have an agenda, keep it short, what **outcome** do you want from the meeting and make sure the agenda reflects this.

Set a regular time to meet so it provides structure and routine – bear in mind that homeworking under current conditions might mean you have to be more creative about meeting times, coffee breaks and remember an hour at max is best for a virtual meeting. Parents might not be doing the school run but being 'virtual' at their desk for the regular 8.30 might just not work for now!

Be creative

What might coffee first thing look like online? Share best bake recipes, show off your barista skills - choose to add flavour to the catch-up meeting especially!

Engaging everyone in the meeting

If you want to get everybody to participate in a meeting now more than ever be really clear about the purpose of your meeting there are not usually very many - here are my top 4

1. Touch base Meeting
2. Problem solving meeting – where everybody's participation is key
3. Decision making meeting where prior preparation may be needed to gain consensus for the decision.
4. Building and Strengthening team relationships

Some simple do's and don'ts regarding remote meetings

Check your connection, think about where you sit, avoid direct light behind you for example, dress for work, at least your top half!

Just like we would in any meeting let's be clear no phones, no multitasking, no checking emails etc it's likely that remote meetings will be shorter and potentially smarter than the meetings we normally have!

Spend some time simply checking in - how are you? What's the biggest challenge you faced this week? Perhaps start with the person who's less likely to speak and agree a common question that all of you will answer and remember if you were chairing the meeting be prepared to be honest yourself - for those of you who are fans of Patrick Lencioni, Steven Covey or Nancy Kline you'll know leader vulnerability is key to building trust and collaborative working.

Nancy Klein's '**Time to Think**' provides us with two fantastic questions to ask when we come to a meeting, under the current remote working conditions these two questions could be transformational to the productivity and outcome of your online meeting and to building team cohesiveness.

Q1 'How are you feeling about today's meeting?'

Q2 'What might distract you from contributing to this meeting today?'

In asking these two personal questions we'll bring in the reality of what people are dealing with in this current climate, it will enable us to really understand one another and build connection because we are not simply working at home we are working in a situation where our personal lives are colliding with our work life and every team will come out the other side of this seeing and hearing their colleagues in a new light.

If you are meeting for either reason 2 or 3 above, then think PREPARATION.....

2) Problem Solving Meeting

What key information can you send beforehand? What are the key questions for the agenda that you want participants to think and consider on before the meeting? Are you looking for a Solution or to generate ideas?

3) Decision Making Meeting

Who is really needed to attend? What facts /figures /evidence need to be circulated? Can participants submit questions for the agenda beforehand? What outcome are you expecting?

Ask pairs or triplet groups to meet prior to group meeting so you can maximise thinking and then allow one person to feedback.

We have been doing some amazing work around effective meetings and the power of 'a questioning agenda' and the concept of 'meeting rounds'.

We have seen the average 2 hour meeting drop 45 minutes by the using the discipline and principles of Action Learning and Nancy Kline's Time to Think approach – get in touch if you'd like to know more

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Stay sharp, innovative and ahead of the game

For all those who say they can't be innovative or creative let the lessons of the last two weeks show us all that we can be exactly this! They say Rome wasn't built in a day, but the UK Nightingale hospital in London was built in two weeks and for many of you, your entire office will now be remote working and you may have thought that was impossible.

We want to be fit and ready to do business and to get back on our feet as fast as we can once we get the green light, so why not build in some creative thinking time whilst you have it.

You will have people on your teams who are naturally creative thinkers but never have opportunity to share ideas and everybody can think innovatively if they are asked the right questions.

So, once things have settled and you have established effective virtual meetings, why not try a new virtual creativity and innovation meeting - the outcome sharing good ideas and doing business differently.

Top Questions to Challenge your thinking

What are we doing now that a year ago we might have thought impossible?

If someone had told us six months ago of what's to come, what would we have stopped doing and started doing?

If we could measure one thing during this season what would it be and why?

What one behaviour is limiting our ability to think?

What one thing might we highlight is a painful reality in this situation?

What is the single biggest drain on our performance?

What have you noticed that has most surprised you?

What are the lessons learned that we would most like to hear when this is all over?

Having identified them what might we need to do to ensure they are learnt?

In five years', time, what do we want to be known for?

Of course, you could always stick to reviewing and considering all or some of the 6 key questions in Patrick Lencioni's book, The Advantage:

Why do we exist?

How do we behave?

What do we do?

How will we succeed?

What is most important now?

Who is going to do what?

The bottom line is now is the time for thinking ahead, whilst the world is on pause our thinking certainly shouldn't be! If we want to get up from this stronger fitter and regain financial strength and prosperity, we will have to be agile and do things differently.

Top 3 Resources

You've probably been bombarded with resources on remote working, but I will just give the link to three resources/articles that you might just find helpful

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/how-working-parents-can-prepare-for-coronavirus-closures>

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/a-guide-to-managing-your-newly-remote-workers?autocomplete=true>

<https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/>

If I can do anything to help you by way of resource, facilitating a team meeting, webinar or anything that would help support you through this time please don't hesitate to contact me rachel@rachelsloughconsulting.com.

If you find this article helpful then please do feel free to share it and do please share any ideas, top tips and breakthroughs you've had so that we might share them with others.

Stay well, stay safe, stay sane and stay in touch.

My very best,

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