Managing in an officeless world

Are reports of the death of the office exaggerated?

Building corporate culture remotely

Sales tops the best jobs for working from home

Is working from home inevitable or overrated?

Reports of the death of the office may be greatly exaggerated. How will it affect managing if it does occur?

BY PAUL NOLAN

Corporate leaders are asked to look forward and plan ahead, especially in times of great shifts such as the one we are experiencing. It is smart, however, to look back, even to recent periods, and make sure that aspects of corporate culture you felt were important are not swept away with the tidal wave of change that is imminent in a post-pandemic world.

Take, for example, a prediction from Geoff Colvin, an author and longtime editor at *Fortune* magazine, in that publication's January cover feature, "20 Ideas That Will Shape the 2020s." "Showing up will matter again," stated the headline on Colvin's essay.

"In the 2020s, people in developed economies will rediscover the value of physical presence — engaging with others face-to-face, eye-to-eye. As the world has become more digital, the trend [toward social isolation] has accelerated."

Colvin presented research that shows how damaging social isolation can be, significantly increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke. That knowledge, he argued, is fueling a counter-trend of people wanting to be together. "Companies are encouraging or requiring employees to come back to the office because researchers find that creativity and innovation are group activities built on trust, and there is no substitute for face-to-face interaction to build up this trust."

The demise of office culture

It's hard to read Colvin's prediction and realize it was published less than 90 days before the world went on lockdown, taking the idea of in-person collaboration with it. Much has been made of announcements by technology leaders such as Twitter and Facebook that work from home (now often referenced simply with the acronym WFH) is a permanent or semipermanent policy, at least for a substantial percentage of their work force. Media stories quoting corporate leaders indicate the WFH movement will be widespread.

"Peter Drucker said in the '70s that office buildings would be like the Pyramids. We would come to marvel at them, but they would serve no functional purpose in the future. That was one

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EDITED BY **PAUL NOLAN**

of those interesting things that was 'proven wrong,' but he may be proven right," says Scott Galloway, an author, entrepreneur, podcaster and professor of marketing at NYU's Stern School of Business. "You might have the largest, most dramatic office buildings in the world converted to either condos or interesting museums."

Offices won't disappear anytime soon, but the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated many companies' openness to permanently allowing at least part-time WFH policies. According to the 2019 National Compensation Survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 7% of civilian workers in the United States had access to a flexible workplace benefit, pre-pandemic. Workers who have access to it are largely managers and other white-collar "knowledge workers" who do most of their work on computers. Economists at the University of Chicago estimate that just 37% of U.S. jobs can be done remotely.

Nevertheless, a forecast on WFH from Global Workplace Analytics expects that those who were working remotely before the pandemic will increase their frequency long term. In addition, the report states, there will be a significant upswing in WFH adoption by those who did not work remotely until the pandemic. "Our best estimate is that we will see 25 to 30 percent of the workforce working at home on a multiple-days-a-week basis by the end of 2021," says Global Workplace Analytics President Kate Lister.
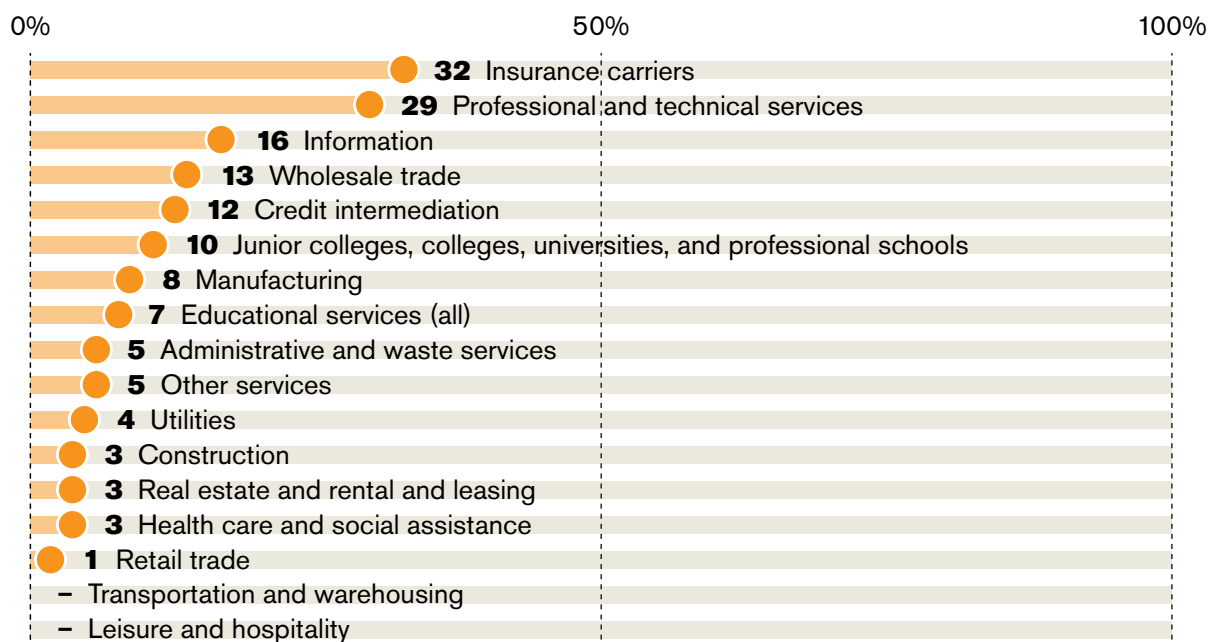
Varied views

Employees tend to favor the option to work from home more than their managers, who often express a fear of less productivity, creativity and camaraderie. In a report on PBS NewsHour, David Kenny, CEO of Nielsen Holdings, says he was opposed to the company's flexible work space policies when he arrived there at the beginning of 2019. In conferences that were a combination of in-person attendees and workers teleconferencing in, those who were not present in person were "largely not in the conversation," Kenny says.

When Nielsen was forced to send its entire work force home to be safe during the pandemic, Kenny says it opened his eyes to the possibilities. "It's been a big event in my life. I was forced to look at a total system change as opposed to an incremental change. I don't think I would have had the courage to go big and have everyone try this if we weren't forced to. It opened my eyes and showed me that with some things, if you do them big, they actually work." For the long term, Kenny says most workers at Nielsen will be allowed to adopt a hybrid model, coming to the office only when it is necessary.

Access to remote work, by industry *In 2019, by selected industry groups*

Industry	%
Insurance carriers	32
Professional and technical services	29
Information	16
Wholesale trade	13
Credit intermediation	12
Junior colleges, colleges, universities, and professional schools	10
Manufacturing	8
Educational services (all)	7
Administrative and waste services	5
Other services	5
Utilities	4
Construction	3
Real estate and rental and leasing	3
Health care and social assistance	3
Retail trade	1
Transportation and warehousing	–
Leisure and hospitality	–

SOURCE: 2019 NATIONAL COMPENSATION SURVEY, U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

Working from home, *continued from page 3*

Other company leaders are less convinced. Scott Wine, the chief executive of Polaris Inc., the Minnesota-based manufacturer of snowmobile, motorcycles and other vehicles, told *The Wall Street Journal* that he expects his team will be back together for traditional work days when it's safe.

"I do think there's a hit on productivity from groups not being able to meet together spontaneously and solve problems," Kenny told WSJ in May. "Most people haven't been in the offices for two months now and they have embraced it, but it's not something I want to keep in place forever."
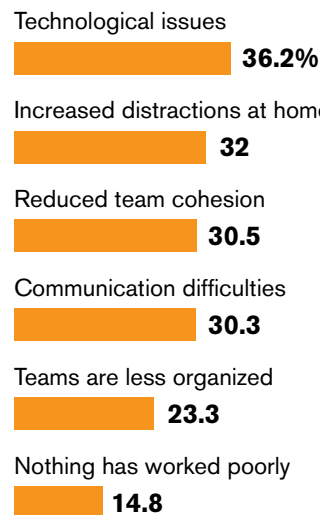
Working together is better

Colvin is in Kenny's camp. He amassed a copious amount of research on the impact of isolated work for his 2015 book "Humans Are Underrated: What High Achievers Know That Brilliant Machines Never Will." Many employers have defaulted to WFH out of necessity, but they should be careful with making that permanent, he says.

High-tech companies like Twitter and Facebook are mentioned as leaders in the WFH movement, yet Colvin says Apple, Google and other hyper-successful companies have always understood the power of physical presence and take extraordinary steps to bring employees together.
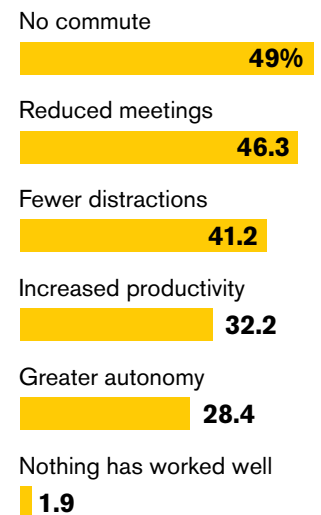
"Abundant research shows powerfully that people are more innovative, creative, effective and productive when they're physically together," Colvin states in an email to SMM. "They trust each other more. They are collectively smarter when physically together than when digitally together. It's tempting to think that physical presence can't possibly matter for some employees, such as call center workers. Not so. Even though they work entirely alone in individual cubicles, when call center workers are formed into teams with their breaks scheduled so they can all get together, their productivity rockets." **smm**

What about remote work has worked poorly?

Technological issues — 36.2%
Increased distractions at home — 32
Reduced team cohesion — 30.5
Communication difficulties — 30.3
Teams are less organized — 23.3
Nothing has worked poorly — 14.8

What about remote work has worked well?

No commute — 49%
Reduced meetings — 46.3
Fewer distractions — 41.2
Increased productivity — 32.2
Greater autonomy — 28.4
Nothing has worked well — 1.9

SOURCE: UPWORK SURVEY OF HIRING MANAGERS

The office as a recruitment tool

Some companies are ditching office space as a cost-cutting measure. *The Wall Street Journal* reports that Skift Inc., a 60-person business media company that covers the travel industry, will not renew its leases on office space in Midtown Manhattan and London when they expire. The company's CEO says the move will save $600,000 annually, including expenses for utilities, office snacks and commuter benefits for employees.

While many workers embrace the flexibility to work from home, they may discover they miss the perks that have become more common in company break rooms and cafeterias. "The office is about to become a perk," says entrepreneur and podcaster Scott Galloway. "It used to be an obligation, where you had to get up, put on a bad tie, get on a train and go to work. Now it's going to be a place where I get to socialize with friends; I get to go to this cool cafeteria; I get to see my team."

Galloway predicts that young workers will differentiate jobs based on who has an office that's been vaccinated and will bring them in. "Young people want an office. Offices and the obligation to commute are about to become a feature, not a bug."

Jonathan Webb, vice president of sales and marketing at KI, a Wisconsin-based office furniture and design company, says millennial and Gen Z workers value the community and collaboration that come with a common office space. "We know that newly hired graduates' top desires are the latest and greatest technology and a sense of community and collaboration. Companies that cannot offer these two things are at risk of not being able to attract the talent they require to succeed," Webb told Monster.com.

Young workers may realize that being present with supervisors improves their chances of being promoted. Studies show that people who predominantly work from home are promoted less, says Nicholas Bloom, an economics professor at Stanford University. He adds that for those who wish to move up the corporate ladder, they may need to be in the office to acquire the skills necessary to manage others.

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Sales reps are ideally suited to work from home

Sales managers who are nervous about their team working outside of the office can take heart in a recent study that ranks **sales representative** as the **number 1 job** for being best suited to work remotely. In fact, the study from MagnifyMoney shows that 13% of sales representatives already worked from a home office prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The study analyzed a multitude of metrics to determine a job's suitability for working from home, including earning potential, future growth prospects and how many people in those positions already work from home.

Sales rep was boosted by the metric that measured job growth and opportunities. The study reported an

expected job growth of 7.2% for sales representatives from 2018 to 2028. The one metric that sales representatives had a low ranking in was wages. In 2018, the median annual salary was $54,550, placing it in the No. 63 spot for that metric.

MagnifyMoney, a division of LendingTree, provides online personal finance tools for consumers. The company looked at data for 579 occupations from the 2018 U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Rounding out the top five most suitable jobs for WFH are:

2. **Management analysts** – The current WFH rate for this occupation is 24% (fifth-place overall for that metric).

3. **Computer and information systems managers** – The overall ranking for this profession was boosted by wages. In 2018, computer and information systems managers had median annual earnings of $142,530, with a 2.4% growth in wages from 2017 to 2018, resulting in the second-place spot for that metric.

4. **Market research analysts and marketing specialists** – With a predicted addition of nearly 140,000 jobs by 2028, that's a growth rate of 20% over the decade. That's a lot of opportunities.

5. **Financial managers** – This position currently has a low 4% WFH rate, but it was boosted by strong rankings in earning potential (2018

median salary of nearly $128,000) and projected robust growth in the field, with an estimated 105,000 jobs added between 2018 and 2028.

Not surprisingly, the highest-ranking jobs for remote work are ones that rely on technology that is easily accessible at home, namely computers and internet access. Industrial jobs ranked among the lowest, not only for the obvious reason that workers need access to heavy machinery, but because the number of positions are expected to decline in the next decade.

The top-rated WFH job: writer/author. Nearly four in 10 writers (38%) work remotely, somehow besting farmer/rancher (29% WFH rate) and travel agents (also 29% WFH rate).

Editor's note: We didn't see the median earnings reported for the writer/author category on the MagnifyMoney chart. Perhaps that's for the best.

Burnout becomes a bigger fear in WFH environments

A recent survey by the IBM Institute for Business Value found more than 75% of respondents would like to continue working remotely at least occasionally, while more than half want it to be their primary way of working after the coronavirus crisis ends.

Company decision-makers seem open to the idea of remote work—at least part time—but many are not comfortable with the idea of full-time work-from-home arrangements. Workers' mental health is a chief concern. Companies are stepping up their health insurance programs' mental health offerings, and employees are taking advantage of it.

Lack of work boundaries

One problem that has been widely reported regarding new WFHers is the inability to distinguish between the workday and home life. "The 9-to-5 workday, or any semblance of it, seems like a relic of a bygone era," states a recent *Bloomberg* article. "I honest to goodness am wearing the exact same outfit that I started with on Monday. I think I've showered three times," Rachel Mushahwar, the vice president and general manager of U.S. sales and marketing at Intel, told *Bloomberg*.

Managers will be wise to increase the frequency of one-on-one check-ins as WFH becomes more prevalent.

and acknowledge where you are and what you are feeling. Is it frustration, fear or anxiety? Accept this without judgement. Set an intention to move to a more positive place and exercise choice in doing so."

Ferreira warns not to make these other mistakes regarding managing remote workers:

- **Thinking you don't have time for team bonding and small talk.** Set aside time for virtual team engagement activities. Ask powerful questions and engage everyone in the answers, drawing out the more quiet voices.

- **Allowing too much negativity to seep in.** How you show up impacts your team. Be more intentional with your energy, noticing as soon as negativity leads to a dark mood and actively choose something different.

- **Expecting to have all of the answers.** Don't be afraid to say "I don't know." Be transparent. Share what you know and what you don't know. Nothing is more disturbing than knowing something is going on and leaders are not sharing. Always communicate with empathy, consider how other individuals might be feeling and stay true to yourself.

"We are social animals—it's in our deepest nature," says business writer Geoff Colvin. "We evolved into humans in groups. Alone we died; together we survived. Social interaction has been declining in the U.S. for decades. Employers ought to consider the full effects of removing more face-to-face interaction from employees' lives."

It's important, however, for managers to also monitor their own mental health. "If we don't understand where we are in a crisis and what we are feeling, it will be tough to lead ourselves or others to something different," change consultant Talita Ferreira states in an article for Conference & Incentive Travel. "Identify

"Obviously as long as COVID-19 remains a threat, working from home is a sensible and necessary response. But companies that are looking beyond the pandemic, hoping to cut costs by keeping workers at home permanently, need to think hard about their decisions," Colvin says. "They should know that they're sacrificing a significant competitive advantage. The savings from WFH are much easier to calculate than the costs are, but the costs may very well be greater."

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Leaders must be mindful of the story behind the story

BY GARY BURNISON, CEO,
KORN FERRY

At a time when different work needs to get done — and work needs to get done differently — we leaders have to change. Today, everyone is a leader, and it culminates in how we make others feel.

I had this experience when I was 12 years old, at a basketball camp led by Coach Gene Keady, a legend in Kansas for having earned Junior College Coach of the Year three times while at Hutchinson Junior College. He later went on to an acclaimed coaching career at Division 1 colleges, most notably Purdue, where he served as head coach for 25 years.

Although I was pretty tall and lanky, it was clear I wasn't destined for the college court, let alone the NBA. But Coach Keady worked with me nonetheless, such as teaching me to dribble to my left. Coach Keady must have seen something else in me. He pulled me aside on the last day of summer basketball camp and said, "Gary, you're gonna be a leader; never stop believing."

My miniature "Camper of the Week" trophy, once the centerpiece of my childhood bedroom, is long gone. But the coach's words have stayed with me all these years — not only for what he said, but how he made me feel.

Empathy leads to action

Through the years I've tried, though not always successfully, to make others feel the same, especially now. Empathy is the starting point. It's the catalyst that turns "we're all in this together" from only words to a feeling and then an action.

The pandemic will create a seismic shift in an organization's skillset as well as its mindset. That starts with the leader but is never about the leader. Although there are "green shoots," the tale of the tape of this pandemic is disheartening — people who are not only isolated, but also feeling insulated from others. Like everyone, I'm hearing about how others are dealing with serious illnesses, fears about the health and safety of loved ones, and even divorces that are skyrocketing. The emotional and physical toll on people is mounting, as evidenced by a significant rise in the use of employee assistance hotlines and telehealth.

This is the story behind the story that leaders need to understand.

Too often, though, empathy is confused with sympathy. The difference is far greater than just a few letters.

Sympathy rushes in to fix things with an attempt to cheer people up, like telling the person who has lost hope and direction that "at least you still have your [insert attempt here]."

Empathy looks at reality and doesn't blink. It forms a bridge, heart to heart, that broadcasts verbally and nonverbally, "I know how you feel. Our circumstances may be different, but I've been there, too."

The glass is already broken

There was a time when companies looked for leaders who weren't afraid to "break glass." These change agents were brought in to shake things up, often without excuses or regard for people's feelings. They operated like the wording

on a fire alarm: "In case of emergency, break glass."

Today, the pandemic has broken that glass. The workforce has been scattered and shattered. Now, it takes a different kind of leader who can turn broken glass into a mosaic of possibility. This past week, I participated in a financial services webinar with the CHROs of Bank of America, Citi and Prudential Financial. Lucien Alziari of Prudential described how, in normal times, transitioning to a 97% remote workforce would have required "an 18-month project... [with] six risk committee meetings and, at the end of the project, the conclusion would have been, 'We can't do that. It's too risky.'"

Amid the pandemic, though, that goal was accomplished in 24 hours. This type of rapid change is baseline for moving forward. As I've said to our team, "We can't think of ourselves as a 50-year-old firm. We need to think like a 5-month-old startup." Those who come out of this crisis as winners will find the silver lining. They will make the most of the disruptive change, but only by meeting people where they are and bringing them to where they need to be.

'Everything is great'

Just the other day, I was shocked to hear an executive describe how he polled people within his organization to get a pulse of their mood and their motivation. He found that, in his words, "Everything is great." What he was proud of were actually symptoms of people either being afraid for their jobs or a culture that lacks empathy and trust. While it's easy to slip into the wishful thinking that "everything is great," we know that's not the case anywhere.

In the triangulation of cash, psychology and biology that will get us through this crisis, we know that cash is not a durable commodity, doesn't truly feed the soul, and isn't in abundant supply. A biological solution is likely still 18 to 24 months off. Psychology is the answer.

> "Empathetic leaders know they can't bulldoze people to push them where they need to be."

My colleague Dennis Baltzley works with senior leaders as Korn Ferry's global head of leadership development solutions. Dennis explains it this way: "You need to be aware of the wide range of emotions and where people are. The leader may say, 'Emotionally, I'm beyond this crisis,' but people are lagging. They need to move, but the leader can't make them. Instead, the leader must motivate them." Empathetic leaders know they can't bulldoze people to push them where they need to be.

Today's butterfly effect

A small or even insignificant event can create a much bigger impact, like the proverbial butterfly flapping its wings that stirs the wind into a tornado. These days, leaders can leverage the butterfly effect as subtle shifts take hold and then ripple through their organizations, creating significant changes in how people think, act and work together.

I saw this recently when a colleague shared with me how she became "compelled to do anything I could" to help others ride out this crisis. Her attitude set off a chain reaction of positivity among the people around her. The result, she told me, was "the most incredible commitment to each other and the firm." The leader's job is to shine a spotlight on those small and sometimes barely perceptible shifts — to see the butterfly within the caterpillars that can't

yet get off the ground, but sincerely want to try. Indeed, there is a leader within each of us.

Leadership is still a contact sport

From pizza to coffee to banking, everything has become contactless these days. It's how we keep ourselves safe. But that doesn't apply to leadership. In fact, leaders must be contacting people more than ever. At the start of this crisis, I was making 50 calls a day. I've slightly moderated the pace but have extended it to almost everyone — from reporters to people I haven't spoken with in years, to checkout attendants at the grocery store.

Empathy informs leadership. The starting point of every conversation is what is on people's minds. How are they feeling? What are they worried about? What are they thinking? Only with that understanding can the discussion pivot from "this is what we've always done" to "this is what we can become."

I had a valuable learning experience recently. Each Memorial Day, we honor those who died in service to our country. When referencing this important day in last week's CEO message, I indicated merely that this day honors those who served. As a father with a son at West Point, I know the difference, but I sure didn't articulate it well. A few members of the military let me know the error, as they rightfully should have, explaining with empathy.

This is how we help each other on the journey. It's how we continuously grow and progress. Indeed, this is how we understand the story behind the story. **smm**

Gary Burnison, CEO, Korn Ferry, a management consulting firm. This article was taken from his weekly CEO message.

Building an office culture without the office

The healthy snacks manufacturer KIND LLC holds two to three virtual water cooler check-ins a week in which all employees are invited. Many of the New York-based company's 320 employees stay for only about 15 minutes. The company has tried to bolster team spirit and camaraderie while its employees are working remotely with virtual interoffice competitions, including a recent challenge to see who could hold a plank the longest.

While it's clear that many workers in the knowledge economy are able to be equally or more productive working from home, company leaders are nervous that the corporate culture they feel is vital to their recruitment and retention efforts is not as successful in the current WFH environment.

"It's the foremost concern. None of us really knows how this movie will play out if it continues like this for much longer," KIND founder and CEO Daniel Lubetzky told *The Wall Street Journal* recently.

Juliette Kayyem, a former assistant secretary for homeland security under President Barack Obama, feels she has a good sense of where corporate culture is headed in the short-term, and it's not hopeful. Writing on the subject for *The Atlantic*, Kayyem states, "Any return to work before a vaccine is available will have employees distanced, possibly masked. Many offices will operate with reduced occupancy. The places where people normally gather — conference rooms, the break room, the watercooler — may be off-limits. The corporate culture that so many employers prize is based on a level of interaction that will not be regained simply by being in the same building, let alone being in the same building with only a fraction of the workforce present. Until a coronavirus vaccine becomes available, corporate culture is over."

Others feel that building a corporate culture among a virtual team can be accomplished. Here are some recommendations:

Take your culture thoughts public

A number of companies have started to publish their company values or thoughts on their company culture in the public space. Company leaders should feel strong enough about their corporate culture mission to post it online for all to see, states a blog post at 6Q, an Australian-based provider of employee engagement efforts through surveys. An early and well-known example is the list of 10 core values that employees of online retailer Zappos helped create and that was posted online in 2006.

Build a sense of shared leadership

Defining deliverables and tracking commitments provides "push" to keep team members focused and productive; shared leadership provides crucial "pull," says Michael D. Watkins, cofounder of Genesis Advisers, in a blog post for *Harvard Business Review.* He suggests finding ways to involve others in leading the team, such as assigning responsibility for special projects or getting members to coach others in their areas of expertise.

Send snail mail

Don't underestimate the power of sending your team something (the old-fashioned way) that shows them that you truly care, value their work and have their best interests and well-being at-heart, Shama Hyder, founder and CEO of Zen Media, told Inc.com. If you don't already have an ongoing recognition program in place, what are you waiting for?

Get things done — and report on it

The COVID-19 outbreak has proven that remote teams can be productive, but it's important to show them they are. Remote teams build trust in each other by seeing what was completed. Set specific goals and report on your progress toward achieving those goals frequently. Find something each week to report on, advises Wade Foster, writing for Zapier, a provider of work automation software, and a company which itself has 250-plus employees spread across the U.S. and in more than 20 countries.

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Tackling low morale among remote workers

BY TANNER CORBRIDGE, SENIOR PARTNER,
PARTNERS IN LEADERSHIP

Keeping people engaged is complicated when we've been told to stay apart. To manage effectively and create action, we need to come together as we've never done before. Morale becomes strained as outside influences push in. Proven leadership principles may be the first to go by the wayside, but leaders can maintain morale by moving remote workers to a place of optimism. That won't happen on its own.

No one should be surprised if loneliness and strained morale arise from working remotely. The brain is wired to grieve and default to the worst-case scenario when change occurs. This so-called negativity bias is natural and real. The challenge of coping with negativity bias during a crisis is that we can become entirely overwhelmed and not see the path forward.

The 10-80-10 Principle

Partners in Leadership uses a concept called the 10-80-10 principle. In a crisis situation: 10% will freak out and may make things worse. Another 80% are stunned, paralyzed and bewildered. Their tendency is to hunker down doing what they know to do, and wait for solutions to come to them. Only 10% will act calm and measured. They see a crisis as an opportunity to leverage change and innovate. They remain engaged. They ask, "What else can we do to thrive in this new world?"

The question becomes: How do you move the middle 80% to being reengaged? When times get tough, leaders get really big or really small. Workplace culture is evolving rapidly right now. Leaders are either intentionally managing it or it is evolving on its own. If you can get mind-sets right, people are going to act. Moving the middle 80% requires three steps:

Step 1: Go big with actions

• **Be visible.** To lead big in a remote world means turning on the webcams. It's essential to interact face to face. Now is not the time to be stuck in the 90s. If you're slow getting on your camera, you'll pay a price in the morale and productivity of your team. Anyone who leads a team, whether it's three people or 10,000, needs to put a camera in front of themselves right now. That's a necessary shift, whether it's making a recording or moving conference calls to video platforms.

• **Over communicate.** Fill the information vacuum with information instead of worst-case scenario assumptions. Overcompensate for geographical challenges.

• **Make the "why" compelling.** Companies are shifting strategies rapidly. The tendency is to focus on what you need and when you need it. Spending time to make the "why" more compelling will reduce the level of resistance you might have otherwise.

Step 2: Shape beliefs with every meeting

Managing beliefs is the most overlooked management element because it is the hardest. Doing so will create a stronger sense of team culture. If you believe your team is worrying about the uncontrollable, start the meeting by asking, "What can we control?" Then, whiteboard all of the controllables. After three minutes, the team is more likely to believe they are still in control.

Step 3: Leverage virtual experiences

Stories play a huge role in illustrating how to show up and get work done. Recognize employees demonstrating extra commitment. Ask people to come prepared with evidence to justify optimism. Invite participants to share stories of what it looks like to live your company's mission right now, given the realities you face.

Encourage everyone to take accountability for creating connections. Remind them to reach out to people and not to just sit back and wait for connections to happen. Remember, we're surrounded by people around the world in the same dilemma.

In his role as senior partner at Partners In Leadership, Tanner Corbridge actively leads many of the firm's largest consulting projects, including the design and execution of multiyear client engagements.

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