

# EMPLOYEE WELLNESS

## IN A REMOTE WORKER WORLD



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# Mindful management has never been more important

**Awareness and empathy are crucial skills for managers to help employees cope with anxiety**

BY PAUL NOLAN

As the COVID-19 pandemic extended beyond a couple months of working remotely, five work companions from a New York AI and machine-learning company searched vacation rental websites for a place they could isolate together to work and enjoy each other's company. They ended up leaving their cities (one lived in Boston) for a five-bedroom restored bed-and-breakfast in Westbrook, Connecticut.

"We come from a company that has a really strong culture. We like going into the office," one of the workers told [The New York Times](#). "And we all hang out and are friends outside the office."

The colleagues (ranging in age from 27 to 42) adopted a regular work schedule and enjoyed Wiffle ball, volleyball, card games, bonfires and karaoke nights around a piano in off hours. Collectively, they agreed the June arrangement benefited their social lives as well as their workday productivity. It was a hybrid office and summer camp.

"I really feel like I've become better at my job," one of them told *The Times*. "Just constantly brainstorming and iterating and being able to trade knowledge."

Online comments from readers mostly expressed admiration for the five coworkers' ingenuity, though some disparaged the privilege it exposed of a group of highly paid professionals who were able to escape urban environments that were experiencing high rates of coronavirus cases. Many readers mentioned a disparity in income problem in the U.S. that the pandemic has further exposed.

No matter where you fall on the approval scale of this particular story, it is testament to the value that workers place on camaraderie and collaboration with colleagues. These workers were willing to shell out \$2,400 apiece to create a pop-up office for one month.

## Anxiety is bubbling up

The story also lays bare a primary concern of executives, HR professionals and mid-level managers as they continue to monitor the mental health of their workers, most of whom have been working from home since mid-March.

The United States is unique in tying health care to employment for the majority of those who are covered by health insurance. As a result, employers are morally responsible to help their workers maintain strong mental health as well as physical well-being. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that an increasing number of companies are creating a chief medical officer role within their ranks. "The more you actually have to be responsible for caring for people, the more likely you need a CMO,"

Andrew Diamond told WSJ. Diamond is chief medical officer of One Medical, a company that provides primary medical care in the workplace to companies including Alphabet Inc., the parent company of Google.

Ashwini Zenooz, a medical doctor who holds the CMO title at Salesforce.com, told WSJ that since the COVID-19 outbreak, her role has shifted from focusing on software products that Salesforce sells to clients in the medical industry to helping the tech giant's employees address mental health issues that can arise from working remotely. She is also working with Salesforce's real estate division to help ensure a return to the office, whenever that occurs, is safe for workers.

Anxiety is the word most frequently mentioned as a key concern, along with burnout, isolation and depression. Experts say it's too early to assess the psychological impact on any broad level of sending office workers home and having them collaborate almost entirely digitally. It's past time, however, for HR professionals and managers to implement programs that educate workers about the potential health problems that could arise, communicate empathy for the situation, promote open discussion and provide professional assistance to those who need it.



The [Society for Human Resource Management](#) (SHRM) surveyed more than 1,000 U.S. employees working remotely and between 22% and 35% reported feeling emotionally drained, having trouble concentrating or losing interest in activities they once enjoyed. That study was released in May. The numbers could be higher now.

“We have found that people often don’t get education about mental health until they have a diagnosis for depression or something along those lines,” says Laurie Sharp-Page, a licensed psychotherapist and founder of Sprouting Change. Her Ohio-based company helps businesses foster mental health awareness and wellness through education and workshops.

“A lot of prevention can happen just by educating people about mental health and how they take care of their mental health. There is a small window of time for people. When they say ‘I could use support,’ we need to meet them there and get them that help quickly,” she says.

Sprouting Change provides employers a means to offer employees an educational webinar on anxiety and other mental health issues. That can be followed by smaller discussion groups tailored more to employees’ questions and needs. Sprouting Change also help employees connect with mental health service providers in their area.

### Awareness is priceless

Many companies — perhaps even most companies — have shown great care for their workers as they navigate the challenges of continuing to operate under unprecedented circumstances,

although there are examples of less worker-friendly approaches. *The Wall Street Journal* reported in July that oil refining giant Phillips 66 ordered the majority of its 2,300 employees that work at its Houston headquarters to report back to the office.

“If we in the energy business are reluctant to go back to the office, why should other people go back? How can we get our economy going again?” Phillips 66 Chief Executive Greg Garland reportedly stated in a video circulated internally. Texas was among the states that experienced a significant spike in coronavirus cases and deaths this summer.

Juxtapose that message with advice from Greg DeLapp, CEO of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA). Now, more than ever, says DeLapp, employers need to be transparent about the anxiety they are feeling themselves. EAPA is the leading provider of education and services to employee assistance professionals and others interested in issues affecting the behavioral health and wellbeing of employers and employees.

“If managers don’t acknowledge their anxiety, let alone address it, their ability to lead companies back to pre-Covid productivity and engagement levels will be severely compromised,” DeLapp says. “In recent years, it’s become more acceptable for leaders to show glimpses of vulnerability, which some argue makes them more relatable and more effective leaders. For that person to come out pretending [uncertainty] is not the case is disingenuous and is read that way immediately. It comes across as, ‘How are you supposed to relate to the

*continued on page 4*

## The stress of home life invades work

It’s important to remember that your workers are more than the jobs they perform. Employers need to be aware that it’s not just the stress of working from home that may be impacting workers’ performance.

“For a long time there was an erroneous belief that you could check your personal stress at the door when you walked into the office. That’s just not true,” says Laurie Sharp-Page. “Our brain particularly struggles to do that when we’re doing everything in the same space. With so many people working from home, it’s difficult for them to delineate between work stress and home stress. That impacts their mental health across the board.”

As an increasing number of school districts in the U.S. announce they will begin the fall semester online, research is becoming available on how the pandemic is taking a toll on children’s mental health. One study out of China examined a sample group of 2,330 schoolchildren for signs of emotional distress. After an average lockdown of only 33.7 days, 22.6% of the children reported depressive symptoms and 18.9% were experiencing anxiety.

Allowing flexible schedules, providing extra time off and connecting employees with resources to help their children are some ways employers can help. Showing genuine concern through conversation and empathy is another way to assist that requires only an investment of time.



## Mindful Management, *continued from page 3*

concern I'm about to raise with you when you pretend that it doesn't even exist in your world?"

### Managing virtually

While the best managers are adept at increasing engagement, productivity, profitability and a host of other bottom-line issues, few have virtual management experience. Efficiently managing a remote work force requires a significant mind-set shift, particularly as managers are required to extend their influence to people they rarely see outside of video chats. Many managers are acquiring new skills for overseeing remote teams. A key aspect heard repeatedly by coaches and consultants is to communicate. In fact, err on the side of overcommunicating. And keep in mind that communicating includes listening.

"The communication between an employer and their employee has a massive impact on a worker's productivity and overall motivation," Braden Smith, a content creator for Sawseekers, an Amazon affiliate that reviews all types of saws, told *Sales & Marketing Management*.

Smith says he has experienced this first-hand. His boss checks in weekly to discuss his health, his family, his anxiety level and whether his work load is causing problems in other areas of his life. He has received gift baskets from his employer as a token of appreciation for his steady performance.

Michael Mercer, a business psychologist and author, manages a team of workers for his company Mercer Systems LLC, a provider of pre-employment psychological testing. Mercer says during the pandemic, he has scheduled a biweekly call with every employee to discuss only non-work topics.

"I start each meeting by saying, 'During this call, we will not talk about work. Let's only talk about your life other than work. I promise I will not judge, nor criticize you. I only want you to have me available to open up to—to help you feel better outside your work activities.' They tell me about their home life, how they are coping with working from home, how they feel about not coming to office, and even tell me about some physical concerns."

When one employee mentioned a skin problem he was dealing with, Mercer relayed that he had dealt with a similar problem. He told him about a non-prescription cream that could help and even sent over a tube of it.

"In the office environment, he never would have told me about that skin problem. But on the phone with me, he opened up," he says.

### A benefit that's win-win

Sharp-Page says managers should remember that anxiety is not inherently bad. Workers with anxiety shouldn't be made to feel

*continued on page 5*

## Burnout is also spreading

"COVID-19 is taking a toll on our minds and emotions in a million little ways," says Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) President and CEO Johnny C. Taylor, Jr. "Now, more than ever, employers should double down against stigmas and guarantee employees know of the resources, benefits and accommodations available."

SHRM offers these tips for employers:

- 1. Prioritize mental health in your benefits plan and remind employees of offerings that may be especially helpful.** The majority of workers in the U.S. have access to mental health services through their employer, but many are not aware of it or how to access it.



- 2. Use technology to offer mental health resources.**

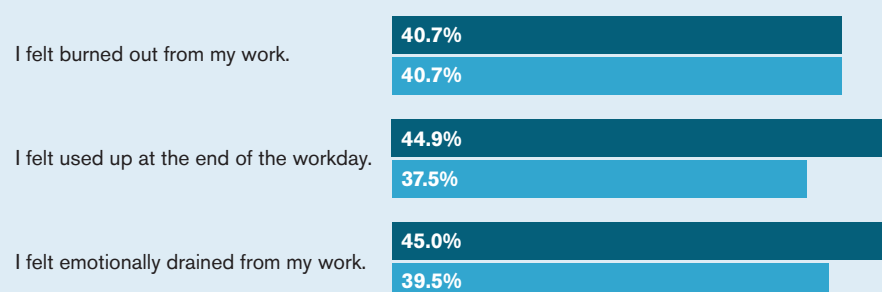
Telehealth has exploded since the virus outbreak.

Affordable services are available for employers to add to their benefits menu.

- 3. Stay in touch.** Simple check-ins via phone calls, Zoom meetings, emails and all of the usual ways you communicate with your team can help them stay on task, reassure them they play an important role in the company and help them feel their job is secure.
- 4. Offer emotional support.** Genuine emotional support from a supervisor has been shown to increase employee commitment, improve performance and decrease anxiety.

### To what extent have you felt the following?

■ Agree ■ Disagree





## Mindful Management, continued from page 4

like they have to escape it immediately. “Anxiety is a feeling like any other. It can be a helper to people by keeping them safe. It often acts as a motivator,” she says. “The issue is when anxiety gets too high and impedes performance.”

Many employers offered counseling and similar services as part of their benefits package before the pandemic struck. Others have added it since the coronavirus outbreak. Neil Taparia, an entrepreneur who started and sold a software company and founded another start-up, Solitaired, says his company began subsidizing traditional therapy for team members, and he is investigating offering his workers online therapy through [Ginger.io](https://ginger.io).

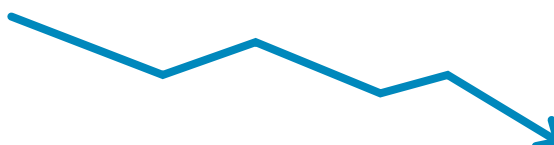
“It’s been a hugely popular benefit. One employee actually commented that they would not have thought about therapy if we hadn’t offered the benefit. In our employee engagement surveys, we’ve seen that we’ve been able to perform past our benchmarks despite the pandemic.”

In this environment, employers are increasingly recognizing that investing in preventative measures and early identification of mental health problems is an expense that makes sense. “You normalize that everybody is feeling stress around this situation. If you don’t deal with it now, and the employee goes into a full-blown crisis of some sort, you may lose access to that person and end up with workers’ comp issues or a person on long-term disability,” says Sharp-Page. “Investing a little bit of time now is going to be a whole lot more beneficial than letting these things accumulate and bubble up later.” **SMH**

A Gallup survey in mid-July showed

**73% of adults view the pandemic as growing worse** —

the highest level of pessimism recorded since Gallup began tracking that assessment in early April.



According to an early August Gallup poll, **13% of adult Americans are satisfied** with the way things are going in the U.S. That’s six points above the all-time low of 7% in October 2008, the start of the global financial crisis.

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# Is monitoring software helpful or 'Big Brother'?

BY PAUL NOLAN

Since entire workforces have moved to remote offices, some companies have implemented various software programs that closely track employee productivity and time spent on tasks. Proponents argue these systems help workers who may struggle to focus in a work-from-home environment stay on task and even increase productivity from their days in the office.

James Jason, assistant HR manager at Mitrade, an Australian-based broker that focuses on online foreign exchange and contract for difference (CFD) trading services, argues the remote tracking software they implemented helps its employees avoid the “always on the job” problem that has been a consequence for some workers now that their home doubles as their office.

“We are very strict with the signing out part since we do not want them overworking. In fact, we have come up with rewards for those who stick to the work schedule that we have carefully put together to ensure no one is working when they should not,” Jason says.

At the same time, Jason states that the tracking software ensures that a worker resists the temptation to take a break and a five-minute walk during work hours. A client may request assistance from an employee who went for a walk and fail to get it. “Five minutes is enough to deny us business worth thousands. Therefore, we only use the software to make sure that if you are required to be working between 9 and 5, you are actually there,” he says.

Others view software that monitors employees' time on task as Big Brotherish. One risk is that it signals a lack of trust in employees. [Laura Vanderkam](#), a consultant on time management and productivity, and the author of “The New Corner Office: How the Most Successful People Work From Home,” is a proponent of time management software as a means for individuals to improve their own skills in that area. She is not a fan of using time tracking software to manage and monitor employees.

“We can learn all sorts of things when we see the data in black and white. However, I think this is best used as individual motivation,” Vanderkam says. “I don't recommend software that reports activities to managers as a form of tracking employees' work. This is kind of a lazy approach to management — trying to recreate the face-time culture of the office while people are working from home. If people know they're being watched, they can game the system if they want. They can sign on early but look at time wasting apps on a phone rather than the laptop. They can keep their inbox open all day but do nothing in it. Or maybe they're wasting tons of time in email but it looks productive. All of this tells you nothing. Better to work with



employees to set goals they find engaging.” (Read a full Q&A with Vanderkam on page 19.)

In her new book, “The Great Indoors,” science journalist Emily Anthes writes about software and hardware being used by companies to monitor their employees' digital and in-person interactions, in part by using badges worn on lanyards around their necks. Experiments using this type of technology are being conducted to determine whether any correlation exists between the types of communication workers have and their success. Such technology may be well-meaning, but could just as likely be abused by employers, Anthes says.

“Companies could use these technologies to try to understand how to make their workers happy and what they need to succeed. Or they could use them to coerce their employees, and to wring every last ounce of productivity out of them,” Anthes writes. “In addition to invading privacy, this surveillance can jeopardize worker health and safety as employees push themselves harder and harder to meet corporate-set metrics. Alternatively, it can spur creative efforts to evade or fool the tracking technology — ultimately making it useless — or even backfire, making workers more stressed and less productive.” **SMH**

# Corporate perks for Fido

Millennials are the country's largest pet-owning demographic, overtaking Baby Boomers in 2017. The shift to working from home has caused many previous petless households to adopt an animal. Companies are taking notice and responding by incorporating pet-friendly perks into their employee policies.

Never mind bring-your-dog-to-work days, *The Wall Street Journal* reports that

more in pet store gift cards, telehealth veterinary services and pet-sitting.

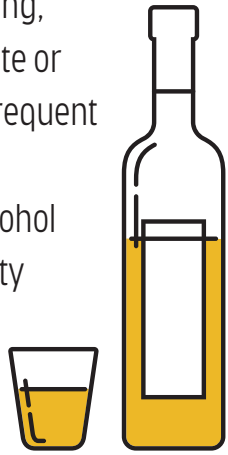
The CEO of a veterinary telehealth service told WSJ that a financial services company



companies are offering employees everything from an extra week of paid leave for new pet owners to \$200 or

contacted her to set up pet care as part of its benefits package. Some companies, she says, are finding that 70% of their employees have pets while only 44% have children. "The benefits balance is way off. Pets are the new dependents that employers are recognizing."

**52%** of respondents to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll **reported experiencing adverse effects due to stress** related to the COVID-19 outbreak. This includes trouble sleeping, lack of appetite or overeating, frequent headaches, increased alcohol use or difficulty controlling their temper.



PETSMART  
HALF PAGE AD  
PAGE 7

# Leading through a crisis: 5 factors for success

BY ARI D. KALECHSTEIN

Even faced with a pandemic, leaders can motivate teams by being transparent and by encouraging positive change. Here are five critical factors that leaders can use to maximize the likelihood of successful company transition in times of crisis.

## 1. Be honest with your team.

Instead of projecting bravado and sureness about the outcome of the pandemic, be honest with your team. When faced with their fear, leaders can say “I understand that you’re afraid and unsure. Most people are.” It’s also important to share your vision about where the business is and where you want to go. “My goal is to keep the entire staff onboard without layoffs. We are going to create a pathway for success. Just hang in there.” This way, leaders will open a dialogue about the business’s prospects and let them know together you will identify a pathway to success.

## 2. Find new benchmarks for success.

Companies are bound to face existential challenges, whether it be a downturn in the economy, a change within a particular industry or an unanticipated situational factor like COVID-19. This creates the need for business leaders and their team to identify new guideposts/markers for success. By identifying intermediate benchmarks rather than a single benchmark of success, teams can experience success on a more frequent basis and a leader can commend those successes.

## 3. Communicate the vision and collaborate on the solutions.

My experience is combining independent consideration of strategies for problem solving, and then reviewing those strategies with my team resulted in a more efficient, effective process by which solutions were identified. The solutions were easier to implement and the team had a stronger commitment to achieving them because they participated in their creation.

## 4. Recognize and share success.

When individuals or teams are managing significant changes, there is a greater risk for members of the team to feel anxious and/or have doubts about their abilities to implement new strategies. Hence, I positively reinforce the efforts by my team to adapt to these changes and navigate the uncertainty. Although most leaders understand the value of providing positive feedback to team members, it can be overlooked during times of transition and great stress. My experience has been that team members are more likely to flourish when they are recognized publicly for their successes.

## 5. Make time for human connection.

In times of crisis, people are scared, sometimes lonely, and searching for ways to remain interconnected. In the absence of watercooler moments or after-hours gatherings, we instituted Zoom-equipped fireside chats. These allowed us a time to communicate weekly successes, shed light on the colleagues responsible for those successes, communicate future goals and say how we were going to achieve them. We shared the spotlight, rotating talks from me as CEO to clinicians and community liaisons, as well as outside guests. Each had a unique and personal story on how EMH had affected their lives, and how they’ve managed in the time of COVID-19. **smm**



Ari Kalechstein is a licensed psychologist and the president and CEO of Executive Mental Health, which provides clinical psychology and neuropsychology services in California and Nevada.

RYMAX  
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# How healthy is your office?

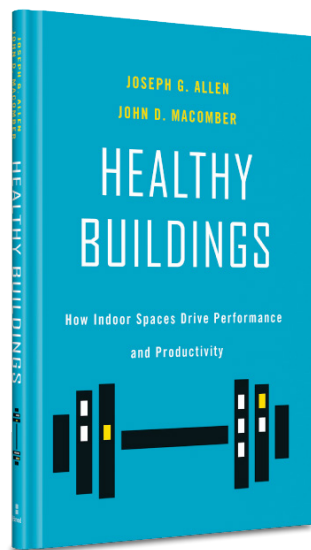
Research shows a direct correlation between the quality of ventilation and other aspects of office space and worker performance

BY PAUL NOLAN

Sports teams from the professional level to high school invest significant sums of money in their facilities to obtain peak productivity from their athletes. On the professional level, athletes are paid exorbitant salaries, thus it only makes sense for owners to seek the best return on their investment by supplying elite training equipment that can help draw out every bit of their skills.

In addition, a cutting-edge training facility also serves as an effective recruitment tool for college or professional athletes as they decide where to apply their skills. It should be no different in all other worlds of business, says John D. Macomber, a senior lecturer in finance at Harvard Business School and co-author of “Healthy Buildings: How Indoor Spaces Drive Performance and Productivity.”

“As a society, we are wasting money on bad buildings, and we are wasting lives in bad buildings,” Macomber and his co-author Joseph G. Allen write. “To be blunt, the air in our buildings makes us sick and saps our productivity.” The authors state their purpose in writing the book is to make the business case for healthy buildings.



## Getting beyond green

Macomber and Allen say the green building movement of the early 1990s that led to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification provides valuable lessons for a similar push for certifying healthy buildings. LEED certification went from a nice-to-have to a baseline-must-have. “We expect that in the future the implementation, validation and communication of some concept of Healthy Buildings will become an even more important differentiation for sophisticated companies,” they state.

In the book, they explain that two brothers from the finance world founded the International Well Building Institute and created a WELL certification process in 2014.

In fact, the authors argue, while billions of dollars are spent on engineering features to construct and upgrade office

buildings to attain LEED certification, the ROI is minimal compared to the very real returns that can be realized from a focus on creating healthy buildings. Improved ventilation, air quality, temperature control, lighting, noise and other characteristics of a work space have a significant impact on the performance of those who inhabit a building. The authors call these Health Performance Indicators (HPIs).

“At a fundamental level, health drives human performance. This means that building performance is a critical metric that every business should be tracking,” they state in an article on what makes a building healthy.

Reinforcing the importance of healthy buildings is the 3-30-300 rule of real estate that was created and popularized by the global facilities management company JLL. The rule reveals relative cost per square-foot across three factors — utilities, rent and people. For every \$3 a company spends on utilities, it spends \$30 on rent and \$300 on payroll. “We’re really missing the boat here if we’re chasing a few nickels of energy efficiency by stretching out the fans and filters while we’re losing thousands of dollars around human productivity and illness,” Macomber told *Sales & Marketing Management*.

## The problem of split incentives

One challenge to increasing the focus on healthy commercial buildings is that of split incentives. Macomber estimates the cost of having a building be WELL-certified at 1 or 2% of the total capital cost. Who will foot that bill?

Commercial landlords typically want to operate a building at the lowest possible cost. And most tenants are not yet sophisticated enough to realize that a healthier work environment goes straight to their bottom line in the form of higher cognitive function leading to better decision-making and fewer employee sick days.

Macomber’s hope is that increased awareness of the benefits of healthy buildings will help commercial building developers understand they can get a premium in rent in strong markets and provide a marketing advantage when they need to keep their space occupied in down real estate markets.

He also expects the COVID-19 pandemic will heighten employers’ sense of responsibility to their workers regarding the health of office space. As evidence that work environment is becoming more important to workers, Macomber and Allen point out that company reviews on the website Glassdoor increasingly include comments about office smells, noise, temperature, lighting and general cleanliness.

Science journalist Emily Anthes agrees that healthy buildings will become an effective recruiting tool for companies, just like swanky cafeterias serving free food and modern buildings set on open campuses were all the rage for high-tech companies that were growing and hiring in the last two decades.

Anthes is the author of “The Great Indoors: The Surprising Science of How Buildings Shape Our Behavior, Health and Happiness.” Like Macomber and Allen, she began work on her book long before the world was hit with a pandemic, but its release this spring could not have been better timed.

“Healthy building and healthy building certification will absolutely be a recruitment tool given what’s happening with the pandemic,” she says. “You will see companies talking about having the highest ventilation standards and receiving platinum certification from a healthy buildings group.”

### A laboratory for studying work environments

In her book, Anthes writes at length about the Well Living Lab, a 7,500 square-foot office space built specifically to conduct research on how office conditions impact employee performance. The project is a joint effort between the Mayo Clinic and Delos, a New York-based real estate company. Located in Rochester, Minnesota, the Well Living Lab features a standard office layout that allows researchers to control virtually every aspect of the building’s environment, including ventilation, temperature, and natural and artificial light. Walls can be moved, the tint of the windows can be changed and acoustical effects can be controlled.

Studies conducted in the lab revealed that employee dissatisfaction with one aspect of their work environment — the temperature, for example — can color workers’ impressions of the space’s other attributes. Researchers found that daylight

and window views boost employees’ working memory, but have no effect on their ability to switch effectively between tasks. Providing artificial light that is on the cooler, bluer end of the spectrum improved their scores on a task-switching test, but did not impact other elements of executive function.

Of course, a work environment that is right for one enterprise may be wrong for another. Similarly, no two employees are alike, thus conditions that foster peak performance for some workers, may cause others to lag. Knowing this, Anthes says, should encourage frontline managers to provide as much flexibility to workers as possible as they make decisions about where to tackle their tasks.

“My recommendation for middle managers would be to trust their employees to the extent they can to know what they need and where and how they work best. Allow them some flexibility. If they want to tackle tasks somewhere other than their desk, trust them enough to have some control over their work environment,” she says.

Managers of sales teams and other mid-level executives may feel they don’t have much control over the conditions of their office space. That is not necessarily the case. Using data like that shared in the books by Anthes, Allen and Macomber, as well as the treasure trove of research on healthy buildings that is available online, managers can lobby for steps to be made to improve work environments just as they do for new CRM or other performance improvement investments.

“Consider the talent you will want to attract in a post-Covid-19 world,” state Allen and Macomber. “Today, businesses need to understand that prospective hires will not just be interviewing you, they will be interviewing your buildings. And you can be sure that future employees will be paying close attention.” **SMM**

## Minimizing Risk in the Workplace

Using a hierarchy of controls as a response framework, companies can take a range of actions — weighing the effectiveness and financial impact of each — to combat Covid-19 in their buildings.

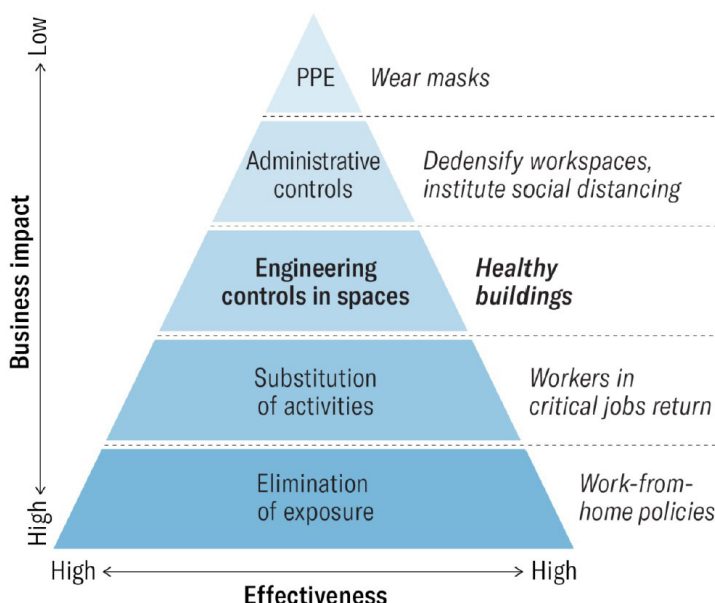
**Elimination of exposure** by extending work-from-home policies is most effective but not feasible for all companies.

**Substitution activities** identifies only the critical workers that must be onsite and physically isolates teams.

**Engineering controls and healthy building strategies** can include using portable air purifiers and incorporating touchless technology for elevators, toilets and sinks. More extensive efforts here involve steps to ventilation, air quality and other elements on the authors’ 9 foundations of a healthy building.

**Administrative controls** aims for social distancing by limiting the number of employees in the building at one time.

**Personal protective equipment** is at the top of the pyramid and the least effective control measure, yet still worth implementing.



# The bottom line of healthier buildings

Harvard Business School Senior Lecturer John D. Macomber says the book he co-authored with Harvard Assistant Professor Joseph G. Allen is aimed at making the business case for investing in healthy buildings. Here are some of the facts they present to make that argument.

Workers in an optimized indoor environment — high ventilation rates, low volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and carbon dioxide — showed **dramatic improvements in cognitive function** across nine categories, including focused activity level, task orientation and information usage. Experts estimate productivity gains between 2 and 10%.

Healthier buildings (focused again on higher ventilation rates) are associated with **1.6 fewer sick days per employee annually**. For a company with 40 employees, Macomber and Allen estimate this results in a nearly 2% increase in net income.

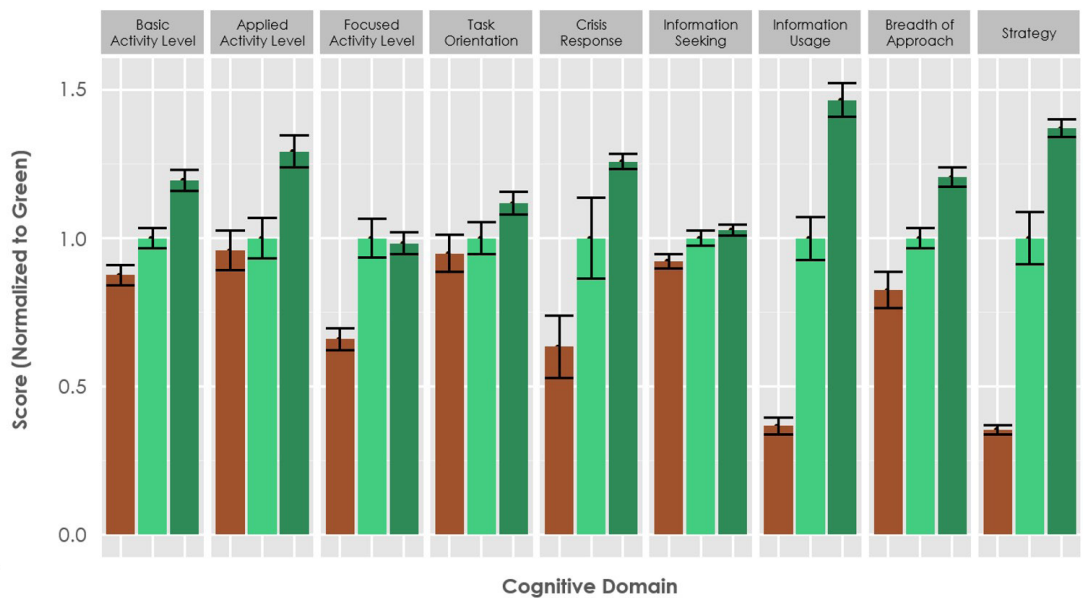
The Lawrence Berkeley National Lab estimates there would be **\$20 billion in benefits to the U.S. economy** if only three of nine healthy building strategies that Macomber and Allen lay out — improved ventilation, thermal health and mold/moisture control — were implemented.



## THE IMPACT OF GREEN BUILDINGS ON COGNITIVE FUNCTION

Exhibit 5:  
Results showing the impact of a 100% increase in ventilation rate from the 20cfm/person minimum on 9 cognitive function domains

- Conventional  
20 cfm/person, high VOCs, high CO<sub>2</sub>
- Green  
20 cfm/person, low VOCs, high CO<sub>2</sub>
- Enhanced  
40 cfm/person, low VOCs, low CO<sub>2</sub>





# Health Performance Indicators

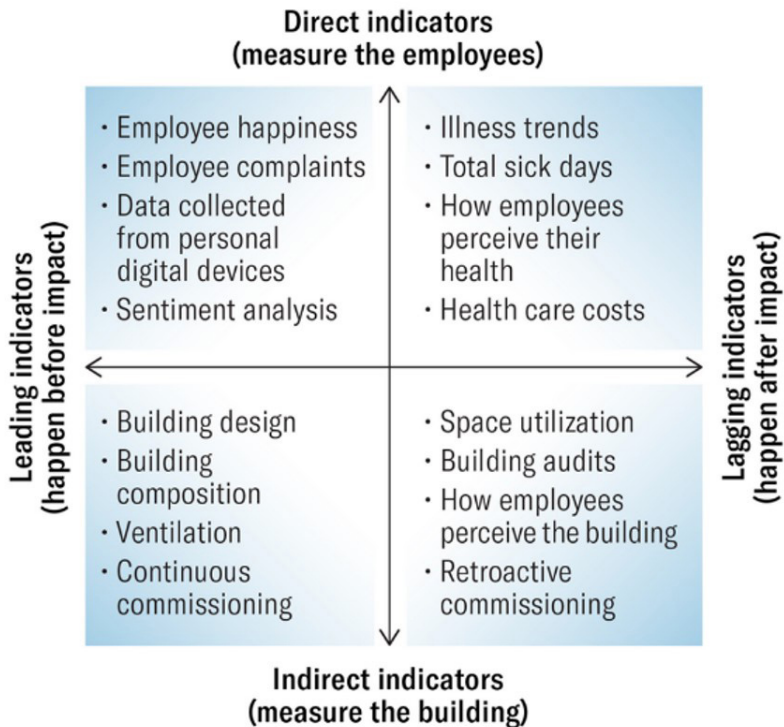
Allen and Macomber recommend that businesses begin tracking Health Performance Indicators (HPIs) as a means of measuring their building's performance in terms of indoor environmental quality.

HPIs can be divided into four quadrants according to the timing of indicators and what they measure.

Their four quadrants are divided into leading and lagging indicators, as well as direct and indirect indicators. Direct indicators measure people (the top half of the grid), while indirect indicators measure the building (the lower half of the grid).

Carbon dioxide sensors can be used to gauge ventilation rates; particle sensors can make you aware if a nearby pollution source is impacting your building.

The investment in a healthy building is relatively affordable, the authors state, and the ROI surprises many people. Scientific studies estimate that doubling the ventilation rate of a building cost less than \$40 per person per year in all climate zones, yet the benefits of higher ventilation are between \$6,500 and \$7,500 in improved performance per person per year.



SOURCE: HEALTHY BUILDINGS (HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS)

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# Are you ready to reopen?

As employers look to reopen and bring team members back to the office, if only on a part-time basis, it's important to realize they cannot think of it as "business as usual," says Mike Veny, who consults with companies on promoting mental health wellness. It's not exaggeration to say we are living through traumatic times, he says. Employers must be sensitive to that.

"Our current reality includes large-scale health scares, financial trouble, political unrest and isolation. People have no assurance of what the future months hold. Even when things start to look a little more promising, talk of a second wave brings the situation into reality again.

"Your employees aren't mindless robots that can show up to work unimpacted by the world around them. They are human. Even before this pandemic began, they needed to be viewed this way. But our 'leave your problems at the door' philosophy makes it difficult for employers to think this way. If you were operating like that before, it needs to change now."

Veny says empathy builds trust with employees. This is crucial for addressing

mental health and wellness in your organization. He offers these insights as business leaders bring workers back to the office.

## **Understand there are different levels of anxiety.**

Most workers will fit into one of three groups — ready to go, wait and see or it's too soon. There isn't a wrong stance.

## **Be open to customizing reopening to each employee.**

It may not be efficient, but it's the right thing to do. Talk to your employees and find out what each needs in order to have a successful return back to the workplace. You may not be able to accommodate all of their requests, but you can explore the options and possibilities.

## **Celebrate the small wins.**

If you've experienced a downturn during the first half of 2020, you may be eager to knock it out of the park and catch up. Instead of pushing your employees harder in order to meet expectations that were set before the pandemic, shift your focus. Start celebrating small wins. Acknowledge the work they are doing and any positive progress that is made.

## **Educate yourself and your team about mental health.**

It's important that you learn how to recognize the signs of mental health challenges and that you educate your employees as well. Remember that a decrease in work performance could be a sign of someone struggling with anxiety and depression. Find ways to educate your team about the signs of mental health challenges and what steps they can take to care for themselves. You can start with free resources on Veny's website that you can share with your employees.

## **Be consistent with your messaging and actions.**

Don't just expect to say something once and have your employees believe you, especially if you weren't in the habit of promoting emotional wellness before the pandemic. Ask frequently, "How can our company support you right now?" Provide them with examples of solutions that you can offer. Take the initiative to support your employees. **SM**

Mike Veny offers a free guide, "How to Support Workplace Mental Wellness As You Reopen," [on his website](#). Registration (first name and email) is required.





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# Workers and employers feel good about WFH



Allego, a leading provider of virtual learning and enablement solutions, surveyed employees and employers (HR reps) in two separate surveys to get a clearer idea how each side was feeling about technical and non-technical resources provided to them by their organizations, employee productivity and collaboration, and COVID-19's overall impact on their company.

## Satisfaction is high

The majority of employees (70%) and HR reps (75%) who primarily worked in an office setting prior to the pandemic report overall satisfaction with the WFH experience. Workers are mostly satisfied with the technical resources provided by employers (81%) and slightly less satisfied (73%) with non-technical resources.

In the non-technical category, HR reps are prioritizing increased communication from management and clarity on expectations, but employees expressed a greater desire for increased interactions with peers and more access to virtual training and coaching.

While workers rated their employers highly in terms of technical support, only 14% of them said they have all the technical resources necessary to work

from home. That's significant given that nearly six in 10 workers (59%) say they will be more inclined to work from home once the quarantine period of the pandemic ends.

## Feeling good about accomplishments

A key to maintaining strong mental health about work is having a sense of accomplishment. Workers and HR reps agree that WFH is not negatively impacting productivity, with 74% of office workers saying they are just as productive in their home setting if not more so, while 77% of HR reps feel employees have been just as productive during the pandemic. It should be noted, this percentage may drop among B2B sales professionals, who are unable to meet with prospects in person.

Too much of an increase in productivity should be a red flag for managers as well, as it may signify workers who are struggling to separate home life from work life and may be heading toward burnout. **SMM**

"Work From Home COVID-19 Survey" from Allego can be downloaded [with registration here](#).

## Helping WFH employees improve productivity

A sense of accomplishment is vital for workers who are uncertain when they will return to the office. Increased communication from managers and clarity about goals and how performance is being measured helps workers maintain a sense of their performance. [Writing for Forbes.com](#), leadership coach Chris Westfall offers these tips for helping workers be more productive in WFH settings:

### Help workers get comfortable

We've all heard horror stories about people trying to get through their work days from [makeshift work spaces](#) and turning clothes hampers and ironing boards into desks. Many employers are offering WFH stipends to help workers purchase home office equipment. Shopify and Twitter gave their employees \$1,000 each for better chairs, standing desks, improved lighting and other WFH equipment.

### Encourage work boundaries

If workers are always on, their work over the long term will suffer. This ties closely to creating a separate work space. Physical boundaries between work space and living space can help workers set regular schedules and shut down at the end of a work shift.

### Reconfigure the water cooler

Spontaneous office chats that foster camaraderie and creativity are no longer happening. Leaders need to schedule times for team interaction and encourage similar discussions using Slack, Teams or similar technological tools that allow for impromptu chatter. Being isolated doesn't mean teams can't stay connected.

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# When positivity can have a negative impact

A key rule of managing remote teams in the pandemic is to keep in mind that everybody's experience is different. Some employees may find WFH more conducive to their work habits, while others struggle with the lack of structure that the controlled environment of an office provided.

Also, as psychotherapist Laurie Sharp-Page and others emphasize, employees always bring more than their work selves to the office; WFH magnifies that. Managers will do well to keep lines of communication with every worker they supervise fluid. Overcommunicating is wise until someone says it's OK to cut back.

Many media outlets, health service providers and other sources of information are making their COVID-19 information available free online. A valuable source of information on dealing with mental health issues during the pandemic is the [News Network of the Mayo Clinic](#). Its COVID-19 content includes articles and podcasts on integrating work and home life as well as tips for dealing with anxiety.

Consuming tips from highly regarded sources like the Mayo Clinic can prepare managers to help workers who express feelings of anxiety or other pandemic-related problems. Rah-rah sentiments can fall far short of what your workers need. In fact, psychotherapists caution that responding to someone's



expression of distress with an unhelpful, cheerful attitude is known as dismissive or toxic positivity.

Writing in [The New York Times](#), Anna Goldfarb shared these tips for responding effectively when people tell you their coronavirus fears:

- **Don't minimize others' fears.**  
"You have nothing to worry about," is not effective. An empathetic response reinforces that you are aware of how they are feeling and you're ready to help in any way you can.
- **Avoid problem-solving.**  
Catch yourself if you're starting a response with, "You just need to..."
- **Don't give unsolicited advice.**  
This is similar to problem-solving. Workers may simply be looking for someone to listen and meet them in the moment. Unless they ask for advice, hold on to yours.

If a conversation in which you listen to someone more than advise them is difficult for you, that's a good time to step back and analyze why that is. Many managers are overly positive by nature because they feel it's helpful to support their workers. Be aware that support comes in different flavors. **SMN**

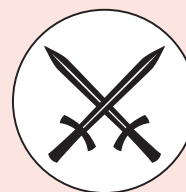
## The Mayo Clinic on...

### Dealing with anxiety:

Feeling anxious is a normal, healthy human response to stressful circumstances. But sometimes fear and worry become excessive, causing intense physical reactions and disrupting one's quality of life. Managers should remind workers to maintain healthy habits, including making sleep a priority, exercising, eating well, staying on top of medications and performing regular chores.

### Decreasing the dose of daily news:

It's OK to check the headlines a couple times a day, but not every 30 minutes. Workers who monitor news too frequently can replace that impulse with other actions, like walking, talking with someone, cooking healthy recipes or reading for pleasure.



### Choosing battles wisely:

Everyone has a limited amount of physical, mental and emotional energy. That energy should be applied to the most significant problems. Help workers let go of smaller problems, especially the ones that are out of their control.

### Practicing relaxation:

Yes, it's important to exercise, but relaxation is also vital to mental health. Make sure workers are setting boundaries between work and home life. Your team may benefit from a sheet of relaxation exercises — breathing, meditation, etc.



# How work from home changes management

Managers who create intricate business plans and put significant effort into developing short- and long-term goals for their teams and individual employees often revert to managing by time. The shift to working from home has forced many managers to adopt new approaches. It's a change for the better, says **Laura Vanderkam**, a consultant on time management and productivity, and the author of "The New Corner Office: How the Most Successful People Work From Home."

"Time is not the only marker of productivity. Managing with a focus on tasks and their accomplishment lets people capture the benefits of efficiency and lets them work how they work best," she writes.

**SMM:** You recommend managing by task, not time. It seems to make perfect sense, whether in an office setting or the current WFH situation. Why isn't this instinctual for managers no matter the office setting?

**Vanderkam:** Managing by time is relatively easy. Are people sitting in their desks from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.? Do they look busy? They must be getting stuff done. Actually helping people set challenging but doable task lists for the week or the day is more complicated. But given that when people are working from home and their managers can't really see if they're sitting in their desks, it's necessary to change the definition of an honest day's labor. I'd argue that looking at results is ultimately much more efficient.

**SMM:** Companies are pondering whether WFH can work for them permanently—or at least some version of it. Have you heard any valid/legitimate reasons why desk-oriented work can't be accomplished primarily from a home office?

**Vanderkam:** Not many good ones! There is certainly some work that must be done on-site (for instance, if there's specialized equipment or security issues), but much information work

can be done anywhere. I know that collaboration is somewhat more intuitive when you work face to face, which is why most places won't go 100% virtual in the future. My guess is that organizations will come to a hybrid solution of two to three days per week in the office and two to three days per week at home (or one week a month in the office and three at home). In this schedule, collaborative work can be concentrated on the in-person days and focused, individual work on the work-from-home days. That's the best of both worlds.

**SMM:** You are a proponent of planning in weeks rather than days, and only slightly ahead of time. (For example, planning the next week on a preceding Friday.) You feel it helps anyone take a broader look at what is consuming their time and structure each week for optimal use of that time. Do you propose coaching/managing to this tactic? While trying not to micromanage employees, can managers be actively involved in helping their team members plan in weeks?

**Vanderkam:** I like to think of hands-on management as more "coaching" than micromanagement. Handled right, it's empowering, rather than getting bogged



LAURA VANDERKAM

down in details. Not everyone is a time management master, so good managers can definitely help employees figure out what set of tasks would make for a challenging but doable week.

**SMM:** You state that virtual work presents an opportunity to innovate, not replicate. How so?

**Vanderkam:** When whole organizations went virtual overnight, people naturally tried to replicate the office environment. It makes sense, but long term, remote work gives us an opportunity to question many assumptions. Does everyone have to work the same hours? Do we need the same number of meetings? How do we decide when the day is done? Long term, there are many upsides to remote work, such as allowing people to work under the conditions that they work best. Wise organizations will take advantage of this flexibility rather than just replicating the offices they left behind. **SMM**



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