

5 Best Practices for Remote Team Health and Wellbeing

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As my good friend, Jonathan, reminded me – for nature “It’s business as usual.”
For the rest of us – it’s not.

Over the past month, I have been researching and discussing with clients, colleagues and friends, the practices their organizations are using to support (remote) teams during COVID-19 and how they are promoting health and wellbeing.

I’ve summarized this research and feedback, into **5 best practices**, which I hope is helpful for you and your teams — and families.

References are listed (at the end).

1) Have a daily ‘on-line’ team huddle combined with scheduled 1:1s to check in

Working remotely, it can be harder to know what everyone is working on and, more importantly, who needs help. A simple, 20-minute meeting (audio or video), the same time every morning can help to bridge the gap. Every team member (including you) can be asked to answer the same questions, for example:

- What am I working on today?
- Am I seeing any major obstacles?
- Where do I need help?

Non-mandatory virtual team lunches can, in addition, provide a way for team members to connect informally during the day.

Each team member will have different preferences and needs for 1:1 contact with you. Some will prefer a light touch, others more frequent interaction to discuss what’s working well and what’s a concern. Use your EQ to determine the frequency needed to support each person and to keep on top of things.

To be a good listener you first need to manage yourself. Ensure you are maintaining a sustainable work-life balance.

In your 1:1s, listen closely and read between the lines. Staff may be concerned about parents or elderly relatives, have challenges organizing the home or balancing their workday and their children’s school day or after care.

A coaching technique that can be used at the beginning of your 1:1s is **centering**. If you are both coming from intense meetings or just need a moment

to ground yourself, this technique can help you “reset” before you start your conversation. A 2 minute explanation of the technique is in this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsXHcDBcuEI>

For those who seem isolated, pair them up with another team member to brainstorm and work on a shared project.

2) Recognize herculean efforts, be flexible and ensure a period of respite

COVID-19 has led to an uneven distribution of work. Some have had their hours reduced, others are on overdrive – working more and longer hours than previous — often on critical activities.

People are motivated and energized when working on important tasks, but it is important for leaders to recognize those going the extra mile and ensure some “chill out” time to reduce the chance of burnout. Assign buddies to provide extra capacity and emotional support. Identify those who are less busy but looking to make a meaningful contribution — which could be in areas outside their normal responsibility — and find ways to involve them.

Working from home, we are all learning new relationship and coping skills as families, but each household will be different. Some employees may need to take breaks to look after younger children or elderly relatives. Work will get done but flexibility will be required. Leaders need to demonstrate empathy and trust, focusing more on agreeing objectives and outcomes with staff rather than on task management.

Though it won't be possible to meet up and celebrate victories, be sure to announce these on team calls and through individual notes.

3) Maintain a positive mindset — leaders need to model optimism and remove fear

More than ever, leaders are required to be humble and accepting of the hand they and their teams have been dealt, as well as being the source of optimism and maintain team morale.

People are achieving great things under difficult circumstances. Employees are being asked to take on many new challenges and demands — to adapt, improvise and deliver in new and different ways. New functional and technical solutions are being created — often on the fly.

The best teams are leaning forward into the unknown.

Team members will take a lead from their supervisors. Leaders can encourage and support innovative behavior by reminding their team that they are capable,

by creating a psychologically safe environment that allows risks to be taken and mistakes to be made, and by celebrating successes.

4) Maintain healthy working practices — regularly check stress levels and provide support (tools and resources)

Let your team know that their wellbeing is of primary concern.

Help your team avoid burnout by encouraging regular breaks and limits to the working day.

Encourage healthy habits, such as exercise (while social distancing), adequate sleep and allowing sufficient time for relaxation. People are finding many different ways to relax (e.g. on-line exercise classes, gardening, listening to favorite songs, watching favorite movies, scheduling more frequent calls with friends and family.) Each of us will have our preferences, but the important thing is to ensure employees are not socially and emotionally isolated.

Remind your team of any existing health and well-being benefits offered by your organization which may include employee assistance programs such as counseling.

Practices such as gratitude may help bolster mental health. One technique is to start and end each day by listing a few things for which you are grateful.

Some organizations offer mindfulness education (a well-documented form of meditation to improve focus and reduce stress). There are also many online apps available support mindfulness e.g. <https://www.puregym.com/blog/top-free-mindfulness-apps/> and as well as free videos on YouTube.

This is also an important time to “reflect and reframe.” For many of us, life has suddenly become much simpler — we have fewer choices in what we can do. We can all benefit by taking advantage of this time to re-assess our priorities and think about how we might live differently moving forward.

5) Create new routines and structure to help build resilience

Encourage your team members to create daily routines. Structure, routine and a sense of purpose can be helpful for all members of the family. Where and how everyone works and plays may need to be planned, while recognizing the need to be adaptable.

Decide what time you will start work each day (you won't have the commute), what time you plan to finish or take breaks, and how you can best manage around family member's schedules, including meals.

Consider when is your best time of day for thinking and creativity, and protect that time if possible.

Schedule some time for self-care each day. Be intentional about incorporating activities that give you a sense of meaning, comfort or joy.

Manage your information intake – particularly around the news. Avoid social media “rumors” and limit the amount of news programs you watch or listen to. It’s important to stay informed but a daily barrage will cause some to elevate their level of stress.

Limit electronics. You may have more time on your hands than usual but use this time to work on a few home projects, play a game or develop a new skill.

Help others – reach out to someone who may need a helping hand. This will not only make you feel better, but take the focus off you.

Practice good sleep hygiene – seek to go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.

Invest in your social relationships (friends, family, community)

Open up to flexibility. Many things will be outside of your control right now. Accept your feelings but seek to adapt and look for the opportunities in challenging times

Take problem-solving action. Focus on things that under your control and take a small step forward.

Practice gratitude.

Overall, these times — unprecedented for the vast majority of us — have shown us how capable and adaptive we are. My hope is that we can take our learning and experiences forward and apply them to our future lives to create stronger teams, organizations and communities.

References (Links):

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