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How to keep mental health on track during remote working

'Surviving, let alone thriving, through these times will take every member of your team playing their part'

BY John Hilton / 03 Apr 2020 / Share f 🐦 in ✉

As the Covid-19 pandemic crisis continues to progress, organisations are already being forced to stand down their workforces and close their doors.

Many others are scrambling to adapt and implement the business continuity plans they never really thought they'd need.

The reality is a lot of people are facing circumstances and levels of stress they've never had to deal with before, according to Karen Gately, founder of Corporate Dojo.

"As the weeks and potentially months of isolation roll on its highly predicable that some people will struggle to maintain mental health," she said.

"It's safe to say the risk of mental illness impacting scores more people across our community than what is typical is very real.

"Leaders face both a great opportunity and challenge in helping people to maintain not only positivity but mental health through what are largely unknown days, weeks or months ahead."

Gately added that while fear is a natural human response to threat, allowing anxiety or depression to take hold is something as a community we can't afford to let happen.

"As business leaders what we need is for people to be thinking clearly, trusting one another, taking ownership and collaborating to solve the problems our organisations are facing," she said.

"Surviving, let alone thriving, through these times will take every member of your team playing their part."

Gately outlines the following tips to keep mental health on track during remote working.

Engage positively with other people
Leaders are wise to appreciate that an individual's well-being is deeply influenced by their opportunity to engage positively with other people and earn a living for themselves and their families. So clearly, priority order number one is to work hard to avoid redundancies.

As the 2012 World Health Organisation report titled 'Risks to Mental Health: An overview of vulnerabilities and risk factors' points out, lost opportunity to gain an education or earn an income are especially significant influencers of mental wellbeing.

Work hard to stay connected. Spend time very day talking to people one to one or in groups. Don't assume just because members of the team are introverted and enjoying the opportunity to get on with work without interruptions, that they don't also need to be in contact with their manager and colleagues.

Maintain routines
The more predictability and certainty we can build back into our lives the better. To the extent that is possible maintain a consistent schedule of meetings throughout the week. If you typically have a Wednesday morning team meeting for example, continue to do that via video conferencing. Even end of week social gatherings can still happen – just online.

Create a sense of community. Extended periods of isolation can be especially damaging to the strength of our spirit and mental health. We are fortunate to live in a time when we have the technology to connect 'real time' and ensure every member of the team feels visible and supported. Look for opportunities for the team to get to know one another better than they did before or laugh together.

Be flexible and adapt

For the foreseeable future its neither possible nor desirable to take a 'one size fits all' approach to leading teams. Be mindful of the individual circumstances people face and take steps to adapt your approach as needed. For example, know when a member of your team is living alone and unable to interact with other people.

Have a full appreciation how people are now working and what that means for their capacity to focus and deliver.

For example, while in some households it may be easy to switch to work mode, keep in mind some people are working at the kitchen bench while kids and pets run riot. Simply demanding more or turning up the pressure isn't going to change reality and is likely to lead to unsustainable levels of stress for all concerned.

Influence how people are thinking and feeling. The simple truth is none of us has the power to control either Covid-19 or the economic impact being felt around the world.

The only real power we have is to choose our perspective and response to the circumstances we find ourselves in. Continue to express empathy but encourage also that people look beyond their fears to the things they can control