



Ideas and information for
human resource professionals



HR TRENDS

4 Self-Care Tips For Working From Home

The shift from traditional office environments to telework hasn't just put a strain on businesses unaccustomed to remote work—it's a major adjustment for employees as well. Current circumstances aside, working from home already presents new challenges that typical commuters may find themselves unprepared for. When combined with the stress and anxiety of the coronavirus pandemic, workers' mental health and performance can seriously suffer.

That's why self-care is now more important than ever. Working in the midst of a crisis means employees need to prioritize their mental health and ensure they're taking extra precautions to mitigate stress. As company leaders of health and wellness initiatives, it's crucial that HR representatives lead by example and demonstrate the importance of self-care, especially when it's the HR team that's potentially the most overworked from the complications of COVID-19. Here are a few self-care tips you and your company can use to maintain mental health and well-being while working from home.

1. Practice Desk-ercise

With the daily commute no longer needed, plus the closing of gyms and fitness studios nationwide, most office workers are more sedentary than ever. Remaining active during quarantine can be difficult, especially with most states implementing a stay-at-home order, so it's important to get in some sort of physical activity wherever possible. One simple, efficient way to do this is through "desk-ercise," or easy stretches you can perform at your desk to get blood flowing and to relax tight muscles. These can include basic neck rolls, shoulder shrugs, wrist curls and quarter squats.

2. Designate Workspaces

Whether it's an entire room, or even just a specific desk or chair, it's important to designate spaces that are for work and spaces that are for relaxation. Without these designations, remote employees typically have a poor work-life balance. For example, don't open your work laptop and start the day while still in bed—set up a space that you have to enter to get work done. You'll not only be more productive, but establishing that boundary will help you relax and decompress when the workday is finished.



3. Let the Light In

Under quarantine, most of us aren't getting the fresh air and sunshine we're accustomed to—a serious detriment to our mental health. It's important to combat this by taking brief, regular walks or jogs during breaks. Additionally, be sure to open some windows and set up your home office in sunlight when you're working indoors. It may not seem like much, but the spring air and natural light can work wonders for our state of mind.

4. Breathe or Meditate

In this stressful time, it's important to take time to unplug and recharge your mental batteries. One of the best ways to do this is through deep breathing exercises or guided meditation. There are countless apps and online resources for either of these techniques (Calm and Headspace are two popular choices for meditation), and many of them are offering free or discounted trials due to COVID-19.

LEGAL AND COMPLIANCE

Remaining ADA-Compliant Under COVID-19

The coronavirus crisis has forced human resources teams to juggle more challenges than ever before, from employee benefits and sick leave to new teleworking policies. On top of this, the drastic change in the American workplace has spawned new laws and protocols, while raising questions about how these new regulations affect standing legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In order to remain fully compliant, HR departments need to keep abreast of the latest developments, especially regarding the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which officially went into effect April 2. Here's some guidance on how to remain ADA-compliant while your company implements new policies in response to COVID-19.

Calling in Sick and Recruitment

[According to the EEOC](#), the reasonable accommodation and nondiscrimination regulations mandated by the ADA, as well as the Rehabilitation Act, are still in effect; however, they “do not interfere with or prevent employers from following the guidelines and suggestions made by the CDC or state/local public health authorities about steps employers should take regarding COVID-19.” So as a general rule of thumb, any guidelines or protocols made by the CDC are considered independent from the ADA, and can be acted on accordingly while remaining compliant. Still, there are a few scenarios where the coronavirus takes precedent.

For example, if an employee covered by the ADA calls in sick, employers may request information about the illness, in order to protect the health and wellbeing of the workforce, as reported by the EEOC. If the employee exhibits symptoms of COVID-19, the ADA allows the employer to require the employee to stay home.

The EEOC also offers guidance if an employer is hiring during the crisis. After making a conditional job offer, employers can screen potential hires for coronavirus symptoms—so long as this practice is applied to all employees that are entering the same or similar position.



Employees With COVID-19

If an employee contracts coronavirus, their symptoms would likely not qualify as a disability according to ADA guidelines. Temporary impairments with no substantial long-term impact, like broken limbs, concussions, pneumonia, and influenza, are typically not considered disabilities under the law.

However, according to Littler Mendelson P.C., a legal firm specializing in labor and employment law, an employee with severe COVID-19 symptoms, or one whose symptoms worsen or complicate a pre-existing health issue or concern, could be entitled to ADA accommodation or protection. A panel consisting of Littler counsel, shareholders, and associates report that “the ADA requires employers to assess whether a particular employee is “disabled” under the ADA on an individualized basis, taking into account the employee’s particular reaction to the illness, their symptoms and any other relevant considerations.”

It’s also important to refer to your state’s specific disability laws, and pay particular attention to how your state defines disability. If those laws are more lax than the ADA’s, it’s possible an employee with COVID-19 could qualify for disability.

Remember, the most important thing you can do as a HR professional is to regularly monitor communications from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the World Health Organization, and your local health authorities, to ensure you’re doing everything you can to protect the health and well-being of your employees.

WORKPLACE TRENDS

How to Communicate Effectively in an Isolated Workplace

With the world in isolation and social distancing in full effect, the coronavirus pandemic has suddenly transformed the workplace, maybe irreparably. Almost overnight, businesses across the globe, many of which had no preexisting work-from-home policy, shifted all operations to remote work. The drastic change presented a wave of new challenges for these companies, on top of the strain inherent in working during an international pandemic. Chief of these challenges has been effective communication between coworkers, upper management, and even to clients.

While it may be exacerbated by the coronavirus, the communication issues that arise while working from home aren’t unique to the current climate. Even offices with robust teleworking policies, or ones where the majority of the staff work remotely, can struggle with miscues and information breakdowns. Here are a few tips to ensure your team stays on the same page, and that nothing slips through the cracks.

Be Redundant

When working in close proximity, it’s easy to verify that whoever you’re communicating with has heard you loud and clear, whether that’s via an announcement in a conference room or simply swinging by their desk to follow up. Work-from-home communication has no such luxury, so it’s important to include redundancies when relaying important information, especially if your



organization uses multiple channels of communication like Slack, email, Google Hangouts, and Zoom. In addition to sending an email, consider pinging the recipient over your office's instant messaging platform, as well tagging them in a project management system or other line of communication.

Be Proactive in How You Want To Be Reached

In addition to over-communicating, you can help your team members by establishing the communication channels you want them to use to reach you, and when. This is especially important if you won't have access to certain lines of communication during different times of the day. For example, if you're away from your computer for an hour each afternoon, be sure to give your team with your phone number if they need to reach you. Team managers or supervisors need to be especially proactive. "As a remote team manager, it's important that you're proactive in making sure that everything runs smoothly," says Gloria Kupp, a recruiting manager and career advisor. "The more proactive you can be, the more fluidly your team and employees will operate."

Update Progress in the Short- and Long-Term

Most companies have implemented some sort of daily check-in or regular progress monitoring in order to keep teams abreast of project developments (and to keep employees on task in a working environment that's now rife with distractions). These are helpful for short-term updates, but it's essential that workers also remain proactive in advancing long-term goals as well. Consider setting up a separate document or video conference to keep track of assignments that span greater lengths, whether that's larger projects or just long-term personal goals.

OFFICE CULTURE

Preserving Office Culture, Without an Office

Organizational culture is one of the most crucial elements of a business and remains one of the most predictive indicators of a company's health. It's a major underlying factor in worker productivity, overall company performance, and employee retention. And if an employee does depart the company, a healthy office culture can turn them into genuine advocates. It's also one of the most important criteria for job applicants when deciding where to take their talent.

Fostering an organizational culture that lasts is already no easy feat, but coupled with nearly all companies working from home for the foreseeable future, the difficulties only compound. The usual techniques HR departments use to drum up culture and morale—employee outings, friendly contests, team-building exercises—either are impossible to execute in our isolated workplace, or when translated to a telework environment, lose a significant amount of their impact. Unlike other company operations, there isn't a handy app or easy software that can automate culture.

Despite this, there are still ways to preserve and even strengthen your office's organizational culture during this difficult time.



Create a Virtual Water Cooler

Whether it's a designated break room or an actual water cooler, traditional work environments have physical spaces where employees can chat, mingle, and take a quick breather from the workday. For remote work, it's important to establish virtual spaces that serve this same purpose. Depending on your company and the communication channels you use, that could be a regularly scheduled Zoom call that anyone can join to chat, or a separate Slack channel designated for freetalk. Whatever it is, creating that space helps employees feel comfortable and relaxed while furthering the company's culture as a whole.

Bring Back the Icebreakers

With the exception of a new employee joining the team, typically offices don't need the usual icebreaker exercises. Team members tend to get to know each other organically throughout the workday, whether it's by sitting in the same cubicle section or talking in the break room. Unfortunately, working from home doesn't offer these same points of interaction. Instead, consider weaving in icebreakers and fun getting-to-know-you questions into the remote workday. For example, daily check-ins could start or end with a question about favorite movies, TV shows, or food.

Get the Most Out of Video Conferencing

While it's obviously not the same as face-to-face interaction, video conferencing is about the closest we can get to simulating the real office. Now is the most opportune time to build office camaraderie and strengthen company culture. Already, workers have been having fun with Zoom's [virtual background feature](#), with some businesses even holding friendly competitions to see who can get the most creative. Others have turned to costume contests, virtual happy hours and pet show-and-tells. Whatever it is, consider some sort of fun activity your team can do to get the most out of the daily facetime.

EMPLOYER WEBINAR

What Employers Need to Know about Notice and Disclosure Requirements for Group Health Plans

Tuesday, May 12, 2020 • 2:00 p.m. ET / 11:00 a.m. PT

This webinar will help employers understand the various notice and disclosure requirements for group health plans.

This webinar will:

- Discuss notices that should be provided at open enrollment, such as ERISA notices, Medicare Part D creditable coverage disclosure, HIPAA notice of privacy practices, and wellness program notice and any recent changes to template notices provided by the DOL that employers should be aware of
- Discuss annual notices and disclosures that are provided outside of open enrollment during the plan year and any recent changes to templates



- Discuss the timing requirements of when notices and disclosures must be provided and the differences in timing requirements when an employer is using a calendar year or a non-calendar plan year
- Highlight differences between notice requirements for fully-insured plans and self-funded plans
- Discuss the DOL rules for electronic distribution of notices and the types of notices that can be distributed electronically
- Discuss best practices for tracking notice distribution, including document retention periods

This 60-minute intermediate level webinar will help employers understand the various notice and disclosure requirements for group health plans.

Registration

[Register here for the webinar](#). The presentation will be posted on the [UBA website](#) the afternoon before the webinar.

About the Presenter

[Chelsea Deppert](#) is an associate in the Atlanta office of Fisher Phillips. She provides practical guidance to employers on the technical aspects of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) and other state and federal laws impacting the design, implementation and ongoing compliance of employee benefit plans and programs. She advises clients with respect to all aspects of employee benefits, including retirement plans, health and other welfare benefit plans.

Certification

This webinar has been submitted to the [Human Resource Certification Institute](#) and the [Society for Human Resource Management](#) to qualify for 1 recertification credit hour.