

According to the American Psychological Association, complex jobs that require little collaboration are best done in a remote environment.

FOR YOUR BUSINESS

by FAITH SAUNDERS

Over a year has gone by and the pandemic continues. Many people are coming back to work, while others continue to work virtually, either part-time or full-time. While working from home offers many advantages for both employers and employees, it presents challenges. Workers with children often struggle to balance their professional and personal lives, especially as it relates to the child's education—which is often done virtually. Others struggle to care for elderly family members who are ill, as they are more susceptible to the virus. Those who come into a workplace part-time fear contracting the virus during their time at work.

On top of these and other concerns is the anxiety workers have about facing their fears. Many workers hesitate to share their emotional stress with their employers, which creates a lot of pressure. The following tips can help you create a nonjudgmental work environment for team members to open up.

- Create a safe work environment where everyone can communicate openly and listen empathically. This is best done by listening first to understand, and then explaining to be understood.

- Working from home can blur the boundaries between employees' work and personal lives. Encourage workers to create a structured workday with a beginning and an end. Encourage team members to use a time management method like the Pomodoro Technique (search "Pomodoro Technique" online), which advocates using a timer to break down work into short (25 minutes, traditionally) intervals, separated by short breaks.



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Steps to connect

Effectively leading employees who are working from home or returning to the office

- Find creative ways to connect with your team members—one human being to another—to make the virtual workspace more human. For instance, allow employees to participate in informal water cooler conversations, host virtual coffee breaks or schedule virtual after-hours get-togethers.

- Schedule check-in time with each team member. Ask about not only work-related matters, but also how the person is doing overall and how you can be supportive.

- Encourage your team to share community resources. For example, in New Jersey, a few help lines provide free and confidential emotional support, allowing people to speak to a qualified professional.

Implementing an infrastructure that supports connection among you and your employees can be a win-win for all involved. Conversely, not doing so can result in a company finding it difficult to maximize its potential. ■



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Support your team

Having a professional speak with your team about work-life stressors—such as the pandemic—can make a huge difference. At the very least,

it shows that someone cares.

A professional can help problem-solve issues and provide practical strategies that may help members of your team cope.

As a professional trainer

who has facilitated hundreds of these workshops, I can say they not only build connections and provide support among members of a team, but they also bring compassion back into the workplace.—FS