

Top tips: maintaining great service in challenging times

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, many traditional ways of working are no longer viable. A new normal is being established - and we are all grappling with the challenges and opportunities it presents. We reached out to our network of Vice Presidents - business leaders drawn from across a range of sectors - for their top tips on maintaining great service in these challenging times and with a more disparate workforce. We've included a list of contributors at the end.

The key to being successful is communication - and this is even more important for people who are not used to home working. Not only are we currently asking people to adapt to home working we are also doing it against a backdrop of possibly having children or family at home too in a very uncertain climate.



Staff who have never worked from home before are especially vulnerable and may need more support during this time. We are in a situation where we have asked people to change their working practices that they have had for a lifetime and embrace something new, this isn't something that can be up and running and effective on day one!

Leadership & management

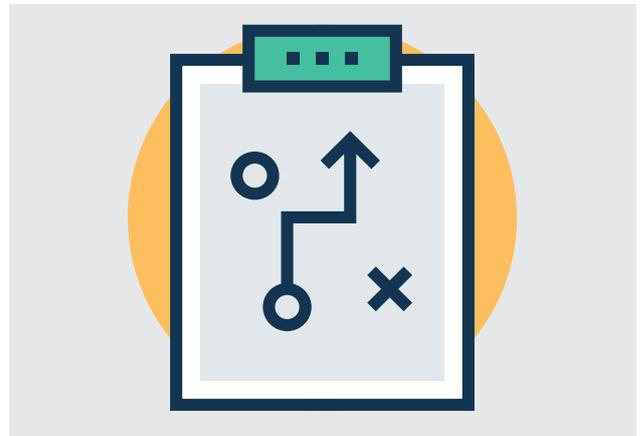
- Staff working remotely at this critical time will need reassurances and support; strong and visible leadership has never been as important
- Leaders need to be able to step up and guide people through uncertain times. They also need to demonstrate resilience and an ability to keep leading the way and supporting the whole workforce
- Accountability - empower your team with crystal-clear accountabilities, focussing on outcomes, rather than outputs. In other words, care more about 'the what' (results) than 'the how' (process)
- Manage people by output not hours worked – set clear, focussed goals on what they should be achieving rather than getting hung up on working the set hours (you can set work that should take the right number of hours to complete)
- Chain of communication - This is absolutely key. Getting sorted who talks to whom, at what stage, via which channel/system should not be underestimated. Consultant, Ben Bax, worked with a number of clients over the past years where fixing this one thing achieved a significant step change in productivity and customer loyalty
- Set routines for your people – working at home is a discipline and a skill... a skill that not all of us have naturally, we have to work at it
- Leaders should up the energy and spend more time connecting with their people setting goals and coaching them on their output and performance
- Managers need to be more flexible than ever in their approach, they need to be empathetic, they need to be mindful of every employees different circumstances and adapt their style accordingly

Communication

- Ensure all customer, field (and home working), office communications are kept simple and aligned. Information overload is a major risk to us all at the moment
- For the really key communications, guidance/instructions have an internal process in place to assure that each colleague has 'seen it, read it, understood it, signalling doing it' and positively support them if not. If colleagues are confused, then customers are guaranteed to be
- Be in touch with every colleague every day – supervisor to individual, if only briefly – healthy minds and wellbeing are key to maintaining great service too. We can all make a call instead of sending an email, etc
- Have Gold, Silver, Bronze major incident response structures meeting at least daily such that any emerging customer or colleague situation or pattern is spotted quickly and the full capability of the organisation/enterprise can be rapidly and effectively coordinated to respond
- Keep thanking people and teams all of the time. The speed of response, change and adjustment so far has been nothing short of remarkable in so many cases, yet there is a long haul ahead
- While it's important to stay informed, it's important to avoid speculation/misinformation and use reputable sources for information and advice on the virus such as the WHO, the FT and gov.uk
- Be clear on what constitutes an essential service and operating to that – really really important for colleague' hearts and minds' and customer opinion
- Build trust and confidence to always be doing the right thing with customers and colleagues alike
- Keep all third-party service providers engaged two-way and in step

Strategy & planning

- Think in terms of feasible 'worst case' situations in planning ahead – get a plan for those and then lower-level events will be easier to address
- Know what your' plan B' is to support customers if 'plan A' can't happen for whatever reason – dynamic risk assessment and response
- Staff will undoubtedly have lots of questions, make sure you have thought about the frequently asked questions



Technology & information

- Engage technology to bring people together: Zoom meetings, Microsoft Teams, Skype, etc
- Ensure you stay connected, stay in touch with colleagues, friends and family, by telephone, email or video calling. Video calling is great not only do you feel more connected you actually feel like you have seen people
- Schedule regular daily check in points with your teams and use technology to ensure people feel connected to the wider team
- Share more information about company performance – the amazing customer service stories we are seeing every day Strategy & planning

Mental health & wellbeing

- The welfare of staff is paramount at this time, make sure you have several different channels of communication open to people, make it easy to stay in touch
- Think about ways to help your stress management, keep active and eat a balanced diet
- You (and your people) may want to assess your social media activity and adjust if necessary, consider unfollowing accounts that cause you to feel anxious
- Plan your day. As tempting as it might be to stay in pyjamas all day, keeping up regular routines are essential for our identity, self-confidence and purpose. Start your day at the same time you usually would and aim to build in movement, relaxation, connection and reflection into your day
- Move more every day. Being active reduces stress, increases energy levels which can make us more alert and help us to sleep better. Even at home, there are lots of ways to exercise and keep your body moving, e.g. gardening, housework, fitness workouts.
- Relaxation techniques. Focusing on the present can help improve your mental health and lighten negative feelings. Try different meditation or breathing exercises to see what helps
- Connect with others. Staying at home, especially if you live on your own can feel lonely. Find creative ways to keep in touch with your colleagues, friends, family and others to help you and them feel more connected and supported. Find a way that works for you, over the phone, social media or video chat. Could be as simple as sharing a cup of tea over a video chat
- Get out of the house - you don't have to get out every day, but you should try to do so regularly. Your body needs to move. Plus, the fresh air and natural light will do you good. Take a walk. Go to the supermarket. Weed the garden. (Ensure you do so within the Social Distancing guidelines)
- Take time to reflect. Make time every day to reflect on what went well. It's important to recognise your successes and the things you are grateful for, no matter how small
- Improve your sleep. Feelings of uncertainty and changes to daily life may mean you have more difficulty sleeping. There is a lot you can do to improve your sleep. Aim to go to bed and get up at the same time each day, even at the weekend if you can and try to get some natural sunlight by opening your curtains and windows where possible. This helps to regulate your body clock, which can help you sleep better. Wind down before bed by avoiding using your phone, tablet, computer or TV for an hour before bedtime

Safe working practices

- Be clear on new/adjusted safe working procedures, particularly when these involve accessing customer premises where occupants may be suffering from COVID-19 or self-isolating
- Develop these in full collaboration with H&S team, Trade Unions (as applicable), other key stakeholders – move in step and together

Process improvement

- Keep a log of the new norm – in so many cases, when this is thankfully all over, serving customers as we used to, from the buildings we used to, will never return to be the same again. There are many many business and environmental positives to be taken from this transition in amongst so many difficult personal moments now and still to come

Attitude & behaviour

- Get dressed and take pride in your appearance
- Exercise – get outside if you can
- Sit at a desk – put your monitor at eye level – don't work slumped on the couch
- Write a to-do list and DONE list and share it with a colleague/team
- Split your day into 'productivity chunks' of 45/90 mins – what works for you?

Working productively as a team

- Ensure you stop working at the end of the day. Switch off and have a separation between work and home
- Discuss and agree with your team about regular catch ups -as if you were in the office. No meeting should be longer than 90 mins
- Show your team your surroundings via video call. Take it in turns to drive a meeting
- Don't just email – if people live alone they may not talk to anyone all day
- Instant chat about non-work things, share a funny news story. Like music? Share playlists
- Let your team know they're doing a good job. High fives are virtual, but needed
- Be mindful of challenges people may have
- Some people end up putting in more hours and working harder when they're at home. Monitor this - don't let people burn out

Can any good come from this? Perhaps. Think about opportunities

- Creativity – You could get some amazing creative ideas from your team
- Productivity – Fewer meetings and distractions, lots of focussed work will get done. Work will be prioritised. We'll focus more on what matters
- Self-leadership – Team members will need to self-manage and self-motivate. Some will really step up!
- Less travel – some people may get 2-hours a day back without travelling. Less stress – more work for some
- Rehearsal – this is a rehearsal for the future of work. It could change us forever
- Technology – those with less appetite for technology will have to get to grips with it. It's what Microsoft Office 365 is made for



A big thank you to our contributors:

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We hope these top tips are useful - we'd love to hear your feedback. If you have any questions or would like information about membership, please get in touch: enquiries@icsmail.co.uk