Unexpectedly Transitioning to **Remote Work**

The Complete Guide for Managers & Employees Navigating Covid-19

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Overview

You've watched it on the news, scrolled through it on Instagram or chatted about it with friends—COVID-19 is wreaking havoc on our world today.

As of mid-February, 46% of American businesses have instituted remote work policies, one of many work-related recommendations by the CDC. Whether we are ready to face this new reality, life as we know it is changing. Not just the way we connect with family or spend time with friends, but the way we work.

Don't worry, you're not alone. ProService is here to help. In this ebook, get advice & tips for making a smooth transition to remote-work.

Is it Time to Implement Remote Work for Your Employees?

First and foremost, remember that the CDC is recommending Americans practice "social distancing" to slow the spread of coronavirus. This can help prevent our healthcare system from becoming overwhelmed, saving lives. So by having your employees work from home, you're not only protecting their health, but the safety of our entire community.

Second, more employees might be ready for this than you think. We live in a digital world, so working remotely is not new. Even if your employees haven't officially worked from home before now, many people are already accustomed to interacting online, using digital tools, and learning new technology. Each business is unique, but chances are, making this transition might be easier than you think.

Maybe you've already determined that it's time to pull the trigger on social distancing, and you want to send your employees home. What next?

Here are four steps to follow:

- Step 1: Identify the employee's core work
- Step 2: Assess in-person requirements
- Step 3: Evaluate resources and access
- Step 4: Explore remote-work alternatives

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Step 1: Identify the employee's core work

Look at your employee's job, and make a list of the key responsibilities and tasks that they usually perform. "Core work" involves the activities that take up at least 70% of your employee's usual work hours. If you're not sure, talk with your employee about the day-to-day tasks that take up most of their time.

Step 2: Assess in-person requirements

Review the employee's responsibilities, and identify any activities that require them to be physically on-site. For example, an accountant or admin may do a lot of tasks that could be handled over the phone or on the computer, like record-keeping, consulting with clients, or calling clients to remind them about appointments. Other roles can only be done in person, like cooking, stocking shelves, cleaning hotel rooms, or providing dental hygiene services.

If an employee's job doesn't involve a lot of tasks that have to be done in person, consider transitioning them to work from home. If you're not sure, ask yourself:

- Does this employee interact with customers face-to-face regularly?
- Can the employee's tasks be done by phone or by email?
- What tasks, would not get done if the employee was not physically on-site?
- Does this person have enough volume of work they can do at home to keep them busy for days or weeks?
- If the employee's primary job can't be done remotely, are there other tasks they could be assigned until business gets back to normal?

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Step 3: Evaluate resources and access

Maybe you've determined that an employee doesn't need to be physically in the office to do their core work. But do they have the right resources and access to do their job at home? Determine what tools the employee needs to do their job.

For example:
- Desktop or laptop computer
- Secure access to applications & data
- Internet access
- Online communication tools e.g. Zoom or G-Suite
- Home phone or cell phone with adequate data

Once the employee is set up to work from home, consider trying it out. Schedule a time for the employee to test the remote work experience and identify any problems. Make sure the employee's manager is on hand to provide feedback, along with IT support to help with troubleshooting.

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Step 4: Explore remote-work alternatives

Depending on your business, remote work may not be possible. But there are still things you can do to reduce risk for your employees and customers. Consider these tips to increase social distancing at work:

- Stagger shifts to have fewer people working side-by-side.
- Reduce your operating hours or shorten shifts to limit potential exposure.
- Limit the number of people in your workplace at any given time.
- Increase the physical space between employees and customers e.g. using windows for interactions or implementing curbside drop-off and pickup.
- Post signage at entrances asking people not to enter if they have symptoms, and suggesting they send a friend in instead.
- Provide staff with clear instructions and expectations around hygiene, such as using gloves, staying home if sick, and proper hand-washing.

Make the best decision for your employees and community

Following the news about coronavirus is stressful for everyone. Employers have the additional worry of trying to figure out how best to take care of their employees and customers in a rapidly changing situation. While making the decision to work from home isn't easy, by staying calm and following a step-by-step process, you'll be able to come up with the plan that's best for everyone.

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5 Tips to Help Your Team Be Productive While Working Remote

You've decided that remote-work makes sense for your business and your team. Now what?

Some of your team may feel thrilled about the possibility of working remotely—but not everyone will feel that way. Some may dread it. But if remote work is our new reality, your role is to help employees make the best of it.

In part 2 of this ebook, we provide tips and best practices you can share with your team. Feel free to copy and paste, and share it with your team.

Tip #1: Set up your workspace

In a perfect world, we'd all have a home office or private space where we could close the door on distractions, but that's not always possible. So what should you do if you don't have a separate room or desk that's conducive to work?

Pick one spot and dedicate it to work

Pick one area of the home and set it up as your workspace. If possible, choose a quiet area that's not in a busy part of the house. If there's no designated office area, you can even work somewhere like your dining room table or a corner of your bedroom. You can use a folding table and chair if you don't have access to a desk. Avoid areas where you usually lounge, like the TV room, or the house common area where your roommates gather to talk story.

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Consider establishing a marked boundary around your space. Put up a shoji screen or hang a sheet or curtain to block off your area. Or put down painter's tape on the floor to create "invisible walls" around your workspace.

Keep everything in one place

Having all your work tools and activities in one designated place not only ensures you won't misplace an important paper, it helps you mentally separate your work life from your home life. At the same time, it also helps establish boundaries with your family and reminds them that when you're in your workspace, you're working.

What to do if you have to set up your workspace in a common area, like the dining room table? Store your work materials neatly in a box or crate at the end of the workday so you can easily clear them away and keep them organized until it's time to work again.

Stay off the couch

Yes, we know it's comfortable. But working from a place where you're used to relaxing can make it harder to make the mental shift to "work mode" and stay focused through the day— especially if your family or housemates are also using the area to hang out and watch TV.

At the same time, while the couch may feel soft and inviting at first, spending too much time curled up with your laptop can lead to back and body pain, affecting your productivity.

Get dressed

While it may be tempting to spend the day in your pajamas, remember that your brain strongly associates pajamas with lounging and sleeping. Getting dressed for work can help you switch gears, feel more professional, and start your day mentally prepared to do your job. That doesn't mean you need to put on your best Reyn's Spooner shirt for your commute to the kitchen table. Aim to at least put on clothes that are clean, neat, and you wouldn't be embarrassed to wear outside the house.

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Tip #2: Establish hours, breaks & boundaries

It's tempting to sleep in and take a leisurely breakfast. After all, you don't have anywhere to go! But keeping yourself on a regular schedule is key to staying productive. Try these tips.

Create a routine— and stick with it

Set your alarm for the usual time, and make a commitment to maintain your normal working hours. It's easy to lose momentum when you're switching back and forth between work and family activities throughout the day, so staying consistent will keep you productive, and help train your brain to stay focused on work. And having a regular "clock out" time will help you switch gears and unwind at the end of the day.

Set a regular time for lunch and breaks

When you work in an office, it's easier to separate work and personal time, so you need to be more intentional about taking breaks when you work from home. If you're someone who forgets to eat when you're in the zone, set a calendar alert or use a reminder app to schedule time for a break.

When it's time for lunch, leave your workspace and prepare some real food to eat. And take regular, short breaks throughout the day to step away from your desk, stretch your shoulders, hug your kids, or go for a walk outside if you're in an area where it's safe to do so.

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Prioritize tasks and chunk your time

If you're someone who has a hard time multitasking, it's even more important to focus on your immediate work when you're at home, since there are so many things that can tug at your attention. Make a to-do list and rank your priorities so you know what to focus on first.

Try chunking your time. At the beginning of your day or week, block out chunks of time on your calendar where you focus on completing your most important projects, then plan time to do your small tasks in batches, such as scheduling an hour to take care of all your client calls.

When the work day is over, it's over

Set a timer for a half hour before the end of your work day, and start winding up. Then, clock out. Stop checking your email or computer, and don't look at work messages on your phone during family time. And try to use weekends to fully disconnect and do a family activity or make time to relax. Between the stress of working from home and the anxiety of following the news, it's extra important to take time to recharge.

Tip #3: Anticipate & plan to deal with distraction

Between kids, your spouse, pets—and that sudden burning desire to do the laundry—it's easy to get sidetracked when you work from home. Here's how to keep distraction at bay.

Communicate your needs

Your family can't respect your boundaries if they don't know what they are. That's why it's important to sit down with the members of your household and talk about what you need them to do to help you focus. Hold a house meeting where you ask everyone about their daily schedule, and share your own. Be sure to mention any times when you know you'll need things to be especially quiet, such as video meetings or phone calls.

Remember: it will take people time to get used the new routine. Be patient if you have to remind your family members throughout the day that you need quiet.

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Coordinate schedules

You may have to compromise and work around other people's needs, but planning ahead will make things easier and reduce conflict. If you have young children, try to plan things like conference calls during their nap time or another quiet time of the day. If your spouse is also working from home, you may need to plan your breaks around their schedule so you can take turns with child care.

Create and reinforce boundaries

Remind your family that when you're in your workspace, you're at work and should not be bothered. If kids are having trouble remembering to stay out of your space, consider putting up a friendly sign as a reminder that you're working, or create a "traffic signal" with red, yellow, and green flags to show kids when they need to stop and leave you alone, and when they have the green light to come to you with a question.

Use headphones

If household noise is a distraction, try using earplugs, or put in headphones and listen to calming music or white noise. Even if you don't want to listen to music, wearing headphones can serve as a visual reminder to family members that you're working and can't be interrupted.

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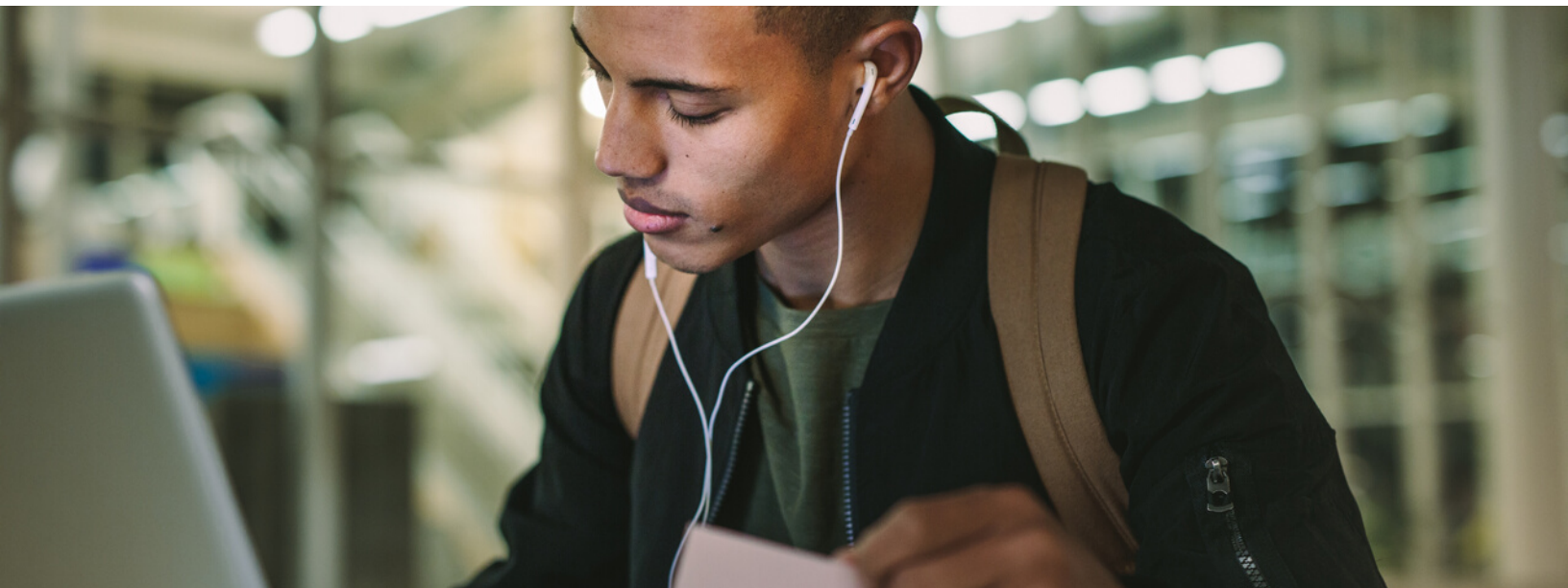
Tip #4: Take care of yourself physically and mentally

It's easy to feel overwhelmed and burned out when you have to cope with work pressures on top of your worries about the news. Taking care of your physical and mental health will help you manage stress and stay productive.

Move your body

You may be surprised to learn that most people tend to walk more when they're at work than when they're at home. That's because the distance between your desk and places like the bathroom and break room is usually farther at the office than in your home, and you're probably also getting up frequently to talk to your boss, coworkers, and clients.

That all changes when you work from home, which is why it's extra important to be intentional about making time to move around. Set a timer to remind yourself to stand up and stretch or move around once an hour, and try to take a walk or go for a jog during your lunch break. If background noise isn't a problem, you can even put on a headset and walk around while you talk on the phone.

Connect with people

Many people don't realize how much socializing they do at work until they have to work from home. Our brains are hard-wired to thrive on human connection, so it can add to your stress when you're not able to talk story with your colleagues in the hall or drop by your work-friend's desk to chat on your break.

When you're working from home, you need to be much more intentional about connecting with others. That might mean picking up the phone to ask someone a question instead of just firing off an email, scheduling a Zoom meeting or Google Hangout, or messaging back and forth with a friend throughout the day.

If you recognize that you're starting to feel lonely or isolated, be proactive about reaching out to your colleagues and your personal network for support. Pro-tip: Schedule virtual happy hours with your coworkers if you miss them!

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Tip #5: Choose your mindset

Whether you're thrilled to work from home or dreading it, remote work is our new reality, so we need to make the best of it. The most important tool to staying productive while remote is your own attitude. Make a commitment to approach this change with a spirit of curiosity and a willingness to experiment and figure out a new way of doing things. Remember to be patient with yourself and others, practice self-discipline, and take time to regroup and focus on the positive when things get challenging.

In a time when there's so much that's outside our control, you can choose to take control of your mindset and make working from home work for you.

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How to Manage Employees Remotely 101

While remote work is nothing new, it's the first time so many people have made the shift at once—so it's natural for some to find the transition challenging.

One of the biggest questions many employers have is how they will be able to communicate with and manage their team. How will you know if people are getting their work done? How can you build relationships if you're not seeing your people every day?

The uncertainty of how things will work can add to an already stressful situation. Fortunately, there are things you can do to make communication and management easier.

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Staying connected while remote

In an office, it's easy to walk over to an employee's desk when you have a question, or sit down face-to-face when you need to deliver feedback. But when people are working remotely, effective communication gets more challenging.

Here's what you can do.

Pay attention to the quality of your communication

Tone matters.
Remember that the majority of communication is nonverbal. Ordinarily, employees and coworkers pick up cues from your tone and body language. That's not always possible when you're working remotely, so it's important to take extra care with your tone at this time.

Prioritize face-to-face.
Yes, video chats can feel awkward, and it's tempting to just fire off an email or IM, but talking face-to-face can help keep your connections strong. Use Zoom, Google Hangouts, or Facetime to schedule video meetings, especially when you need to discuss sensitive or difficult topics. If video isn't available, pick up the phone or schedule a conference call instead.

Assume the best.
This is an extraordinary time, and it's more important than ever to practice empathy. If you find yourself getting frustrated with a coworker or client, take a moment before reacting. Take a deep breath, and think about what the other person might be going through. When you've calmed down, respond with patience and care. Remind yourself that most people are trying their best in a difficult time.

Ask for help.
It's ok to be real about what you need and how you're doing. By being open and honest with your team, you build trust, and signal to them that it's ok for them to open up as well.

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Think about when and how often you reach out

Don't just communicate, over-communicate.
When you work alongside someone, it's easy to just lean over to their desk when you need to double-check information. Now is the time to be very intentional about checking in and making sure you're on the same page. Plan a daily check-in with your team members, and keep a running list of questions or ideas to discuss when you meet.

Be sensitive when scheduling meetings.
If there are certain times of the day when it's easier for team members to meet (like when their kids are resting) keep that in mind. And if your schedule calls for several meetings back to back, plan a short break in between, so people can get up to use the bathroom or grab a glass of water.

Keep video calls professional.
Think about how you'll be presenting yourself on the call, and make sure you're well groomed and wearing something professional, especially when talking to clients. And be mindful of what's behind you. While everybody understands you're working from home, try to keep your background neat and avoid distractions like piles of laundry. If children are in the home, ask for cooperation in keeping things quiet, or mute the line when you're not talking.

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Communicate well with collegues

Give people a heads-up.
If you have kids at home or a dog that might bark, let your team know at the beginning of the meeting that there might be noise, and mute the line if there's a disruption.

Make an effort to talk about non-work stuff.
In an office it's easy to keep personal connections strong by chatting in the break room or going out for the occasional pau hana. When you work from home, you need to make an extra effort. Keep things friendly by showing off your remote-work setup or sharing a picture of your "coworker" pets,.

Plan a virtual lunch.
Plan a "snack and chat" or do a lunchtime video call so you can eat with your colleagues and spend some time talking about non-work things like family and hobbies. Or ask coworkers if they'd like to do a "show and tell," and share something personal, like their vinyl collection, or a new surfboard.

Strengthen customer relationships

Be proactive with communication.
Remember that you're not the only one being impacted by these changes, your clients are being affected by the crisis too. Make a point of reaching out with empathy, and dig deep into your toolbox of customer service best-practices.

Connect over more than just work.
Don't be afraid to get personal and ask clients how they and their family are doing. Find out about their challenges and successes, and share some of yours..

Go above and beyond.
Now is the time to show clients that you're there for them. Don't wait for them to come to you with problems — reach out directly and ask if there's anything else you can do to help.

Managing remote employees

If you've never managed remote employees before, it may feel overwhelming. The good news is that, while there are some unique challenges, the basic practices of good management remain the same. Managing remote employees well means keeping up with what you're already doing, but being more intentional about it.

Give clear direction, then let people do their jobs

Communicate expectations.
If you need your team to be working specific hours, responding to you within a certain amount of time, or using a specific mode of communication (like email or Slack), communicate that clearly. Confirm that your staff has a plan for challenges like child care or distracting housemates.

Establish clear deliverables.
Think about what needs to be accomplished, and let that be your measure of productivity. If your employees are getting their assigned work done, it doesn't matter whether they worked in pajamas for the entire day or listened to music in the background.

Back off.
Make peace with the fact that you can't constantly monitor your employees while they're working from home — and that they'll see you as a micromanager if you try. Make a decision to let your team do their jobs. Communicate to your team that you trust them to get their work done and to come to you if they need anything. Then let go, and plan a regular check-in with individuals and the group to address any challenges that come up.

Run effective meetings

Practice using new platforms.
Make sure employees know how to use your online meeting platform, and give them time to practice and try it out. Be specific if there are any features of the platform that they will be expected to know how to use for meetings (such as screen-share, or mute).

Set the ground rules.
Establish and communicate online meeting norms, and let employees know your expectations — such as asking them to use their webcam so colleagues can see their face, or muting their line when they're not speaking.

Have an agenda.
Help people prepare and keep meetings running efficiently by sending out an agenda in advance.

Stick to video.
Yes, some of your team members might not like using video or might ask if they can just email their updates instead, but hold firm. Explain that it's important to stay connected at this time, and that being able to talk to each other face to face can help the team communicate and work together effectively.

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Make people feel supported

Use emotional intelligence.

This is a stressful time. Keep an eye on your team and ask yourself how everybody's actually doing. Look for social and nonverbal cues that might signal someone is having a harder time than they're letting on. Is the person really ok? Are they healthy? Anxious? Do they need support? Make it a point to reach out and ask if they're getting enough support and what else they might need — and follow through.

Make sure your employees don't get burned out.

Talk with your team members individually about their work-life balance, and make sure they're keeping healthy boundaries. If you notice someone returning emails in the middle of the night or see other signs that a member of your team is being hyper-vigilant, remind them to clock out at the end of the day and make time for self-care.

Ask for feedback.

This might be the first time you or your team has gone remote, so it's natural for there to be a learning curve. Make the decision to approach this process not with a fear of failure, but with curiosity and a willingness to learn. Ask for regular feedback from your team and check in about what's working and how the process could be improved.

Then, offer your own thoughts and requests. By sharing feedback you'll not only help the process go more smoothly, but also help build your company's feedback culture for the future.

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You Can Do This!

This is an extraordinary time for everyone — including employers. But even if the transition to a remote workforce is challenging, remember that you're not alone. Organizations around the world are facing the same challenges, and we here at ProService Hawaii are here to help.

 Remember that, while your physical surroundings and the platforms you use may be different, the basic principles of running a business and managing employees remain the same. If you approach this challenge with thoughtfulness, compassion, and an openness to a new way of doing things, you can rise to the challenge and build resilience in your business for years to come.

How ProService Hawaii Can Help

ProService Hawaii is the state's leader in HR management. We give local employers access to benefits, payroll, HR and compliance support that make it easier to hire, manage and grow their teams.

ProService drives local business forward by taking care of 2,200 employers and 35,000 employees statewide. We combine the power of passionate local experts with innovative HR products and a simple online platform that is transforming the workplace in Hawaii.

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