

# Legislative Staff Training: How to Navigate the "Next, For Now, Normal" Together

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## The Next, For Now, "Normal"

COVID-19 and remote work: which is foreground, and which is background?

- We are coping with both, simultaneously...
  - One layer is in the news, laying foundations for how we do business
  - One layer is the business we need to do, in a context of COVID-19
    - *Both are vying for our attention and priorities*

## Filling the gap: Supervising the unreliable or needy employee

- Make expectations, assignments, deadlines and tasks explicit, clear, written
- Ensure the above are known, discussed and agreed upon with the employee
- Have regularly scheduled, brief up-date calls as often as needed
  - At noon and 4:00 pm? Every morning? Twice a week?
- Supplement reduced task demands with professional development via elevateU or Spartan 365 Power Hour or other opportunities
- Identify courses consistent with unit goals; agree on courses, set deadlines and seek evidence of completion
- Reorder priorities if demands are higher than normal

## Employees maintaining focus: making sure work is getting done

- *It's the **employee's job** to be sure the work is getting done*  
*Help with suggestions for structuring , for example: scheduled time for tasks in writing on Outlook calendar*
- *encourage them to make a distraction-free space (a corner, tri-fold display board...)*
- *set a timer for breaks*
- *schedule a time to do home things & limit to that time*
- *turn a light on/off when in a focus/working period*
- *but beyond tips, **the employee has to structure themselves***

# Manage the mass of new information and ways of interacting

## Set new norms and structure (boundaries)

- *“Establishing priorities has been critical for my team”*
  - *Begin with the end in mind*
  - *Seek first to understand*
  - *Think win-win*

• (Stephen Covey, 7 Habits)

## Structure to relieve stress: overwhelmed with chats?

- *Keep the face-to-face connection an option:*
- *ZOOM daily office hour from 8AM to 9AM, so anyone can connect with you*
- *Set up a weekly meeting to connect with the people you supervise or collaborate with*
- *List all your contacts, via Zoom, email, Face-Time on my out-of-the office email response*
- *And your times when you are available/unavailable*

# Missing people, contact, informal communication, ability to drop in...

- *Change is hard. Period.*
  - *Unanticipated, forced change is harder*
  - *Grief and loss (hopefully temporary) are natural*
  - *We are sad, and scared, while life as we know it is on hold*
- *Set up times to have informal connections*
  - *A weekly coffee break together; an informal Teams chat for humorous posts...*
  - **Trust is built through getting to know each other beyond work. Trust makes collaboration and conflict more navigable.**

## Manage isolation issues

- *Find out what people's best mode of communication it (teams, phone, emial) and set a time each week to connect with them 1:1 in that mode, when possible.*
- *Also, consider small group meetings if your team is large.*
- *Listen with an open heart and open mind*
- *Ensure your openness to hear from them is evident, by making your contact info available, "open office hours" reliably maintained*
- *Provide frequently repeat invitations to contact you*
- *Provide frequent references to resources like WLO, EAP, HR, outside counselling services available*



## Learn how to identify signs that others may be struggling

- *Difficulty finding words, framing answers, delayed or fewer responses than usual*
- *Reduced eye contact*
- *Words don't match facial expressions (e.g. "I'm fine" with a worried look)*
- *They seem more distracted or work is filled with more errors*
- *Changes in behavior, mood, language, more irritated*
- *Other?*

## Self-care vs team care?

“Put on your own oxygen mask first”

Self-care supports care for others

Don't have all the answers yet?

We are all in this together

We are all learners together

We must have more compassion and flexibility now than ever.

Have grace for yourselves and others.

## Decision making: Focus on the task, not the personal aspects

What is the nature of the task/job? Key responsibilities?

- What outputs or indicators of success must be evident?
- What shows accountability on those indicators?
- How do you know the job is done successfully, or well enough?
  
- What is the impact of flexibility on the work/unit, if any?
  - Nature of the impact? Positive? Neutral?
  - Probability of impact?
  - Severity of impact?
  - Scope of impact?

If impact of being flexible is neutral or positive, why *not* be flexible?

## Decision making con't

- Consideration of multiple means to the same end (not a change in the end goal)
  - Is there only one way to do this job?
  - What is the evidence/reason for the need to do this job in a particular way/time frame/schedule/location?

*If a task can be done in more than one way, why not?*

***Thank you!***

***For additional resources, support and  
information,***

**Contact: [worklife@msu.edu](mailto:worklife@msu.edu)**

***Or visit [worklife.msu.edu](http://worklife.msu.edu)***

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