

The art of working remotely

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Organisation Development Consultant Paolo Giuricich shared top tips on working and managing remotely at SAICA's Leadership in a time of crisis webinar series.



Paolo Giuricich

The coronavirus has turned our world upside down and working life as we know it may never be the same. Right now, many of us are still struggling to adjust to the drastic change of working from home. We know how difficult this can be, which is why, as part of our SAICA's complimentary webinar series, *Leadership in a time of crisis*, SAICA invited Organisation Development (OD) Consultant and founder of Smarter EQ, Paolo Giuricich, to share his advice on how to acclimatise to working and leading remotely.

For individuals

Giuricich acknowledges that if you've never worked at home before, it can be a challenging adjustment. His tips will help you make sense of these new changes, and even help you forge better relationships with your colleagues.

Making sense of your new world

The way the world has changed is unprecedented, and for Giuricich, it is imperative that we make sense of what is physically and mentally happening to us

at this particular point in time.

One of the most valuable things we can do right now, is to talk about how we are feeling. "Honest conversations are a useful way to decode and understand your emotions, as well as to try to make sense of "What Is".

For Giuricich, remaining productive in all spheres of life will also help you adapt to your new world. "It's easy to throw yourself into work all day long, but remember that family, friends and your wellbeing are equally important," he says. "You need to figure out how to find balance and bring back perspective."

Giuricich stresses that there is massive opportunity for growth from this collective experience. "It is fascinating to see how things are shaping," he says. "Placing a positive spin on this experience will help us to grow from it."

Deepening relationships

As ironic as it may seem, remote working gives you the ability to deepen your relationships. "Now is the time to build your work relationships and to recontract your boundaries," says Giuricich.

Working at home can cause trust issues, so make sure you constantly keep your team updated on your progress. If you feel slighted or frustrated in any way, call a virtual meeting and openly talk about your issues.

Remember that instant messaging is devoid of tone and open to interpretation, and also that staring at your screen all day can be quite taxing. Sometimes it's best to pick up a phone and talk through issues. Not only will this help deepen your relationships, but it will also reduce the constant flow of messages and emails.

Remote working strategies

When it comes to remote working, we have both physical and wellbeing needs. In terms of physical needs, Giuricich stresses that even if you don't have a dedicated room, you need to create your own workspace. "This is really important in terms of boundaries, as you must be able to close off at the end of the day."

You will also need basics such as good Wi-Fi, as well as a computer with a camera and microphone for virtual meetings.

"On the topic of virtual meetings, remember that there is different etiquette from physical meetings," says Giuricich. "For example, during normal meetings, you can enjoy a drink quite comfortably, but if you sip water on screen, your colleagues may see all kinds of funny facial movements," he explains. "It's important to think about the nuanced etiquette issues of working from home."

That said, Giuricich acknowledges the norms are changing quickly. "A few weeks ago it was awkward to have a dog barking on screen or your kids walking into the shot, but these have become normal disruptions. People understand that you are inviting them into your home."

In terms of wellbeing needs, Giuricich stresses that routine is important. "Wake up at the same time you would if you were going into the office, but use this extra time in different ways, and of course, make sure to change into suitable work attire," he says. "Also, mark the beginning and end of your work day, as these things can blur."

For leaders

Remote working offers a very good opportunity for leaders. "It's time to let go and trust your colleagues," says Giuricich. "If you're a micromanager, let go of the small tasks that others should be handling, and rather start to take care of the emotional state of your team."

Show your vulnerability

In tough times, the ability to be kind and to help those around you become resilient is what's going to count and to build your leadership capability. "Your ability to show your vulnerability becomes incredibly important in these times," says Giuricich. "Now is the time to invest in greater development of your team relationships and for you to suspend your ego and become more human."

Create psychological safety

We all hold fears and anxieties that negatively affect our performance. When we feel safe, our ability to function optimally improves, which is why it is incredibly important for team leaders to create psychological safety.

"During this time you'll start to recognise underlying team dynamics that you've never been privy to before," explains Giuricich. "Somehow these issues become more prevalent in a virtual world."

For Giuricich, it's important you understand how to surface the anxieties within teams, and help your colleagues to co-create the solutions to those anxieties and fears. "Everyone is feeling anxious as they don't know if they'll have a role or even a job when this is over, and they're all trying to deliver as best as possible," explains Giuricich. "Your role as a leader is to support your individual team members on a one-to-one basis."

Celebrating achievements and checking in on everyone's emotions are important ways to improve team morale. Also, remember that this is a time of change and renewal, so leaders need to suspend any difficult behaviour and focus on being supportive. "Your ability to build and grow individuals during this time is going to stamp your mark onto your team and organisation," says Giuricich.

Tips for running a virtual meeting

Suddenly we're interacting with technology in ways that we're not 100% comfortable doing. Giuricich shares his tips for

optimally structuring a virtual meeting:

1. Start with a check-in. Ask your colleagues how they are feeling. This will give you a sense check as a leader on what is going on for your team.
2. Create a very focused agenda.
3. Try to keep your meetings as short as possible.
4. Close with a check out. Go through the actions that need to be taken. Track your team's emotional state to see if there has been a shift in dynamics from the beginning to the end of the meeting.

Paolo Giuricich presented this information at the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants' (SAICA) complimentary Leadership in a time of crisis webinar series, which is focused on supporting individuals, businesses and those in the accountancy profession during the pandemic. Find out more by visiting SAICA's events page at <https://saicaevents.co.za/>.

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