



Timely Information for Personal Success

Will Working Remotely become the New Norm? (Part II)

By Jill J. Johnson

During the COVID-19 crisis, businesses have had to drastically shift the ways that they operate. For many, this means moving their workforce to a work-from-home arrangement—which may be an entirely new situation for some employees.

The concept of remote working has been around for a long time. Many entrepreneurs have mastered the ability to work virtually, but it is often a major challenge for those who normally work in a busy office setting to shift to working outside their traditional office environment. Working remotely can feel more isolating than mingling with co-workers in an office setting.

Being effective while you work remotely takes more than a mindset shift. It requires a disciplined approach to planning your activities and seeking out opportunities to interact with co-workers. A number of practical tips were presented in part one of this two-part article. The remainder appear below.

❖ **Utilize video conferencing:** Using technology applications such as video conferencing is a great way to connect people from different locations. It provides a deeper level of connection and engagement than a phone call or text. Don't worry about looking perfect on camera. The key here is using technology to connect with each other. Remote meetings are often very effective, but you need to make sure everyone is focused on the meeting and not multi-tasking! You can even set up regularly scheduled meetings via video conferencing so you can add more structure to your workday.

❖ **Communicate clearly:** If you are now relying on digital communication with your colleagues through email, be sure you are communicating effectively. Sarcasm or snarky comments have no place in written communication as they can be taken out of context without the body language or facial expressions to convey your meaning. Take some time to plan out the structure for your communication. Identify your key messages and what you need to add to support them. This will help you clarify your thinking and be better understood by others when they are only relying on your written communication.

❖ **Connect with others:** This one bears repeating from last month: When you are feeling a little lonely or isolated, take a minute to reach out to someone. Rather than sending a lengthy email, see if a colleague is available to talk over the phone or

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Healthy Recipe: Sweet Potato & Black Bean Chili

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 tablespoon plus 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large sweet potato, peeled & diced
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 4 teaspoons ground cumin
- 2 15-ounce cans black beans, rinsed
- 1 14-ounce can diced tomatoes
- 4 teaspoons lime juice

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- Calories per serving: 307
- Carbohydrates: 53 g.
- Protein: 12 g.
- Fiber: 14 g.
- Fat: 8 g.
- Saturated fat: 1 g.

DIRECTIONS:

① Heat oil in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add sweet potato and onion and cook, stirring often, until the onion is beginning to soften, about 4 minutes. Add chili powder, cumin, and cook, stirring constantly, for 30 seconds. Decrease heat to a simmer. Cover, reduce heat, and cook until the sweet potato is tender, 10 to 12 minutes.

② Add beans, tomatoes, and lime juice; increase heat to high briefly, 1 to 2 minutes and then return to simmer, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and serve.

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 Phone: 715-445-4386
 Website: writeitrightllc.com
 Email: mjacquart@writeitrightllc.com

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Questions and Answers

Will Workplace Hygiene Improve?

Q: *It's easy to be despondent with all of the uncertainties surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, but I think one of the positives that will come from this is improved hygiene in the workplace such as more hand washing. What do you think?*

A: I whole-heartedly agree. How many times haven't many of us read a sign, "Employees must wash hands before returning to work", but then failed to do so? How many MORE of us will read a sign like that now and take it more seriously? I'd be willing to bet quite a few!

Even more importantly, perhaps the coronavirus pandemic will lead more workers and employers alike to recognize the need for employees to STAY HOME when they are sick. It has been human nature for years to trudge into work regardless of your cold. "I can tough it out!" That's fine for "Joe", but what about all of Joe's colleagues he's exposing to illness as a result of his coughing, and sneezing?

"Social distancing" is a term that likely wasn't even in our vocabularies earlier this year. I would hope it will continue to hold meaning in some form even after COVID is over. We'll all be healthier as a result. ■

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via Skype to talk about a project. If they are working remotely, they might welcome the human contact! Connections like these build team bonds and help sustain you when working remotely. It also offers you additional opportunities to dig deeper into issues and brainstorm alternative solutions to critical issues.

❖ **Be aware of the dreaded "time trap":** It is not uncommon for people to feel guilty that they are not working hard enough when working remotely. It is easy to fall into the time trap to seek out additional job responsibilities to fill your time. Keep in mind that you won't have the same opportunities for productivity once you go back to a normal office environment. You and your boss should be clear about this so the extra work does not cause complications when you get back into the work setting.

Summary

While it is not ideal to have a major shift in how you work, you can adapt to the situation with practice and focus. Keep in mind that it takes time learning to balance all of the complex aspects of working remotely. Be creative in exploring all your options for maintaining a connection with those you work with. Just make sure you keep your mindset on making a remote situation work for you—and your employer. ■

Jill J. Johnson is the President and Founder of Johnson Consulting Services, a highly accomplished speaker, an award-winning management consultant, and author of the bestselling book "Compounding Your Confidence." For more information, visit www.jcs-usa.com.