



Timely Information for Personal Success

The New Workplace: Remote Work Taking Off (Part II)

By Mike Jacquart

As explained in part one of this series, COVID-19 has intensified workplace trends that were occurring even before the pandemic. According to Global Workplace Analytics, prior to the coronavirus outbreak, roughly 3.2% of the workforce were remote workers. In April, that number skyrocketed when over 60% of employed Americans said they had worked from home during the crisis.

That's just for starters.

Digital health is increasing. As the world of work becomes increasingly remote and digital, so does an employee's access to healthcare. As employers are becoming acutely aware of the impact the coronavirus crisis is having on not only the physical well-being of employees but also their mental health, many are making telehealth options available to their workforce. *This, of course, is good news for behavioral health professionals, including EAP practitioners.*

"It's worked during the pandemic and I imagine it's going to continue to work because of the convenience," said Julie Schweber, senior HR knowledge adviser at the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). "Many healthcare insurance organizations are promoting it as a viable way to connect with your healthcare provider, so I definitely see that in the future."

Research is bearing this out. Roughly 53% of 256 employers surveyed by the National Alliance

of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions reported providing special emotional and mental health programs for their workforce because of the pandemic, with offerings including virtual care, apps, *and EAPs.*

For example, Headspace says it's seen a *400%-plus increase* in requests from companies seeking support for their employees' mental health since mid-March. Big Health cites that same triple-digit increase in employer interest in the same time-frame. Many workplace experts predict the interest in virtual care *will not* go away after the pandemic is over.

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Healthy Recipe: Turkey Panini

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 slices Italian bread
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 4 thin slices, peeled and cored apple
- 4 springs watercress, large stems removed
- 1 slice Asiago cheese
- 2 slices (about 2 ounces) cooked turkey
- 1 tablespoon cranberry sauce

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- Calories per serving: 388
- Carbohydrates: 39 g.
- Protein: 27 g.
- Fiber: 2 g.
- Fat: 14 g.
- Saturated fat: 5 g.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Brush one side of each piece of bread with olive oil and lay the bread oil-side down on work surface.
2. Place turkey, cheese, apple slices, and cranberry sauce on top of one of the slices of bread. Place second slice of bread on top, oil-side up.
3. Heat grill pan over medium heat. Grill sandwich on each side until golden brown, about 3 to 4 minutes per side.
4. Transfer sandwich to work surface, lift one piece of bread and arrange watercress inside, then replace the bread.
5. Slice sandwich in half and serve.

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The New Workplace

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Rethinking corporate culture. Until now, most workplace culture was defined by people working together in an office setting. As noted last month, with some firms suddenly having a 100% remote workforce, employers are evaluating the need for a physical office.

The trend toward remote work is resulting in a “great pivot in terms of the employee experience – a much more flexible work experience,” according to Ravin Jesuthasan, workplace futurist and managing director at Willis Towers Watson.

This doesn’t mean that offices won’t still be needed, but they will increasingly be seen as places for getting together when important *thinking* and *strategizing* is needed, as opposed to a setting where people simply drive to more out of force of habit.

“There is a lot of soul searching going on about the role of the office going forward, because it’s no longer the place where we come to put our heads down and just work,” Jesuthasan stated. “It’s increasingly really the place where people come to engage and collaborate, where they come to innovate in ways that Zoom doesn’t help them. So that’s not so much an acceleration, but a radical rethink.”

While the need for physical offices will remain, it’s likely they won’t need to be as large going forward, which can be a huge cost saver for a business since utilities and rent can be expensive.

Last month, I mentioned an employer spending \$1,600 a month to rent two office suites, one for

the sales staff, versus \$800/month for everyone else. If remote work had been more common at the time, it may have meant giving salespeople a work-from-home option instead of laying them off! Besides, smaller workplaces make social distancing easier, too.

What’s more, many employers found during the pandemic that remote work went more smoothly than they thought it would. As a result, Joe Connell, a principal at Perkins and Will’s, agrees a mindset toward more remote work is in place. Some people “are just rethinking having to be at the office all the time for accountability, because they’re actually pretty effective working from home,” Connell explained.

“There’s a much more permissive culture right now from the business leaders, and from the employees to work that out into full agility and flexibility.”

Summary

Clearly the pandemic has been accelerating workplace changes that were already taking place. But all is not rosy. Remote work and related areas also have drawbacks, which will be examined next month in the conclusion of this series. ■

Mike Jacquart is the editor and publisher of “Employee Assistance Report” and he edits the “Journal of Employee Assistance” for EAPA. He has been writing about employee assistance and workplace topics and trends since 2004.