# Leaders, don't make a drama out of a crisis

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**With a few key tweaks to your management style sudden remote working can lead to greater freedom in the future**

With COVID-19 declared a pandemic, business leaders and managers across the globe are suddenly finding themselves catapulted into a world of not only managing a remote workforce but doing so themselves remotely.

For many leaders, remote and virtual management is already part of everyday life. But for those who are now thrust into it for the first time, in an unplanned way, there is huge potential for negative outcomes in terms of productivity and working relationships.  It's likely that both they, and the workers for whom they're responsible, will be largely unprepared for the unique concerns that come with remote working.

A big challenge comes with those colleagues who are already perceived as average or underperforming. Without leaders paying close attention to their management approach, average or poor working relationships can deteriorate in remote conditions. Yet if leaders

can focus on being agile, curious and open, they can create advantage from this new experience. By making small, but incredibly effective adjustments to their communications style they can find a new way to thrive in these unpredictable, unexpected conditions.

Whether remotely managing traditionally high performing team members or even those perceived to be underperformers, adopting these three behaviours will optimise both their output and the leader themselves.

## 1. **Create conditions of mutual trust**

Even in normal circumstances, [studies](#) have shown that 'trust' tops the list in terms of what makes teams and workplaces excel. If leaders are not cautious and self-aware remote working has the potential to amplify any existing discord in working relationships. Leaders that demonstrate trust that their newly remote working staff remain committed to getting the job done while at home will have better outcomes than those who don't.

In times of crisis and uncertainty, our brains seek to maintain control. In a work environment, a perceived lack of control is usually amplified by our natural tendency to assume the worst, particularly if we have a team member whose performance we may feel is already lacking, even when they're present.

As remote working literally takes away the opportunity to see what someone is doing, it can be tempting to try to find ways to closely monitor our direct reports. But this sends the wrong message and the urge to control in the face of ambiguity can remove our empathy and humanity. Treat people with trust and respect and they will work for you. Control and demonstrate distrust and they will or do no more than what you tell them to, or worse, rebel against your expectations. Like most successful management techniques, the key is in the intention behind the communication.

Be the right level of curious. For example, ask about the environment in which they'll be working in a way that suggests you're simply eager to know they have a suitable working setup. Do they have good WiFi? What technology is available to keep in touch? By mutually agreeing some clear guidelines around communication, and expectations around responsiveness, you will leave an employee feeling empowered to work from home, rather than afraid of your judgement.

## 2. **Focus on output rather than time worked**

It's highly likely that a side effect of this current turmoil will be a seismic shift in the way we work. A shift that productivity experts suggest has been a long time coming. There are many reports that indicate commuting to and working in an office is highly inefficient. Studies range from indicating we are only productive for [under three hours](#) to a more generous [six hours a day.](#) Wherever the truth lies, it's clear that a shift from 'time spent' to 'output achieved' is a more manageable and forecastable method for modern business.

By focusing on output rather than time worked, the pressure felt by top performers to be constantly available online is reduced and leaders have a clear benchmark to manage team members who may traditionally underperform. It's a win-win.

**Help your team own what they need for their personal resilience and wellbeing**

Sitting at a desk all day is seriously detrimental to our health. We've all heard about the research that declares '[sitting is the new cancer'](). In an office environment we naturally get up and move around for various reasons; people are generally getting better at recognising the importance of going for a walk and taking some sort of lunch break.

The danger of home working is that if there is no trust or understanding about flexibility, presenteeism swaps from the sitting all day at the desk in the office to sitting with a laptop on the sofa at home. If leaders encourage discussion around tactics for nourishing personal resilience, team members will naturally feel they have permission to make positive choices for their own wellbeing without coming under scrutiny.

Your role as a leader is to help your team members tune in to what they need to be able to thrive at home, while at the same time delivering the agreed output for business success. By adopting the right attitude and approach truly skilled leaders will harness this unique moment in history to create conditions where it's possible for people to have greater freedom in the future.