

Working from home – the new normal?

Tips on how to help your team feel supported and stay engaged

Tip #1: Take care of you



One of the most important things we can do to be an effective team member while working from home (WFH) is to take care of ourselves. If we are feeling healthy and balanced, this helps us to be in a better space to contribute. Here are a few tips that Stratos team members have been practicing in recent days:

Set up a routine: Even though we are not going into the office each day, we are doing our best to set up a daily routine. If you normally wake up, meditate, shower and listen to your favourite radio station – then keep doing that! We're also continuing to dress in business casual clothing. Showing up to 'work' in our pajamas (even if it is in our homes) doesn't set us up to be as focused and productive as we would like.

Manage your time: Some of us are using the Pomodoro Technique, a popular time-management method that can keep you hyper-focused in short bursts while taking frequent breaks to come up for air and relax. This can help bolster motivation and creativity.¹

Share the load: Those of us with children at home are finding new ways to divide up parenting and house-hold responsibilities. One strategy is to co-create schedules with our children about how their days will be organized. This helps everyone know who is 'at work' and who is 'parenting'. We are also finding ways to share the load of childcare and other household tasks with others in our living spaces, if we're fortunate enough to have them.

Schedule breaks: Most of us are tracking the news closely. This can be overwhelming. Pick and choose when to catch the news and stick to that plan! Working from home can also throw off our schedules, making it difficult to carve out time for meal breaks, family, personal time and connecting with others. Book times for these self-care tasks into your calendar, where possible. We are in for a marathon, so set up some good habits in these early days!

Take time for physical fitness: With gyms closing, the outdoor ski season winding down, and team sports all shut down, it may be hard to find time for exercise. We are finding ways to go for walks outside to embrace the sun and spring. Some of us are doing yoga. Others are participating in online guided physical activities in our homes. Be creative and be intentional – it will be beneficial.

Create a separate and ergonomically suitable workspace: Where possible, we are establishing places in our living spaces that are for "work", separate from other household activities. This helps us to be intentional about being present for work when we are in those spaces and also for our families. Finding a good set up with a chair, desk and monitor is also important for physical well-being, particularly if WFH extends into the summer.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomodoro_Technique

Tip #2: Stay connected



In addition to taking care of one's self, it is important to find ways to connect, and stay connected, with members of our team.

Checking in: Our managers are intentionally scheduling regular chats with their staff beyond text-based media, i.e. audio or video connections (we use MS Teams to help us). We want our staff to know that we care about their circumstances, what challenges or worries they may have, and what supports they need. While respecting their privacy, we are using this feedback from staff to help our Leadership Team shape and deliver consistent messages and to find team-wide solutions to address common challenges.

Ping your “cubicle friends”: We are all missing the ability to ‘pop’ into each other’s workspaces for informal conversations. Members of our team are ‘pinging’ each other regularly just to let them know we are thinking of one another. These moments of contact help people to feel connected and supported. They also help to keep information flowing informally across the firm, a critical pre-condition for innovation and excellence.

Use humour (where you can!): One of the practices our Stratos colleagues are specializing in these days is sending “GIFs” or other fun messages. Each little humour-infused message helps to lift the spirits of the team, recognizing we are all in this together – even if we are apart.

Keep up your staff meetings: We are using MS Teams for our regular weekly staff meetings. There are other audio and video tools you can use as well. It is important for the team to be accountable to one another, even in the midst of uncertainty and chaos.

Tip #3: Set a good tone



Leaders and staff alike all have the opportunity to shape the culture of the firm through the way we communicate with each other.

Choose optimism: We have a choice to be positive and supportive – or not. Stratos colleagues are leaning into clear, positive and transparent communication. We believe this will help set the tone for how we communicate with others and how we focus our everyday tasks towards constructive outputs.

Send regular and clear messaging: When we are all working in isolation, it is harder to ‘get the message across’ to all team members. Without clarity, there is a greater risk of unproductive side conversations, unnecessary anxiety or groundless hypothesizing. The Stratos Leadership Team is working diligently to shape and deliver messages that set the tone for the firm, manage expectations and provide direction as it is needed. We also use these messages to let staff know where there is still uncertainty and how we are addressing (or when we will address) areas that are still unknown. We hope that this approach to internal communication will reduce stress and help our colleagues deliver their best work.

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