

Winning from Home: Remaining Effective During Remote Working

Special thanks to Stephen Miles, Founder & CEO, The Miles Group, for his contribution to this piece.

The Corona Virus (COVID-19) is disrupting all businesses in an unprecedented way. Several service industries that rely heavily on in-person consumer interactions to deliver their product—for example, airlines, hotels, retail—have been adversely impacted by the restrictions and social distancing mandates. In addition to the revenue challenges, all businesses, large and small, have to think about how COVID-19 will impact their employees' ability to come in to the office and drive sustained productivity over the course of the next few weeks as the public health conditions evolve.

While secondary to human safety, **a key role of a leader today is making sure work-from-home keeps the wheels of the economy, your customers, and your own business turning** during this period of significant dislocation. Leading Technology companies like Snap Inc., Alphabet, Facebook, and Cisco have already instituted work-from-home (WFH) policies and largely already have well-established WFH cultures that enable their employees to remain 100% productive no matter where they are working from. Most other companies are quickly trying to develop their own.

WFH is viewed by many companies who don't have a well-engrained remote culture as a liability that could lead to a productivity deficit. Instead, we would suggest that the current environment is a great opportunity to turn WFH into *Winning from Home* - where all employees are empowered to remain productive, drive results, and stay engaged with each other and with your clients and customers. Openly, we are borrowing the *Winning from Home* moniker from our client and friend Evan Spiegel at Snap Inc. - great to be able to borrow a terrific idea from a market leader. Below are some central lessons in driving *Winning from Home* from an individual level as well as a team perspective.

Being Effective Individually

- Recognize the current COVID-19 situation is putting **immense stress on everyone**. In addition to professional strain, many colleagues have to make emergency plans for their children with schools closing, as long-standing plans are being cancelled or reconsidered.
- Appreciate that **we each respond to stress events differently**. We should understand our own response, **absorb it and not amplify** it to others. We all play a big role in "keeping calm and carrying on" with our teammates, our clients, and with our families.
- Be mindful of **how isolation may be affecting your introverted colleagues**. While introverts may be energized by being alone, they aren't inherently antisocial. Ensure your team is effectively connecting and communicating with one another in both high-level and casual formats, large and small group settings, to cater to both personality traits.
- Create a **daily routine** as you would when going into an office. Wake up, get prepared for the day, and log on to work at the same time every day.
- Stay **focused and avoid distraction**. Reset yourself after each meeting and keep a disciplined "To-Do" list that you hold yourself accountable to.

- Create a **professional workspace** and environment in your home in the event that you need to participate in phone calls or video conferences; whether that be a home office or dining room space.
- Keep your energy and personal metabolism high - **be a positive source of energy, excitement, and good spirits** for your teams in situations where it is easy to get complacent or distracted from what matters most.

Being Effective as a Team

- The goal for your team's WFH strategy should be to mimic as much of the "sitting around the conference room table" dynamic that you typically might have day to day while in the office. The main objective is to **drive velocity of work** and **maintain a high level of productivity**, as the expectations from your colleagues and clients has not changed.
- Have **daily standups** to get the team aligned on what everyone is working on day to day. Our SSA teams typically will do two or three standup meetings a day depending on the time deadlines of current work
- Use **video as much as possible** when talking with your team to maintain connectivity between team members and to limit opportunity for distractions. This encourages focus and engagement for the duration of team meetings.

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Being Effective as a Team (cont'd)

- In crunch periods, keep an **open phone or video line** to allow for rapid, real-time collaboration, similar to sitting in a conference room and working on a critical deliverable.
- Keep any **chat platforms** you use at work, e.g. Teams or Skype for Business, active at all times to allow for quick “pings” in the event of questions or a quick connection.
- Use **cloud-based collaboration tools** like Teams, Webex, or Mural to share materials live during meetings.
- While working remote, **over-emphasize good team and meeting hygiene** - send agendas and meeting materials in advance, take detailed notes and send out a meeting synopsis and next steps.

Below is a sample email that the G100 Companies leadership sent to the broad organization. If any of this resonates for you, please feel free to use it as a template.

As we all strive to remain productive and effective at work, we all must recognize the current COVID-19 situation is putting a ton of stress on everyone. This is not limited to our work lives, and it includes our personal lives: as we are all concerned for our families' and friends' wellbeing, as some of our colleagues have to make emergency plans for their children with schools closing, as long standing plans are being cancelled or reconsidered, etc. All of the stress and fear surrounding COVID-19 is amplified by the fact that there is still a lot unknown around the virus and the widescale hysteria associated with the unknown. One thing we know: we all respond to stress events differently. It is important for each of us to understand our own response and work to absorb it rather than amplify it. We all play a big role in “keeping calm and carrying on” with our teammates, our clients, and with our families.

Additionally, please recognize that this may be impacting some more than others, and we need to rely on and support each other, as we navigate this event. This includes myself. If you have any special circumstances that require support, please reach out to anyone on the leadership team, Tricia or me. We will do our very best to look after your needs. We care deeply about everyone's health and well-being and want to support everyone and the firm through this unprecedented event.

As a firm, we have done well under stress events, and I am confident we will do well through this one. Collectively, we are hunkering down and need to stay very close to our clients. We will continue to serve them, while also utilizing this time to support and coach many of our executives through a stress event and how they can best show up and lead (we can truly be value-add to them during this time). For everyone in client-facing roles, please continue to stay close and provide value. For anyone in client and revenue roles, please try to continue to work hard to gain new work and to keep existing work in the pipeline. Personally, I am relentlessly focused on our clients in every facet. While the health of our team and the success of our clients is paramount, we should recognize the potential impact this economic dislocation will have on our business. If we want a great year, we need to double-down our efforts to make it so.

Some of you already do an amazing job of working remotely, while others are learning how to be the most effective from home. As we discussed Friday, the key to working from home is to treat it the same as if you were going into the office each day. Stay in your routine: wake up, prepare for the day, and then focus on your work for the day (and if you are Wayne, put on your “work shoes”). I understand it is very easy to get distracted, and this ultimately results in us not showing up well for our clients. Working successfully from home requires all of us to be able to continually reset and focus on each client interaction. Additionally, if anyone is participating in video-conferences, please try to establish a professional space and environment. For me, that will likely mean walking down to our office as our two teenage kids are sequestered from school (I forgot how small a NYC apartment can feel!), but for most it will mean finally getting that home office organized...

Most importantly, we want you all to stay safe and look after yourselves and families, while we continue to serve our clients with the highest possible touch. Thanks again for everyone's patience, focus, and dedication here. While these are trying times, these challenges do present SSA with an opportunity to really demonstrate what being the best is all about.

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Exhibit A is an example of how our teams are using WFH best practices to drive productivity at our Clients. We would invite you to consider using any of the practices highlighted as appropriate.

Working Remote Protocols

As we move to a remote work environment, SSA will leverage our best-practices protocol to ensure continuity of Client deliverables and drive for high productivity

Internal Team Meetings

Standup Meetings



Three standup meetings daily (30 / 15 / 30 minutes) with the full team

Working Calls/Video



For ideation and content creation sessions, maintain an open team phone/video line - even when working individually

Skype Connectivity



Keep your chat function (Teams, Skype) online/active during the full work day

Client Meetings

Share Content via Zoom



Ensure that the content to be discussed is shared via Zoom/Webex (and encourage Client attendees to join)

Utilize Video Calls



Be visible via video on Zoom/Webex; encourage Client attendees to participate as well

Send Agendas In Advance



Ensure that all participants know the content of the discussion (and responsible speakers) in advance

Client Workshops

Share Content In Advance



Ensure workshop material is distributed at least one day in advance to allow participants to prepare (and encourage advance questions or comments)

Ask and Answer Questions



Encourage participation via video calls and asking participants direct questions; plan a mechanism for audience questions as well

Take Notes & Markups



Help participants follow along by taking visible notes and marking content via Zoom/Webex or Mural when possible

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