

WorkWell

A Deloitte podcast series to empower your well-being



Special COVID-19 Edition

Episode #3: WorkWell: Maintaining human connection, from a distance

Human connection is the heart of who we are as people. It defines and regulates our relationships with family, friends and colleagues. We rely heavily on the physical, spiritual and emotional bonds we create with one another – their importance cannot be overstated. With physical distancing, we are losing opportunities for many of the physical components of human connection – eye contact, facial expressions, hand gestures, hugs, and shaking hands, for example – that have been part of our everyday life for as long as any of us can remember. The absence of those physical connections can create a sense of an overall lack of connection between people, at work and home, and can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Hi, I'm Jen Fisher – Deloitte US Chief Well-being Officer, and I'm here today to provide you with information you can use to help you maintain human connection even while being physically distant.

It may seem that if you have your laptop, a mobile device, and a good internet connection, you have everything you need to work remotely – and from a technology standpoint, you may be right. But work, and life, is really about relationships. Too often, our technology has caused social distraction and disconnect, but now, more than ever, we need to leverage that same technology in creative and different ways help build camaraderie and connection among remote teams. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Schedule video calls whenever possible. Hearing a colleague's voice and seeing their face can help make you (and them) feel less alone. The ability to make eye contact and take advantage of gestures helps focus our full attention on the meeting instead of trying to multi-task.
- Conduct a virtual coffee break – or better yet, try a healthy smoothie, juice, or water. We've sometimes taken for granted spontaneous opportunities to catch up with peers and friends in the office during the day. Video technology makes it easy to enjoy a virtual hydration break or lunch to share what's going on in your lives, including both challenges and victories. Use the virtual coffee break to maintain the human connection, rather than focusing only on a work task or project. It can really help if you're feeling disconnected.

- Lead Well-being check-ins as a team to see how everyone is doing, and who could use some encouragement. The check-ins are a great opportunity to share things we are grateful for, new tips we've learned for working better from home, or other ideas to increase connectivity across the team.
- Recognize people for the great work they are doing by sending an encouraging email or text message to the team.

Our ability to spend time with family and friends has also been greatly impacted. Fortunately, personal technology allows you to keep up with them, virtually. Hangouts, dinner with neighbors, movie parties and even birthday parades are just a few of the activities that people are now doing online or from a distance. You can set up private group chats on messaging apps to share ideas and have virtual conversations with your family and friends. Right now, I'm making a special point to reach out and check on friends and family even more than I usually.

Social media can also help you stay connected as a broader community. It's more important than ever, though, to practice empathy and kindness – use these platforms to share joy and creative ideas for the greater good. Speaking of community, some meaningful connections to consider include donating to your local food bank or blood bank, if you are able. You may also want to buy a gift card for your favorite local retail store or restaurant to use at a future date. Those businesses could use the revenue, and you and your family will have something to look forward to!

If you have kids who are now also home with you, you may have a different set of challenges when it comes to staying connected. It might help to plan to have shorter, frequent check-ins with them, rather than long or heavy conversations. If they don't have online school work, engage them in your work with easy, "work-like" projects to do. Let them say hello on one of your video calls – it will make them and everyone on the call feel a little lighter. You can also give them other fun activities or chores to do. They could write cards or letters to mail to their grandparents or other distant loved ones. Not only will it keep them busy, it will keep them connected.

Maintaining human connection at a distance may also require you to set some boundaries. This may seem counter-intuitive, but boundaries give you the time and space to take care of yourself. Protecting your physical and emotional health makes it easier for you to more meaningfully connect with others. Here are a few tips for setting boundaries that can help when working remotely:

- Set up your remote workspace in a dedicated area of the house rather than the dining room table or other family gathering places, if this is possible.
- Identify boundaries for those things that are important to you – your non-negotiables. For me that's exercise and sleep — it's a core part of who I am and how I live my life. I'm

personally very excited about the great uses of technology I'm seeing for remote yoga and exercise classes, as well as meditation.

- Once you've established your non-negotiables, discuss them with others, including those sharing your remote working environment. The better they understand your boundaries, the more likely they are to support you in keeping them.

Let's try to remember that we are all HUMAN BEINGS, not human doings. In times of uncertainty, we all feel the need to DO SOMETHING to help us feel like we are in control, and that's okay, if it's constructive. It is also okay to give ourselves permission to just BE – even if just for a few minutes a day – to honor what we are feeling. Cry, scream, laugh, dance – whatever it is – just BE!).

Physical distancing has reminded us just how much we need and want real human connection. I am so encouraged by so many wonderful stories of people showing empathy, kindness and compassion for others in their communities. One positive that may come from this is that we are all learning valuable lessons for getting to the true HEART of human connection.

I hope you found these tips for staying connected helpful. Until next time, BE well, everyone.