

# Business **Culture** in a Crisis: Tools for Survival

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Every business has a culture. Your culture helps attract and retain the kind of talent allowing your business to be successful. It maximizes your competitiveness in the markets where you live and work. Your dominant culture may be either collaborative, competitive, innovative, or rule driven. These distinct types of cultures support a business's goals when things are business as usual.

## **But what kind of culture do you need in a time of crisis?**

It is not business as usual with the Coronavirus and social distancing enforcement. How can you shift your culture from what it currently is to what it needs to be to support you during this crisis? Since culture is how things ARE around here, that looks different for you right now. And it's changing fast so you will need to be nimble and flexible.

What-ever your dominant culture, shift to a culture of "we" until we move out of this crisis. What does that mean? As a leader you already consider the needs of many people. Think what is best for everyone, and consider the needs of your business, and clients at the same time. We are in this together: no one is unaffected. We must exercise **Relational Responsibility**. Each person matters, and the decisions *each* person makes impacts everyone. We each need to make decisions based on our connectivity, not our individualism.

To operate in this new environment, you may need new policies such as a temporary work from home policy and agreement. You likely need to find ways to support those most vulnerable populations at your office and figure out how to protect vulnerable clients from exposure to illness. You may also be struggling to support your workforce's financial security and help them find needed resources. Your leadership role may be feeling more like that of a social worker right now than a business leader or human resources manager.

As a "interim social worker" what tools do you need? Here are a few things to support your expanded role. There are many resources available locally and nationally. Some of them are overloaded now, so I've included a few "self-serve" kinds of resources you can implement including tools for managing anxiety in your workplace, and how to connect services and support to your workforce. I provide you a sample telecommuting policy and agreement for you to modify for your workplace. And throughout this time of increased stress, it is imperative you build and maintain your own resilience. I provide you some easy ways to do this. We start with resources to support your business.

## **Use Resources to Support Your Business.**

Below are things to focus on now to create a culture that supports your workforce and your business allowing you to weather this national and global crisis. Included are some sample policies and other tools you may find helpful.

- a) If you have an Employee Assistance Program, call them. They have a lot of tools available that are included with your Program including help with finances, how to provide services such as mental health and information on daycare services. Your workforce may just to talk with someone who can help reduce their stress and fears.
- b) If you do not have an EAP, do you have a relationship with any mental health professionals who could make themselves available for a phone conversation with anyone feeling overwhelmed? You could put someone on a temporary contract to provide emotional and mental support. This is an investment by your business, but well worth the cost to keep your employees calm and productive.
- c) Do you work with a financial planner? If so, can they provide some tips for how your workforce can manage financial pressures that may be arising? This is also something you can find in your community and contract with someone to provide advice in a group setting or one-on-one (remotely).
- d) If you have a professional association, visit their website for news and tools to support your business and people. Organizations like SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management) has many tools to help you manage people and needs. SHRM Global HR can be found at [globalfocus@e.shrm.org](mailto:globalfocus@e.shrm.org)
- e) If you are a law firm, access the Association of Legal Administrators at [www.alanet.org](http://www.alanet.org) for resources and support. Or the ABA at [www.americanbar.org](http://www.americanbar.org).

### Flexibility is your superpower right now.

How flexible can you be with your role and policies and procedures? If you have a culture that is highly trusting, from management to workforce and back, you will excel at offering flexibility. You already have the foundation you need and maybe just need a couple of policies that give direction to your workforce making remote working expectations clear for everyone.

If you are a highly rules driven culture with strong enforcement policies, this is an opportunity for you to make a shift. It is also an opportunity to be highly communicative and transparent. First, create the policies allowing flexible work arrangements, and share them through multiple mediums including writing such as a memo or email, and get them out through verbal communications such as a group voicemail message, podcast, video, etc. The most important thing is to communicate and demonstrate trust in your workforce.

See [Appendix A](#) for a sample remote work policy and [Appendix B](#) for a sample telecommuting agreement.

Above are specific resources, but let's also talk about how to support yourself and other leaders during this stressful time. Below are some tools to help you build and maintain your resilience so you can remain in a support role.

### Maintaining Your Resilience is a secret weapon.

If you are reading this, you are likely the person on the front lines, managing stress and chaos daily. You are probably sleep-deprived, experiencing a higher than normal level of

anxiety or stress, and trying to balance many priorities including your family and social network. What can you do to keep yourself resilient and strong? Here are four strategies:

a) **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is simply bringing your attention to what you are experiencing in the moment. You do this without judgment by just noticing what you are thinking and feeling in that moment. You can practice mindfulness formally through training. You can also practice being mindful all during the day. I like setting specific times during my day to stop, bring my attention to what I am thinking and feeling, and focusing on how I am breathing for a couple of minutes. After this quick break, I continue working. I find I bring greater clarity to what I was doing before taking this break. And sometimes I re-direct my attention because I realize I was distracted and sometimes unproductive.

A simple mindfulness exercise:

At the top of each hour, pause for one to minutes. Bring your awareness to your thoughts, feelings, what you notice in your body including areas of tension or discomfort. Notice your breathing and if you are holding your breath, breathing shallow or regular.

Here are some Apps to support you in developing a regular mindful pause during your day:

- **Calm**-- Brings sense of clarity to everyday life, great for meditation, mindfulness, and changing your life in positive ways.
- **Aura**-- daily micro-meditations – 3 minutes each.
- **Breath**-- Free App that follows the user through the day, offers 5-minute meditations and tips for overcoming pressure and living with intention and inner peace.
- **Headspace**--Spoken word exercise around 10 minutes a day.
- **Insight Timer**-- Over 4000 guided meditations from over 1000 teachers on various topics such as self-compassion, nature, and stress.
- **Mediation for Fidgety Skeptics by 10% Happier**-- Training for those skeptical of meditation presented by Dan Harris, author of 10% Happier.
- **Mindfulness Daily**-- Takes a few minutes each day offering quick, effective guided practices to reduce stress, anxiety, improve performance and enhance sleep.

b) **Movement**

Build exercise into each day. You need a minimum of 150 minutes a week of exercise for good health. You also need exercise to clear your head, re-energize yourself, and deepen your breathing. I recommend you put exercise on your calendar like you would any meeting and treat it like it is critically important. If you do not keep yourself healthy, you will not be able to help others. Here are various strategies to get in your 150 minutes per week.

DAILY (7 days a week)	21-minute sessions
5 days a week	30-minute sessions
3 days a week	50-minute sessions
2 days a week	75-minute sessions

Exercise can be a mix of different kinds including walking, running, cycling, exercise equipment, weight training, yoga, swimming, vigorous yardwork/gardening, exercise classes, etc. Get up and move around your office or home, take the stairs, walk the hallways, take a walk around the block a couple of times a day, and consider walking meetings with colleagues or peers to encourage one another to take this needed movement break.

### c) Mastery

Mastery is about engaging your brain to focus on something specific. This could be tackling a project, writing a needed policy or putting a new program in place. You may need to take some time to read and study something important to your work. The most important thing is to engage your brain in something that allows you to focus and create. If you can carve out time every day to work on a specific project, that is even better. Mastery allows you focus your brain, which allows you to bring calm to your nervous system by engaging your pre-frontal cortex. This also works if you want to practice a hobby such as playing music, cooking, reading for pleasure, painting, gardening (bonus with providing movement also), crossword puzzles, and games both online and traditional board games.

### d) Meaningful Engagement

During this period of social distancing it is important to remain connected to others. This may need to be via technology for the next few weeks. If you take a walk, call your best friend or your mom. Use that time to engage and move. Make sure you have several meaningful engagements each day both professional and personal. You can have virtual engagements such as coffee breaks or happy hours. Use videoconferencing technology to “see” others and work together.

It is time to default to a culture of “we” in this time of crisis. Part of that is taking care of your employees, while also taking good care of yourself. Don’t forget to exercise, eat well, engage meaningfully with others, be mindful, and engage your mind. Doing these things will build and maintain your resilience so you can remain in a support role. By doing these things you also teach others how to be more resilient. As a leader, others are watching you. You have a huge opportunity to set the expectation and lead by example. And don’t forget to check in with yourself regularly and breathe. You got this.

## Appendix A: SAMPLE Remote Work Policy

*Below is an outline of what can be included in a Remote Work Policy along with sample language. Customize this format and language to apply to your specific work environment. Check with your employment lawyer and Human Resource professionals to ensure this policy is appropriate for your work environment.*

### ***DESCRIBE WHEN THIS APPLIES:***

If there is an emergency such as a weather disaster, circumstantial incident, or serious illness such as a pandemic, [Company name] may allow or require employees to temporarily work from home or other remote locations to ensure business continuity.

### ***WHAT PREPARATION WORK IS NECESSARY:***

If there is an emergency as describe above, [Company name] may require certain or all employees to work remotely. These employees will be advised of such requirements by their manager, human resources, or the company’s executive leadership. Business leaders will prepare in advance to allow employees to work remotely in emergency circumstances. Preparation includes needed equipment, such as hardware, software, phone and data lines. The IT department will review equipment needs with employees and provide support in advance of emergency telework situations.

### ***GIVE EMPLOYEES A TELECOMMUTING AGREEMENT ALONG WITH POLICY:***

For voluntary telework arrangements, the employee, HR or manager initiates a temporary telecommuting agreement during emergency circumstances. The employee will discuss their particular job responsibilities with their direct supervisor and determine if the job is appropriate for a telecommuting arrangement, including equipment needs, workspace considerations, scheduling, and expected availability for online meetings, phone calls, and training.

### ***STATE WHO WILL PREPARE THE AGREEMENT:***

A telecommuting agreement will be prepared by human resources and signed by the employee and the supervisor.

### ***EXPECTATIONS FOR SETTING UP A HOME OFFICE:***

The employee will establish a suitable work environment within their home for work purposes. [Company name] will not be responsible for any costs associated with setup of a home office, such as remodeling, furniture or lighting. [Company name] will not pay for any repairs or modifications to a home office space. [Company name] will work with employees to determine equipment needs on a case-by-case basis. Equipment supplied by the business will be used for business purposes only.

### ***REQUIREMENTS FOR CONFIDENTIALTY:***

All telecommuting employees must ensure the protection of proprietary and confidential company and client information from their home office.

***WHO HAS AUTHORITY TO ESTABLISH THE PERIOD OF TELEWORK:***

It is the company's discretion to specify a period for emergency telework arrangements, and [Company name] may require employees to return to regular, in-office work at any time.

## Appendix B: Sample Telecommuting Agreement

*Here is a SAMPLE telecommuting agreement. Consult with your employment lawyer and human resources personnel to tailor this agreement for your workplace needs.*

Telecommuting is a voluntary agreement between the supervisor and human resources and the telecommuter. This agreement begins on [insert start date] and continues until [end date] and must be renewed after the end date. This agreement can be discontinued at any time by either party with [number of days] days' notice and without adverse repercussions.

### AGREEMENT TERMS:

1. The telecommuter will work from [insert places where employee can work].
2. The employee is expected to work in the office on certain days [insert days or indicate if the employee is working from home full time for the period indicated above].
3. The telecommuter agrees to be available during the assigned business hours of [list hours] for communication through phone, voice mail, video conference, email, or other online tools and agrees to respond within [number of minutes] minutes/hours.
4. If the employee wants to initiate a schedule change, it must be done in advance with supervisor's approval.
5. The duties, obligations, responsibilities and conditions of the telecommuter's employment with the employer do not change. This includes the employee's salary, retirement, vacation and sick leave benefits, and insurance coverage.
6. Work hours, overtime compensation, use of sick leave, and approval for use of vacation remain consistent with the employer's policies and procedures, and to terms otherwise agreed upon by the employee and their supervisor.
7. The telecommuter agrees to maintain a safe and ergonomically sound work environment, to report work-related injuries to their supervisor at the earliest opportunity, and to hold the employer harmless for injury to others at the telecommuting location. The employer may inspect the employee's home office as needed.
8. The telecommuter will provide a secure location for employer owned equipment and materials, and will not use, or allow others to use equipment for purposes other than for employer business. All equipment, records, and materials provided by the employer shall remain employer property.
9. The telecommuter agrees not to use his/her personal vehicle for employer business unless specifically authorized by the supervisor.

10. The telecommuter agrees to return employer equipment, records, and materials within [specify number of days] days of termination of this agreement. All employer equipment will be returned by the employee for inspection, repair, replacement, or repossession with [specify number of days] day's written notice.
  
11. The employer will pay for the following expenses:
  - a) Charges for business related telephone calls. [Specify if you will pay for data packages including phone line].
  - b) Maintenance and repairs to employer owned equipment. [Specify what equipment and any limitations or exceptions to maintenance and repair].
  - c) Travel Expense Claims along with receipts, bills or other verification of the expense. Expenses should be pre-approved by the supervisor.
  
12. The employer will not pay for the following expenses [List everything the employer will not be responsible to pay for or maintain].
  - a) Maintenance or repairs of privately owned equipment.
  - b) Utility costs associated with the use of the computer or occupation of the home
  - c) Equipment supplies.
  - d) Travel expenses (Other than authorized).
  
13. The telecommuter agrees to seek advanced approval by the supervisor to use sick leave, vacation, time off, or other leave credits. For non-exempt employees, overtime must be approved in advance by the supervisor.
  
14. The telecommuter will make dependent care arrangements during telecommuting periods.
  
15. The telecommuter will implement steps for good information security in the home office and will check with their supervisor if any security matters arise.
  
16. Management [specify who this is] retains the right to modify this agreement on a temporary basis as a result of business necessity for example, the employee may be required to come to the office on a particular day or for a particular meeting, or as requested by a supervisor.

The telecommuter has a copy of this Agreement and agrees to its terms.

Telecommuter's Signature

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C: Do the Five PSA

Google and the World Health Organization have put this Public Service Announcement out widely. Follow these guidelines and share them with your employees. Post it in breakrooms and meeting rooms.



The graphic is a public service announcement for COVID-19. At the top, it features the logos for the World Health Organization and Google. Below the logos, there is a red octagonal icon containing a white hand with fingers spread. Underneath the icon, the text reads "DO THE FIVE" in large, bold, black letters, followed by "Help stop coronavirus" in a smaller font. A list of five items follows, each with a red number and bold text: 1 HANDS Wash them often, 2 ELBOW Cough into it, 3 FACE Don't touch it, 4 FEET Stay more than 3ft apart, and 5 FEEL sick? Stay home. At the bottom left, it says "General public health information" and at the bottom right, there is a blue button with the text "More info".

World Health Organization | Public Service Announcement | Google



**DO THE FIVE**  
Help stop coronavirus

- 1 HANDS** Wash them often
- 2 ELBOW** Cough into it
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General public health information [More info](#)