Keys to telecommuting during, and after, the lockdown

Working from home during the lockdown is stressful for more than 40% of Spaniards surveyed. In this unusual situation, Mireia Las Heras offers advice for getting organized and managing both your team and your boss -- now and after the crisis ends.



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- **Flexibility, generosity, initiative and an upbeat temperament are four core attributes for working in the current circumstances.**

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- **Some coworkers will have dependents in their charge, so adjusted work hours may be necessary.**
- **When the new normal comes, it may still be optimal to telecommute "two or three days a week" for many.**

Four out of ten Spaniards find remote work very stressful amid this public health emergency, according to the preliminary results of a study led by **Mireia Las Heras**, research director of the International Center for Work and Family at IESE.

Initial findings from a survey of more than 750 people working in Spain indicate that "feeling supported" by their boss positively affects employees' commitment levels and reduces their feelings of stress and anxiety. However, the reality on the ground is that only 15% of respondents feel highly supported by their supervisors, while 60% report moderate support and 25% complain of very little support.

In this survey, only 11% of telecommuters say they are at home alone. And taking care of dependents is the reality for 40% of women and 21% of men in the study. As such, teleworking is complicated by the daily needs of also managing a "restaurant," a "school" or even a "hospital" at home.

Best practices for managing yourself

Las Heras offers four keys to work better in these extraordinary circumstances:

- **Set up physical and psychological boundaries.** Set aside a space and working hours and communicate them to others to help protect them. Having these boundaries will also help you disconnect once the day's work is done.
- **Create routines.** Make a list of daily as well as longer-term goals, and try to save time by thinking creatively.
- **Start working early.** Try to find moments of silence to work without interruptions. For many that means getting to work early, but follow your own biorhythm: that may mean working later at night.
- **Maintain fluid communication.** Take time to connect with the people in your household, with your coworkers, as well as with your friends and family.

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Best practices for managing your team

To improve team performance, Las Heras offers the following recommendations:

- **Offer flexibility.** Keep in mind that your colleagues may have dependents at home, so let them find their own optimal hours of work. Help them set up and manage their work schedules.
- **Clarify what is expected.** Communicate a list of goals and how to achieve them. Also, encourage people to disconnect at times: don't expect all-day availability. And if there's a work emergency, let your team know what it is, why you need their help and when you need it by.
- **Be sympathetic.** Remember that your colleagues are handling other issues and may be acting as teachers at home. Offer up ideas, contacts or tips to help them get their work done while also caring for dependents. This can help your team members focus and contribute better.
- **Maintain frequent contact** to promote mutual support among coworkers and follow up on ongoing projects that may re
quire significant changes.

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Best practices for managing your boss

Keep in mind that your superior is probably in a situation similar to yours or perhaps under even more pressure:

- **Offer ideas to improve performance.** Think about how to boost efficiency, try to incorporate tools to better respond to customer needs, and propose online training opportunities.
- **Prepare properly for meetings.** Ask your boss when the best time to talk is, be clear on the status of your projects and humanize videoconferences by activating the camera.
- **Maintain direct and regular communication.** Your manager needs to know what you're doing and how you're doing it, as well as any difficulties you're facing and how you propose to overcome them. Keep in mind that your boss is working on several fronts.
- **Empathize and offer extra help.** Many teams have people out on leave or caring for others, so it's helpful to be open to taking on extra responsibilities. Proactivity is

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more necessary than ever.

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Lessons for after the crisis

Up until recently, working from home was treated as a "bonus." However, under lockdown teleworking is seen as benefitting the company, the employee and society. Which is why Las Heras believes "telecommuting is here to stay."

But keep in mind that "telecommuting is not equally effective for everyone": it depends on personal preferences as well as logistical and technical issues. Once the lockdowns end, Las Heras recommends turning to remote work selectively, based on employees' preferences and the potential benefits.

For the new normal, the optimal situation may be to work remotely "two or three days a week," according to Las Heras. More than that usually lowers performance results because some resources are only available in the workplace and it's good to maintain personal relationships and contact with the company culture.

Regarding the rise of virtual meetings, Las Heras says "videoconferencing can be more efficient," although she recommends a combination of online and face-to-face meetings. A good balance might be "20% face-to-face and 80% by videoconferencing."

Finally, the four attributes that Las Heras considers key during confinement — namely, flexibility, generosity, initiative and an upbeat temperament — continue to help corporate operations after the crisis has passed.

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