



THE Learning Advantage

Mobley's Musings: Finding Joy in Difficult Times

In this era of social distancing and stay-at-home orders, it's easy to focus on what we are missing. But this new normal has brought some unexpected joys too.

People working from home no longer have to deal with daily commutes, giving them more time in the morning to exercise, sleep in, eat a healthy breakfast, meditate, play with their children, and prepare mentally for the day ahead. I am hearing of more productive interactions with staff and colleagues because people have time to think through what they want to accomplish.

Being able to take a break during the day to go for a walk or start making dinner is another benefit of staying at home. Just stepping away from work allows your mind to focus on other things and can lead to breakthroughs and creative ideas. And having more time to prepare meals allows children to participate. One client's 11-year-old daughter recently made crepes for breakfast.

More family time around the table—whether it's to share a meal, play a game, or complete a puzzle—brings everyone closer. And when you cook together your children learn new skills and gain confidence while they contribute to the family.

Then there are all those projects around the house that always fell to the bottom of to-do lists. Tackling those long-neglected tasks, like reorganizing the pantry or clearing out overflowing closets, can be very satisfying. When we're pressed for time, we tend to just shove things in a drawer or closet to deal with later. Now we can tackle a closet a week, throwing out boxes of junk and giving away things others could use. And that annoying door that never closes properly and that leaky faucet? Finally, we can get around to getting them fixed. Just seeing an organized pantry or not hearing a dripping faucet can bring joy.

Reaching out to others takes our mind off our own cares while bringing joy to them. Picking up groceries for elderly neighbors, donating to a foodbank, making signs to thank essential workers, calling friends we've lost touch with—all let the people in our lives know that we care.

Eventually, when we get back to our pre-pandemic life, we may even come to miss the unexpected joys of this time.

Sandy



Ask Sandy

How Can We Work Together Alone?

While we are working from home, we still need to connect with co-workers to be productive and feel engaged. Many of us can't do our work without help from others, but working from home presents a new set of challenges. In recent conversations, several clients offered best practices that can help your virtual teams be more effective.

Increase caring. When conducting a videoconference or Zoom meeting, one of my clients makes sure all employees turn their cameras on so she can see their faces and pick up on non-verbal cues. Before getting down to business, she asks each of them to say a few words about how they're doing: what concerns they have, challenges they've encountered working from home, or pleasant surprises about their new normal. When she learned one employee was sharing a computer with her child who was doing online learning, she had a new laptop shipped to the employee.

Address concerns honestly. Many organizations will need to lay off or furlough employees. Some can survive longer than others. In this stressful situation you should share as much as you can. Your team will know if you are hiding something and that will only increase their stress level.

Be positive. Have a compelling view of the future. Focus on what can be done and how current work projects can help the organization realize that future. Remind employees why their projects matter and keep them engaged.

Encourage job flexibility. Many organizations are having to reassign staff from current projects to tasks that are more immediately pressing. Remind staff that working on what is most important will provide value for the organization while augmenting their skillset.

Allow for individual schedules. Another client noticed that one of his team members, Josh, was working strange hours. In a one-on-one Zoom meeting he asked Josh why he was sending emails at 2 a.m. Josh explained he had always been a night owl and did his best work late at night. Those "old normal" early morning office hours killed him, but now he could be much more productive.

Replicate office relationships. When Thomas noted some staff members were struggling with their projects, he asked them what they did at the office when they got stuck. Each person mentioned one or more people they went to when they needed help. Thomas formalized a mentoring relationship with those individuals and asked them to reach out daily and offer to help.

Practice good meeting management. Just because you're meeting virtually doesn't mean you can neglect meeting basics, like having an agenda with timeframes specified for each topic. Send the agenda out ahead of time to allow introverts time to prepare. (This is a good practice anytime.)

Have flexible meeting times. If team members have children at home, daily 10 am meetings may not be best for them. Sarah created a Doodle Poll to find out the best times for staff to get together and alternated times every week so the same people wouldn't always be inconvenienced.

Replicate team playtime. Tamara hosted a Zoom happy hour with her team, encouraging them to get creative with their cocktails and mocktails and spend the time socializing, not talking about work. Another team leader had his group split into teams and play charades and trivia games.

Maintain professional appearance. While it would be odd to wear a suit or business attire when working from home, don't go overboard with the informality. Conducting a video meeting in your pjs with bedhead is an image no one will soon forget.

Learning for Leaders: Think about all the things that increase focus and productivity in the office. Replicate what you can and come up with new ideas for working virtually.

Coaches Corner: Work with leaders to identify inefficiencies caused by working virtually and help them develop solutions.

If you have questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



Taking Advantage of Coachable Moments

Unprecedented change, fewer workers than are needed, and a new generation with different values from past generations characterize the work world of today. These changes present unique challenges and opportunities if a company wants to attract and retain the best employees. Using coaching to help employees learn and grow can create a positive climate and make your organization the employer of choice.

Employees are being asked to do more and to do it faster, often without adequate training. When a mistake is made, coaching can help the employee learn in a way that builds his self-confidence without making him feel foolish or criticized. This builds employee loyalty and willingness to go the extra mile or take risks, because the employee feels supported. Millennial employees are characterized as being unwilling to jump through hoops and less promotion oriented than earlier generations. They expect to be involved in decision-making and treated as a part of the team. They are more responsive to coaching and less willing to "take orders." Coaching is a supportive process of helping people find their own solutions to problems which creates stronger, empowered employees.

What is a coach?

A coach is someone who has a different or broader perspective than the employee. The coach should be an unbiased observer who offers feedback to help the employee and has no hidden agenda. A coach helps the person learn and improve. The coach may be internal or external to the organization. Coaching may be her primary role, or may be a set of behaviors that a manager uses to lead her staff. The key to being a good coach is recognizing "coachable moments" and taking advantage of the opportunity they provide.

What is a coachable moment?

A coachable moment may come when something good or something bad has happened. Perhaps a person has just been promoted and is feeling overwhelmed with the new responsibility or has been asked to make a presentation to the leadership team for the first time. When facing a new and exciting challenge, having a coach to help through the rough spots can make all the difference in success or failure. Transition times have been recognized as particularly difficult for employees, and many organizations offer coaching at those times.

Sometimes the coachable moment occurs when a colleague gets promoted and the person starts to wonder why she didn't get the promotion. Maybe she lost a big account or blew a major presentation. When the person is feeling vulnerable and open to help, coaching can provide reflection and pathways to improvement.

How can you learn to coach?

Often managers say they have too much to do and don't have time for coaching. My response is that coaching takes no more time than the other ways of managing. Instead of doing more, substitute coaching behaviors. Do more "asking" and less "telling." One example of using coaching to help an employee problem-solve is given below:

Larry is responsible for completing a team report and presenting it to management. He asks his boss, Pat, how to solve the problem of not getting feedback from other team members in a timely way in order to improve the quality of their joint report. The typical boss behavior is to tell Larry how Pat would solve the problem and stop there.

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