



COVID-19

REWORKING HOW WE WORK – MANAGING LIFE IN THE NEW WORKPLACE

As many of us begin to return to work or continue to work from home, the ‘workplace’ in which we find ourselves may be very different. Coupled with a growing ‘always-on’ work philosophy, this can be a stressful time for all of us. Dr. Stuart Lustig, National Medical Executive for Behavioral Health at Cigna, and Michelle Leung, HR Director, Cigna International Markets discuss how we can manage these changing times.

Eighteen per cent of people believe that life will never be the same again.¹ As the world attempts to return to some semblance of normality, this figure from the Cigna COVID-19 Global Impact Study may well increase as we begin to discover what the new working normal is like in real terms. “The traditional nine to five office hours are gone,” explains Michelle Leung, HR Director, Cigna International Markets. “People are working far longer hours; a higher percentage of work is being done outside of the traditional office hours; people don’t need to commute; people don’t have time to take proper lunch breaks. And stress levels are high.”

On the flip side of this, the situation has also forced many of us to be innovative in the way we connect. “People are finding creative ways to still connect with each other and connect with their loved ones,” continues Michelle.

The way people have adapted to the situation means that our employers will look into what lessons can be learnt from the lockdown, and this will result in potential changes to the work environment. “In the longer term, employers are taking a fresh look at their real estate strategy,” says Michelle. “They’ll be looking at the design of the offices, and when employees return to work, there will also be a whole host of questions they will be asking around measures that employers are taking to continue to protect their health and safety.

Uncertainty has been our only constant since March, something that can have a huge impact on an individual’s mental well-being. “One of the most stressful things for people is fear of the unknown,” explains Dr. Stuart Lustig, National Medical Executive for Behavioral Health at Cigna. “There is quite a bit that we still don’t know at this point, people are still anxious about whether or not they are going to get sick, they are learning about how to interact with each other, both at home and back in the workplace – what is safe, what is not safe.



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“People are also worried about other things, such as their finances, their loved ones, and significantly missing their regular routines. Many people have lost loved ones at this point, either friends or family members. And there is also a grief for what used to be normal that we took for granted.”

Understandably, many of us are suffering from information overload, with conflicting reports and interpretations making it difficult to fully understand a situation. At the same time, as individuals we’re also having to manage several



roles concurrently. “People are constantly switching roles – from being a parent, to a caregiver, to a teacher, to a spouse,” says Michelle. “This ‘always on’ culture is definitely adding to the stress levels. Unless you recognize how these stress levels are affecting you, it’s going to get worse. So, I think it’s really important for you to be able to talk about it and to actually know where to get help when you need help.”

And although you may not be suffering from stress, there’s a good chance one of your friends, colleagues or family members could be, so it’s important that you find time to check-in. “You simply start the conversation with, ‘How are you?’,” explains Michelle. “And after you ask that question, you give them time to answer. And don’t start then jumping on sharing your own experiences or your own stories. I think you have to build the trust. You have to make sure that you’re there to listen, but you’re empathetic.”

“I think the biggest challenge right now, amidst all the isolation and social distancing, is how do we stay in touch with each other, how do we stay connected,” adds Dr Lustig. “So just to say to someone else, ‘How are you doing?’, ‘What’s going on?’, ‘What are you dealing with?’, and maybe sharing a little bit of yourself, too.”

“It doesn’t have to be an entire information download, but just sharing a little bit of yourself, to let them know that it’s okay to share a little bit with you. That communicates that we are all in this together. So, we may have been separate, but we are still together. That’s a very powerful message.”

If you’d like to find out more about how to check-in on your friends and colleagues and start the conversation about the new working normal, watch the video below.

[Watch the video here](#)

References:

1. Cigna COVID-19 Global Impact Study, Cigna, 2020. To date, the study has engaged over 16,000 people across China, Hong Kong, Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States between January and June 2020.

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