

HOT SHEET

Volume 7, Issue 3
March 28, 2020



Full-Circle HR



" IT MUST BE NICE HAVING A JOB WHERE YOU CAN WORK AT HOME. "

HR Trends:

- The week of March 15 -21, new Washington State unemployment claims increased by 133K over the previous week; the previous weekly increase was 14K.
- On March 9, the Employment Security Department issued an additional [emergency rule](#) extending standby status from 4 or 8 weeks to 12 weeks in an effort to support the economic impacts of COVID-19. More information regarding the Department's COVID-19 response is available on the [COVID-19 web page](#).
- Effective 4/1/20 - 12/31/20 the U.S. Department of Labor issued the Families First Coronavirus Response Act requiring many employers to provide at least up to 80 hours of paid sick leave to employees directly impacted by the illness or by children who must now stay home without options for daycare. Click here for [Employer Fact Sheet](#), [Employee Fact Sheet](#), [Q&A](#), and [Model Poster](#).
- On March 26, changes to [Paid Family & Medical Leave](#) came into effect increasing eligible relatives, defining a class of casual workers, and clarifying other definitions.

Navigating This Crisis

In a rapidly changing landscape, there may be options that have escaped your radar. Here are some possible options that may assist you and your employees as you navigate our current climate.

Due to Trump's declaration of COVID-19 as a national emergency, SHRM and tax and advisory firm, BDO, employers may be able to provide tax-exempt payment for certain expenses under Section 139 of the tax code. Such expenses might include: Over-the-counter medications, hand sanitizer and home disinfectant supplies; Child care or tutoring due to school closings; Work-from-home

expenses like setting up a home office, increased utilities expenses & higher Internet costs; Increased commuting costs, such as taking a taxi instead of using mass transit; or Unreimbursed health-related expenses. Payments, however, may not include nonessential products or services. They do not cover wage replacement programs. Consult your tax advisor for further information.

Staying connected can also be an issue. Here are some things that employers and employees are doing: • Holding virtual meetings. Now might be the time to invest in Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.

Telecommuting on Steroids

While telecommuting has been significantly on the rise for some time, COVID-19 has kicked this into overdrive. According to Derek Thompson of The Atlantic, this outbreak has triggered an anxious trial run for remote work on a grand scale. What we learn in the next few months could shape the inevitable future of working from home. This could be the 'new normal.' There are definite advantages including a cleaner environment, traffic reduction, and more flexibility for workers. There are also logistical concerns such as assuring that the home office is a safe workplace, that employees are working efficiently and that they have the tools they need.

Additionally, a very real concern of this crisis has been mental health issues

related to the major changes we are experiencing so suddenly. One of these includes loneliness. If you have an Employee Assistance Program in place, remind your employees about it and don't be afraid to use it yourself!

You may find counselors are pretty busy these days though, but there are some practices you can put into place and encourage employees to do the same. I liked this post from one employee who listed his daily routine. "Today is my first day working from home. I gave myself a few rules to make sure I don't get cabin fever: -Virtual lunch with a friend -Virtual coffee break -Get fresh air every day -Exercise (push ups, jumping jacks etc)."

Another suggestion described by the New York Times was to use the simple offerings of technology to

While this may be an acquired taste for some, I know from experience that synergistic and productive connections can happen even for the doubters of this form of connecting. • Invite your employees to a virtual lunch (this may inspire them to do the same with their coworkers if they are not already doing so). • Share a skill via social media. As example, Lori Russo, President of Washington, D.C.-based Stanton Communications, kicked off #closing the distance by streaming a favorite baking recipe on Facebook and answering

questions in real time. • Online training—keeping those skills honed and getting in some of that training that you have always been meaning to get to but no one felt there was time to do. Make it interactive if possible. • Virtual coffee breaks where you can have casual conversation or share how you are dealing with real concerns of the situation.

While all of this suggestions can be helpful—also stay abreast of the action that governments are taking to offer immediate financial support.

Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.

—Charles R. Swindoll

help approximate the experience of being with others. One writer joined a virtual co-working group. The idea is that at fixed times of the day, you log onto Zoom, Skype or some other tool for online video conferencing. Other people log on too, and after a couple of minutes of structured chat, everyone hits "mute" on their microphones and the session begins. Video on, sound off. As the coronavirus spreads

and more and more people retreat from public spaces, I foresee a Zoom Boom: Meeting in a Zoom Room will come to seem normal, not so much postmodern as postviral.

In any event, whether employees are coming to work or working from home, checking in with them on their emotional well-being, in and of itself will feel welcome and supportive.

