

# Helping Managers to Help Employees Working From Home



This article was written about working from home in the era of Covid19. It is written by Lynn Thomas, J.D., who has a consulting business that focuses on HR topics such as executive coaching, change management and emotional intelligence.

## The Confusion and Uncertainty

Whatever you are experiencing in this new “normal” of Covid19 is okay. No one has ever had to work (or manage employees) remotely under such unforeseen and challenging conditions. I have heard from homebound employees concerned about the negative impact of social isolation, unapologetic emails from supervisors at all hours of the day and night, working longer hours not less, feeling guilty about still having a job, living in their home offices, not being able to stay focused during endless online meetings and more. I thought working from home was going to create more work-life balance, apparently for a lot of employees, it’s just the opposite.



## Your Employees

All your employees are still on a learning curve. This unprecedented situation is creating stress, fear, and in some cases, panic. Your employees are overwhelmed, confused, alone, concerned and for good reason: They are trying to be teachers, caretakers, babysitters, shop for their parents, and still be on call for work matters, 24/7. As a result, they feel out of control. They are probably not sleeping well and may be over-eating. Their nerves are frayed.



## Why Such Strong Reactions?

Everyone’s routines and schedules have been dramatically changed. According to Bloomberg News “homebound employees are averaging 3 hours more per day than before the lockdown.” Some complain of wearing the same outfit for days, and that every day is “Blursday.”

Almost every strategy that we have developed in the past to cope with new situations in our lives will not work in this time of rapid, unforeseen, and dramatic change. We all need some reassurances, guidance, ideas sharing, etc.

## Your Vital Role

That is where you as a manager, counselor or EAP specialist come in. You need to genuinely connect with employees to the greatest degree possible. One important new role for you during this time of crisis is to be their coach and cheerleader. You want to create a sense of safety in a sea of uncertainty so they will be transparent with you if they have any issues or concerns. Most of all they need you to show some level of genuine concern.



## Start With A Conversation

Do not attempt to connect through emails; that will not work. Start with a phone call or even better an online video session. They need to know you care about them and their families. Ask open-ended questions with compassion and clarity. Listen attentively to their responses. Probe underneath any quick responses for deeper reasoning or root causes.

## 5 Good Questions to Start Your Conversation

1. "I want to know how you are doing. How is your family doing? Is everyone OK? Remember, your employees care about their family first, their job second. When you share that view it's tremendously reassuring to them.

2. As you work remotely, what do you enjoy? What is challenging?

3. Let's discuss your goals and our goals during this pandemic, so we all stay on the same page.

4. Are there any conflicts at home, or with team members, that I can help you figure out how to resolve? Are you able to maintain any sense of work-life balance?

5. How can I best support you during this time? What can we do better?



No one was trained on how to manage employees working remotely under these circumstances. We are literally making this up as we go along. So don't be afraid to try new approaches, new ideas and most importantly don't be afraid of making mistakes. One day, we all look back on these unprecedented times and wonder how we even made it through. For now, just focus on doing the best you can and then making any necessary adjustments as you go, based on the feedback you receive as the result of reaching out to your employees in any of the five ways described above.

### Reach out to the EAP

Triad is here to support you and your employees. Give us a call between 8 am and 6 pm Monday through Friday

**Call:** 970-242-9536

**Toll:** 877-679-1100

For more information about your Triad EAP benefits, visit our website at [www.triadeap.com](http://www.triadeap.com) to view the providers in our network.