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As the coronavirus situation intensifies it is becoming more and more apparent that we must become increasingly flexible and innovative in how we approach our day-to-day lives.

Nowhere is it more evident than in how we run our businesses. For CPA and accounting firms, this will require a total re-evaluation of how businesses is conducted. For those firms with employees – as opposed to sole practitioners – it is critical to consider going fully remote during this time. It makes sense from a health

standpoint and also from a business survival perspective. It's important for

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in their conference rooms. Many firms have an "old school" perspective dictating that employees must have to "go to work" to be truly efficient, allow for collaboration, and develop a collegial work environment.

Fortunately, the technology exists to create a virtual workplace and many firms are using it, allowing employees to work from home, on the weekends, and during business trips. As the current situation plays out, we'll be seeing a much heavier dependence on technology to accomplish these tasks. The major hurdle could very well be cultural and an acknowledgment that virtual workplaces will likely be the wave of the future, well beyond the current pandemic.

The major change will be that for some firms having a virtual workplace will evolve from being simply a convenience to becoming standard, accepted, and mandatory practices.

Let's take a look at several of the issues CPA firms will face as they create or increase their virtual presence:

1. Recognize that this is the best strategy to maintain the health of your employees and clients. Those firms that aren't making this move will likely lose clients and employees.
2. As discussed, the technology allowing this already exists. Office 365 is perhaps the most efficient and comprehensive system. In short, it is a cloud-based integrated experience that empowers your employees with the tools they need to collaborate efficiently, communicate on the go, and access files with ease. Its business apps allow you to manage bookkeeping, customer scheduling, and referrals in a secure environment.
3. The key element, though, is to utilize the communications tools such as video conferencing, conference calls, etc. Many firms have these capabilities. But now the critical issue is to use them all the time. For example:

- Have a short 5-10 minute quickie meeting at the start of each day to address

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- ~~On most of this may initially seem like a precaution, but it's no different than~~ checking on these issues in-person at the office
- Make sure all security protocols are in place and that files are password protected. It's also best to set up your employees with company laptops as opposed to allowing them to use personal computers which are more likely to be compromised. If they have to use personal devices, bring them under management and help to secure and clean them before they can connect to the corporate network.
- Consider providing tutorials to clients on how to best set up virtual workplaces

It will also be important for management to educate staff on best practices for working at home. It requires discipline, boundaries, and routine. Here are a few tips we have implemented since going virtual several years ago:

- Establish a schedule:
 - Wake up
 - Make coffee
 - Shower
 - Get dressed for work
 - Go to the office which will be a few steps away as opposed to a few miles
- If possible, establish a dedicated workplace in your home. This signals to your spouse and children that you're "at work" and try not to disturb
- Recognize that it's easy to "burn out" when working at home. It's important to set boundaries by turning off the computer and walking out of your home office at the
- Maintain the separation between weekend and weekday rituals. Saturdays are different from weekdays in that you may not shower or "get dressed" for work. And you may not get to your home office by 9 a.m. on the weekend, or at all

Once this new workplace culture is adopted, you'll find that there are many advantages:

1. Decrease in “sick days” related to children since employees can still get a full day’s

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the workforce, whether it’s virtual or face-to-face. Also, this transition can’t be done overnight. There will be a time for adjustment so consider small steps as big victories.

This crisis will eventually end, but you may find a silver lining in that the shift to a virtual office could be permanent resulting in a more efficient workforce, elimination of expensive rents, and the ability to recruit your workforce of the future.

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