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These are unprecedented times, as leaders try to manage staff amid the COVID-19 pandemic. While some companies have had to furlough staff or make cutbacks, others have been able to maintain operations by asking their employees to work remotely to adhere to social distancing guidelines. There also are industries where organizations need to hire to address increased business activity or keep key initiatives on track.

Following are tips to help you manage your staff in this new environment.

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everyone on your team needs to be on the same page about how these systems work, why they're being used and who can fix them if troubles are encountered.

- **Be an authentic leader.** It's up to the leaders of every business to serve as the glue that holds their team together during these stressful times. It's more essential now than ever as so much of the workforce is dispersed. Your team needs a guiding light and looks to you for counsel and calm.
- **Communicate effectively and often.** Set up regular calls with your employees to offer company information and share project updates. Consider conducting conference calls that feature video as well as audio. It can be therapeutic for team members to see each other, even though they are physically far apart.
- **Appoint clear project managers.** Prioritizing and reprioritizing projects will help your team move smoothly and confidently through the foreseeable future. With everyone in the department working remotely, communicate who the project managers are for each task and initiative. A lack of collaboration can cause people to feel lost, disconnected and isolated and lead subgroups to run off in their own directions.
- **Apply the human touch liberally.** A leader's role in holding the group together also extends to people's personal, human needs. We are all challenged during this time to ward off the low spirits isolation can bring. The opportunity to interact, even virtually, with other people every day can bring a sense of normalcy to a very stressful time. Quick check-in calls about non-work matters on a regular basis are something staff may look forward to. How are people handling the situation? How successful are they at keeping distractions and interruptions that are such a part of home life to a minimum? How are they grocery shopping? Movie recommendations? Connect on work, definitely, but also prioritize connecting on personal needs and experiences.
- **Offer flexibility generously.** This is not a time for clock-punching and cookie-cutter rules. Recognize that everyone's situation is different. Some employees may

live alone. Some may be having to keep kids entertained now that they are out of

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boards are a start but often are not targeted enough to bring in the best fit. Contact former employees who were great performers — those you know are capable of successfully working off-site. Those employed elsewhere might entertain a generous offer. Also ask your employees if they know anyone who would be a good addition to the team. If you enlist the help of a staffing firm specializing in placing accounting and finance workers, their professionals will have a database of candidates who have been pre-vetted.

- **Know how to conduct a remote interview.** Not only will new employees have to work from home initially, but you'll also have to interview them virtually. First, make sure you know how to work your teleconferencing app. Ideally, it should be video- as well as audio-capable, which will allow you to better build rapport with interviewees and more accurately assess candidates' nontechnical skills and potential fit with your company culture.
- **Evaluate aptitude for remote work.** In addition to discussing the accounting or finance position itself with the applicant and assessing their experience during the interview, include questions about skills that are common to successful virtual workers. They should be reasonably tech savvy, used to taking the initiative on projects, good problem solvers and expert communicators.
- **Onboard virtually.** Invite new hires to a video conference with your current employees and ask each team member to briefly describe their role in the group. Working remotely can be isolating, especially for people just joining the team, so consider pairing each new hire with a staff member who can help them through their first weeks on the job. The arrangement should be more mentorship-like than a substitute for formal on-the-job training. Also let new employees know you are available to address any questions or concerns they may have.
- **Consider temporary professionals.** For skills that are not needed year-round or for short-term projects and activity spikes, interim professionals who can work remotely can provide a valuable supplement to your department. They can keep

projects moving and provide stopgap relief and a morale boost to a team that has

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It's a new world we have to adapt to for the time being. Recruitment will look different for businesses hiring people into positions that are remote from Day One. These suggestions can help you provide support for your staff and add talent to ensure your accounting and finance team can help the business through these uncertain times.

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