

# **How to Manage a Congressional Office Remotely During a Crisis**

Thursday, March 26, 2020  
12:00 PM ET

There is no phone connection to this webinar  
– computer audio only.

# Presenters

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# Agenda

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- 5 Changes to Immediately Consider
- 6 Common Mistakes in a Crisis
- How to Make “Virtual Meetings” Seem Real
- Helpful and REALLY silly things you can do remotely to help everyone maintain their sense of humor...and their sanity!
- Webinar Preview:
  - “Online Town Hall Meetings & COVID-19”

# What Do I Do Now?

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Best Practices

# 5 Changes to Immediately Consider

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1. Change goals
  - Stop, think, plan, execute
2. Establish core responsibilities
  - Communicate WHICH tasks take priority
3. Don't forget staff's personal needs
  - Operate in flex-time environment

# 5 Changes to Immediately Consider

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4. Increase individual meetings with direct reports
  - Crises require MORE communications, not less
5. Reconstruct some social interactions
  - Recreate “water cooler” conversations online

# Changing Responsibilities

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- All of your plans have changed
- Events previously planned are now changed or modified
  - Town Hall meetings
  - Coffees on your corner
  - Workshops and Expos

# Changing Responsibilities

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- Possible options
  - Continue preparations, knowing disruption will end at some point
  - Readjust responsibilities of staff to focus on what is possible now



# Establish Core Responsibilities

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- Normal operations have changed
- Staff may be confused on priorities
- Modifications or changes will need to be made to previously planned in-person meetings and may now need to be converted to live-streaming or webinar formats

# Establish Core Responsibilities

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Questions for examination of each staff

- What was that person's responsibilities before the crisis?
- Has that work changed or become irrelevant?
- Should new responsibilities be added?
- What responsibilities can be modified?

# Remember Staff's Personal Needs

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- Abnormal is the new normal
- Everything has been rushed
- New responsibilities at home
- New responsibilities may require accommodation
- Failing to do so, may result in less productive, distracted staff

# Increase Meetings with Direct Reports

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- First sense is a feeling of distance
- Regular daily routines in the office cease

# Increase Meetings with Direct Reports

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- Option for response may include additional meetings with direct reports so:
  - Managers can better track work and oversee staff since they've lost direct oversight abilities
  - Managers can re-establish connectivity with staff by increasing lines of communication for staff to raise concerns or questions.

# Reconstruct Some Social Interactions

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- Regular interactions have been eliminated.
  - Create “Random” Slack channel
  - Post non-work related interesting stories
- Can you recreate some in-office activities?
  - Lunch-hour book club
  - Lunch-hour trivia competition

# 6 Mistakes in a Crisis

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1. Too much time attacking – too little time understanding.
2. Don't try to do too much and spread resources too thin.
3. Organizations deal with problems through their normal organizational structure – not designed to handle the new work demands.

# 6 Mistakes in a Crisis

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4. Managers shouldn't get pulled into doing line work.
5. Decision-making all too often breaks down under pressure.
6. Organizations fail to train individual staff on new duties.



# General Rules in Crises

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- You can't be frozen by "we just don't know what will happen."
- Make the best decisions today with the data available.

# **How to Make “Virtual Meetings” Seem Real**

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# Participation in Virtual Meetings

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## Harvard Business Review

*“How to Get People to Actually Participate in Virtual Meetings”*



# Four Reasons to Hold a Meeting

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- Influence others
- Make decisions
- Solve problems
- Strengthen relationships

# Rule #1 – 60 Second Rule

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- Make staff experience the problem at hand:
  - Caseworker discussing a constituent case
  - Legislative staff shares constituent letter
- Keep everyone involved with suggesting solutions

# Rule #2 – Responsibility Rule

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- Determination of an individual's role
  - Attending a movie – your role is observer
  - Going to the gym – your role is an actor
- Greatest threat in virtual meetings is staff unconsciously becoming observers
  - Create shared responsibility



*“Research shows that a person appearing to have a heart attack on a subway is less likely to get help the more people there are on the train.”*

*- Harvard Business Review*

# Rule #3 – Nowhere to Hide Rule

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Diffusion of responsibility

*“If everyone is responsible,  
then no one feels responsible.”*



# Rule #3 – Nowhere to Hide Rule

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- Assign tasks to staff in which they can actively engage.
- Define a problem, and assign to groups of 2-3 staff
- Provide limited time frame to take on task

# Rule #4 – 5 Minute Rule

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- Don't exceed 5 minutes without:
  - Engaging on problem solving matters
  - Open to questions
  - Have other staff bring in topics

# Rule #4 – 5 Minute Rule

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- Many distractions at home
- Maintain involvement or staff will retreat
- Have 2-3 meaningful engagements
- Keep track and summarize action items

# Technical Setup Checklist

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- ✓ Test the technology
- ✓ Raise webcam to eye-level
- ✓ Use a good microphone
- ✓ Position conference window near camera

# “Tips From Experts—Our Co-Workers in Asia—About Working From Home”

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- “Go” to work
- Create an “office environment”
- Set boundaries – don’t overwork  
(unless you’re responsible to save our lives)
- Think ahead about activities for kids
- Avoid isolation
- Stay healthy
- Embrace unexpected dividends

Source: *Bloomberg News*

# House[keeping] Notes - HSAA

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HSAA District Security Service Center: 202-225-3380

- General security related questions or concerns and district security including:
  - Security systems
  - Mail safety
  - Training
  - Security for public events
- For security resources, information, and training go to [saa.house.gov](https://saa.house.gov)

# House[keeping] Notes - CAO

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## Microsoft Teams

- For on-demand video and audio conferences with your staff and your constituents
- Easy set up
  - Chats
  - Calls
  - Conference Calls
  - Conference Call Lines

# House[keeping] Notes - CAO

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- CAO still has laptops, surfaces and tablets for sale if offices need them
- Please do not use personal devices to access the House network
- Microsoft Teams provides good internal and external web conferencing tools for offices
- More guidance on HouseNet about tools for web and audio conferencing





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Recognize Legislators and Staff  
Provide Examples to Colleagues  
Change Perception of Congress



# DEMOCRACY AWARDS

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- Finalists Selected!
- Finalists Announcement – April 2!
- Ceremony Postponed Until September 17  
*CONSTITUTION DAY!!!!*

# **How to Manage a Congressional Office Remotely During a Crisis**

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