

# The psychology of virtual working

Top tips on how to stay mentally fit and productive

SenateSHJ interviewed psychologist Rachel Clements, co-founder and director of the **Centre for Corporate Health**. What follows is a bullet point summary of her advice about how leaders and individuals can stay connected, and how to look after their physical and mental health while working virtually.

## Take control

### 1 STAY AWAY FROM 'WHAT IF-S' AND FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN DO

Use your energy wisely. Be present on the things where you can take direct personal control like:

- Social distancing
- Personal hygiene
- Setting routines and sticking to them
- Setting up work at home
- The help you can give your team as well as your clients and neighbours.

### 2 CHALLENGE THE WAY YOU THINK

- Ask yourself and others: "How are you using your mind right now?"
- Keep your thoughts positive and forward-thinking.

### 3 CONFIDENCE

- If you keep resetting your mindset away from the negative, you build and maintain your confidence and of those around you.
- Remember fear and anxiety are contagious – give yourself and your team time out to recalibrate and reset to a positive, solutions-driven mindset.
- This requires diligence and focus so you may need a buddy to help you do this.

### 4 COMMIT TO ACTION

- Mental fitness is about transferring knowing into doing, no matter how small the act is.

## How leaders can help keep themselves and their teams mentally fit

### COMMUNICATION



It should be frequent and transparent. Don't be scared to be vulnerable and to ask for help from others.

### BEING CONNECTED



With each other, but also maintain connection to the values and purpose of the organisation.



The biggest predictor of team wellbeing is supportive leadership, and this means leaders being connected not only to their employees but also the values or purpose of the organisation.



Rachel Clements

Every check-in should count. Quality is better than quantity.

## Early warning signs you or your team aren't coping



Looking fatigued or dishevelled



Poor sleep



Complaints of migraines, stomach problems



Flatter voices than normal



Quality of work dropping



Missing meetings, avoiding tasks or contact

## Tips for leaders

**1 Consider your own wellbeing**  
Remember your team will take their cue from you. Make conscious decisions to look after your own mental and physical health and prioritise this.

**2 Stay connected to your team**  
Do it visually and be visible to your team whenever possible.

**3 Communicate often**  
Be transparent and keep bringing people back to your purpose or make sure decisions are filtered through your values. And end with a discussion on how people are feeling, what they are doing and what they are struggling with.

“ Communication should happen visually and as often as possible because the first signs of mental health issues manifest themselves physically.”

Rachel Clements

## Tips for individuals

**1** Watch where you expend your energy: Consciously pull yourself out of negative thinking over which you have no control. Instead reframe your thinking by asking things like: How do I turn this into a positive? Where is the opportunity in this? What can I do to make a difference?

**2** Focus on your circle of influence: Focus on the things you can control, and let go of those you can't.

**3** Put in place stopping cues: Have set times you will shut down your laptop and put it away. Create boundaries within your home for work and personal time.

## General tips

### USE FAMILY TIME TO RECONNECT



Sit down and have dinner. Talk, play board games, learn a new skill, tidy the home, paint a room together, etc.

### CONNECT WITH NATURE



Nature is a very powerful antidote. Get out into the fresh air and sunshine, mindful of course of crowded places and social distancing.

### COME UP WITH CREATIVE WAYS OF SEEING FRIENDS



Watch a movie or sports game together virtually (e.g. Netflix party), virtual cheese and wine night or even virtual book clubs.

“ There are numerous studies which have linked social isolation with depression, poor sleep, impaired executive function, accelerated cognitive decline, poor cardiovascular function and impaired immunity. **By being kind to one another and staying connected, we will come through this together.**”

Rachel Clements

The Centre for Corporate Health comprises over 50 psychologists across Australia and New Zealand who work with organisations to create safety and wellbeing at work.