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COVID 19, working from home, staying healthy and motivated

- For distribution to all your members -

24/20

Geneva

20 March 2020

To: All members

From: Evelyn Kortum, General Secretary

Dear colleagues,

Tomorrow is the first day of spring here in Europe. Everything has changed in our daily routine, in our feeling of safety, and we need to adjust in every sphere of our lives. We want you to know that the FICSA Secretariat continues to support our members to the best of our ability despite us all working virtually like many of you. We will continue to share information with you and to receive your concerns.

As the situation with the Coronavirus outbreak evolves, we want to acknowledge those difficulties, including the strict rules imposed by many host country governments in an attempt to curb the impacts of this virus.

Organizations that honestly confront employee challenges in the short term will be the most successful in recovering. What is best for the employees is also what is best for the organization in the long term. We all do our strongest work from a base of physical and emotional security. While recovering that base is challenging at the moment, there are things supportive organizations can do to help employees better manage their work lives in difficult times. Acknowledging that workflow will be disrupted is essential to help employees feel supported.

If you are a manager/supervisor, be sure to check in with your staff not just on deliverables for the week, but also on the challenges they are facing in adjusting their lives. Provide guidance to help prioritize work, rather than attempt to maintain “business as usual” and deliverables that were set prior to the outbreak. Display trust in your staff, and work on the assumption that everyone is doing their best in these difficult circumstances. For all of us, remember that while it may seem minor, the social network of the workplace is essential. Do what you can to reach out and remember that kindness and compassion are essential. We are all in this together.

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For now, we would like to share some very practical and useful tips with you for working from home, which were provided through Gwyneth Leatherbarrow's online training this week. We you enjoy these and can apply some of them.

WORKING FROM HOME: How to stay motivated and on track

If you've never worked from home before, it can be a huge shock to your system. Not only do you *not* have the social contact with your colleagues, in the current situation you'll be either with your family or alone – all the time. Emotionally we associate our home space with relaxation, not work, and this change can cause great discomfort in many people. If you have a young family, you're suddenly on call 24/7.

Here are a several things you can do to make working from home as easy as possible:

1. Bring routine into your day

- Get up at a similar time that you would if you were going to the office
- Get dressed in smart-casual clothing to give you the feeling of being ready for work (pyjamas and casual clothes will have a negative impact on your work)
- If you're with your family, sit down with them and work out a timetable for everyone. Be realistic. You are not going to be able to sit at a desk for eight hours if you have small children around you wanting your attention. If necessary split your day up into shorter chunks (30 or 45-minutes for each task)
- Use a time tracker – online or offline – to plan your tasks for the day and include coffee and lunch breaks. Setting an alarm can be a useful reminder for you to take a break
- Towards the end of the day, review what you've achieved and plan your next work day. This will help you to create a clean break in your day between work and private time
- Decide what time your work day will finish and set an alarm on your 'phone or clock to make sure you shut down your laptop/computer when the alarm goes off

2. Create some clear space to work

- Not everyone has a home office but it's important to have a dedicated space from where you can work
- Is there somewhere you can block off with some plants or other items to create a screen? Having piles of washing, children's toys or other non-work items in view will irritate your concentration. Keep your space as neutral as possible
- Make sure that you have sufficient light to work with. If it's not possible for you to be close to natural light, make sure you have a desk lamp so that you're not straining your eyes
- Keep an extension lead close by to charge any equipment you're using so that you don't have to keep getting up unnecessarily from your work space.

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- If you enjoy having a snack whilst you're working, keep something close to hand (again so that you're not getting up unnecessarily)
- Limit visits to the fridge 😊

3. Limit Feelings of Isolation

Human beings are not designed to live in isolation, and even if there are other people in the household, not being at the office with your colleagues can leave you feeling alone and isolated.

- Find an online community and join groups on Facebook, LinkedIn or other social media, or create your own online social group with your work colleagues
- Limit the amount of time that you watch/read the news because it will bring your energy down (especially these days). Decide to watch a news summary once a day and stick to it.
- Use the time that you would have spent commuting doing something for *yourself* – or maybe start doing that one activity that you've been telling yourself you never have time for – it could be a few minutes of meditation or focused breathing, maybe some exercise, yoga, virtual coffee with someone close....
- Set up a regular video call with your colleagues. Messaging and emails are good for passing information, but face to face conversations will help everyone to feel connected
- Plan some FUN activities for the evenings or weekends. Get creative using video on your 'phone or laptop. Join an online yoga class, arrange an online party with friends and take it in turns to play your favourite music, hold a baking class and show others how to make your favourite cake, form an online choir, set up online play dates for your children – the possibilities are endless (see a list of websites at the end of this information)

4. Stay Focused

- If you have a home office, shut the door; put up a *do not disturb* sign
- Have regular meetings with your family to make sure that everyone knows what everyone else is doing
- Turn your 'phone to silent or vibrate when you're working because there will likely be people wanting to just have a chat (let others know when they can call you)
- Keep your work space tidy and make sure everything is shut down when you finish for the day (don't be tempted to re-open your laptop *just in case*)
- Managing upwards: you're already working in a different environment with a huge amount of uncertainty about how long this situation will continue. Long online meetings are not helpful to anyone. Encourage those you work with to send information over email, and then meet online to take decisions

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- To function properly, your brain needs water, oxygen and protein (and time to sort things out whilst you're asleep). Keep a large jug or bottle of water close to where you're sitting, and if possible, spend a few minutes outside during your breaks
- If you have small children and you're finding it impossible to work, speak to your staff rep/supervisor and find out what your options are in this exceptional time.

5. Useful resources

<https://zoom.us/> - online video meeting (free for up to 100 people for up to 30 minutes)

<https://clickup.com/> - online project/time management

<https://www.headspace.com> – online meditation

Some suggestions from others:

www.skypeascientist.com/for-families.html - let your children learn from a scientist online (from Anna in Vienna)

<https://www.grokker.com/> - videos with workouts, also on wellness and health (from Robert in Montreal)