



Leading with compassion: how employers can support working parents during the COVID-19 outbreak

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The world is experiencing a global crisis never before seen. With many countries around the globe in lockdown, and domestic and international travel all but come to a complete stop, all of a sudden the traditional workplace is a thing of the past. Excluding our hero frontline workers, the majority are now a remote, or somewhat remote workforce. However, as working from home becomes the new normal, it's imperative we consider how this arrangement affects the 'person behind the employee'. Canva's Head of People, Crystal Boysen, shares how Canva is looking after working parents and those who are caring for others.

The world is in the midst of a global crisis, a pandemic no less, where everyone in one way or another has been affected by the new coronavirus. Since COVID-19's global emergence five months ago, it has been an incredible challenge for businesses of all sizes and governments across every nation to #stopthespread. The workplace of pre-2020 is no longer, as organizations around the globe try to function either in a fully or partially remote working environment, trying to navigate this new normal.

This is uncharted territory, and whilst scientists and epidemiologists around the world are scrambling to learn more about the disease in the hope of finding a vaccine, the rest of us are trying to put 'best practice' in place to assist in flattening the curve and keep our communities as safe as possible. There are many countries around the world gradually easing isolation restrictions, however some have experienced a second wave of infection, and it constantly remains top of mind for my colleagues and I - what role do we play in ensuring the same doesn't happen within our places of work and our broader communities? Either way, one thing is certain, the impact of COVID-19 will be felt for months, perhaps years, and as a business, we need to be prepared for the long term.

Depending on where you live, schools and daycares may still be closed. Others may be making a judgement call and keeping their children at home to prevent exposure or transmission of the virus to others. What this means is a work/life balance, in the traditional sense, is going to be even harder to attain for many working parents.

Looking at the figures closer to our Sydney office, there are currently 7.2 million families in the Australian workforce, and with schools only just now re-opening its doors for students full time, and daycares still functioning at less capacity due to funding restrictions, parents have been required to be full-time parents during the day, but also maintain their full time jobs.

The reality is, parents around the globe have been forced to juggle two very important priorities and undoubtedly feel stretched thin, under tension and burned out.

I've read of parents who have said the enforced WFH policy and being a parent broke them professionally and personally. I can understand why. I've also heard from parents who are struggling with a work-home life-distinction; with no physical disconnect between work and home, and the multiple hats parents wear every day - mum/dad, partner, chef, chauffeur, teacher, cleaner, 'organizer of the household' - working longer hours and still managing to do absolutely everything; there are only so many hours in a day - something has to give.

So how do we alleviate some of the pressure?

Leading with compassion

We certainly don't have all the answers, but, as a starting point, we're firm believers in leading with compassion.

Every single person we come across could be fighting a battle we know nothing about and sometimes as leaders we become so focused on deadlines, numbers, quotas, goals and a never-ending to-do list, that we can lose sight of the fact our team members are human beings, just like us. We cannot forget compassion is an instinct we're all born with, it's ingrained in us at our very core, and for us here at Canva, we make sure we're cognizant of

that, and really try to ensure it's at the forefront of all we do.

We're not leading with compassion solely for parents who are being full time carers and professionals simultaneously, or those family units who have had people laid off from their jobs. We strive to lead with compassion for all, in any circumstance - however it's now more important than ever, during this unprecedented time, to rally together to support those that need extra support and little more empathy and understanding.

But what does that actually mean - to lead with compassion?

"While empathy is the tendency to feel others' emotions and take them on as if you were feeling them, compassion is the intent to contribute to the happiness and wellbeing of others." — Harvard Business Review

At Canva it's not about being in charge, but rather taking care of those in our charge. To us, leading with compassion means through every thought, word and deed, we empathize with our employees' needs while focusing on the actions we can take to contribute to their overall happiness and wellbeing.

At Canva, we believe compassion is foundational to a healthy working environment. We are committed to doing our best to always put our people first, provide them the flexibility they need to not only meet all their professional goals, but also the day-to-day needs of their personal lives, support their growth and, in this instance, foster an environment that helps them do their best work during this challenging time.

How we're supporting working parents at Canva

During this global crisis, Canva's people-first response means we are providing ongoing, day-to-day flexibility for working parents, so they can strike a balance between both work and family commitments without it impacting their salary. We completely trust our people to put in their best effort.

Family first, with a "whatever works for you, works for us" mentality.

How? What are the initiatives?

Supportive teams and flexibility We firmly believe in empowering not only our working parents, but all of our employees, to find a daily schedule that works for them and simply ask them to communicate their availability to their respective teams. We also encourage them to lean on their coach to assist in prioritizing workloads, clarify expectations and regularly check in on progress. At the end of the day, our main priority is to ensure everyone's safety and wellbeing.

A parent myself, I know how easily things come up at home that draw me away from my workday, that's why it's so important in this current situation to be fluid – with kids at home it'll be a rare event if you can lock yourself away for a 9-5 routine.

Truthfully working from home has been a tough adjustment. I have two little ones who have been home full time since mid-March. Luckily my husband has been willing and able to be the primary carer while I work, but I still struggle with finding the right balance and managing the associated guilt that comes along with trying to do it all.

[Caption] Crystal, her husband and 2 children - Emery, 3, and Bennett, 1.

My kids don't fully understand the concept of mommy working from home yet so I get plenty of 'visitors' throughout the day and it's hard not to be distracted, or want to join them when you hear them playing outside your door all day long.

[Caption] Crystal's son, Bennett, 'zoombombing' work calls has become a welcomed addition to those also on the call, so much so Crystal's colleagues have come to expect his appearance during meetings.

During this time, I've learnt that I need to let go of the guilt and figure out what works best for me and my family. I've realized I have to balance my workday with my family time in a new way and am looking for the positives. For example, without a commute to the office, I'm now able to spend more time with the kids in the morning and afternoon. I block my calendar from 7-9am so we can have quality time as a family and we've tried to repurpose 'commute' time into family walks. I also try to always log off my computer by 5pm and am fiercely protective of a no meeting rule in the evenings when bath and bedtime routines reign supreme. I often check emails or jump back online after the kids have gone to bed, but that flexibility is important for

me to feel like I'm able to fit 'work' with 'life'.

Supporting the right state of mind There's a lot of commentary out in the public domain about managing the 'mental load'. We know parents are struggling to balance work, child care and self-care while keeping worries under control – both your children's and your own. You don't have to do it alone. This is why the provision of support is so important to Canva.

To support our team members, we've created a dedicated internal website that provides guidance on how to seek support - including mental health support for those who feel anxious, confused, scared or stressed during this outbreak, as well imparting coping mechanisms for working in physical isolation from others.

Canva is also fully covering the cost of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) sessions, delivered online, to further ensure the team's well being in the workplace and also in their personal lives. We also fully subsidize Mindfulness/Meditation app subscriptions such as Headspace, Calm or Smiling Mind, as meditation has been shown to help people stress less, focus more and even sleep better.

We've also hosted a number of webinars, from 'Managing stress and building resilience in times of uncertainty' to ensure our teams have the tools required to help cope during these challenging times, to most recently hosting a virtual Q&A session with Audrey McGibbon from Global Leadership Wellbeing Survey and Martine Beaumont from Select Wellness, to lead a discussion about the importance of balance and boundaries in managing the challenges of working from home.

The longer our environment is compromised or limited by the impact of COVID-19 the more we'll continue to add to this space; I have no doubt circumstances will continue to change.

Allowing unlimited sick and carer's leave To provide greater flexibility to take care of ourselves and our loved ones during the COVID-19 global crisis, Canva is not requiring employees to log sick or carer's leave. All that is asked is that those employees provide transparency on time away to coaches, group leads and other members of the team so that business as usual can continue, and where necessary a team approach needed to chip in and get things done.

At the end of the day, for those with extra obligations at home, we're not asking them to work harder or to make up for the time others within your team are more likely to have. It's time for all of us to take a moment and try to understand the person behind the 'employee', the commitments, the responsibilities, the mental load.

So on a final note:

be patient with your kids; they're still adjusting to their new unqualified teacher, missing their friends and extended family members, mostly confined to the realms of home and unable to participate in their extra-curricular activities. The younger children could be especially frustrated with no direct understanding of why outside 'there is a virus causing everyone to remain apart';

communicate openly with your team, they're working on company-wide goals with you, and may be in the same boat - and together we're all trying to achieve the same thing; and

most importantly, be kind to yourself.

Whether it's within your workplace, or personal life, it's times like these that call for all of us to lead with compassion - our greatest strength stems from rallying together.

There are enough stressors in the world without the COVID-19 pandemic thrown into the mix. Take solace in that it won't always be this way. Hang in there, be kind yourselves, your families and your employees in this difficult time.

Remember, help is always available to you if you need it. Check out <https://checkpointorg.com/global/> to find local websites and emergency contact numbers wherever you are, for whatever you need.

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