

Connection, understanding, and vulnerability in trying times

By Jonathan Schuppert, AICP, March 18, 2020



Like most of you, my daily routine is drastically different now than it was a few weeks ago. There are limits on what businesses I can visit and restrictions on when and for what reason I can leave, and my team and I work from our respective homes.

For you who are working or learning from home, you've undoubtedly experienced someone's family member (human or furry friend) making an unexpected cameo on screen or making a strange noise in the background.

It's awkward, it's funny, and it's just what we need right now.

Earlier this year, my team conducted an exercise where we individually reviewed a deck of values cards and identified the five that best resonate with each of us. We then shared our values and discussed where there was overlap and where there wasn't. This gave us insight into how we think and approach the world. I finished with a sense of connection, understanding, and vulnerability.

As I settle into my WFH routine, I'm learning much about myself and my colleagues. I'm



meeting their families; I better understand their values as I get glimpses into their lives. As we learn more about each other, we can empathize and better understand our respective thought processes, enabling us to work together more effectively.

I'm also striving to find ways to bring in some fun and create some sense of normalcy. I generally maintain my schedule, get dressed as if I'm going to work (often putting on my badge out of muscle memory), and treat my home as if it were the office.

I take breaks and refill my water glass or coffee mug in my version of a microkitchen (tech for break room with snacks and beverages). I have breakout sessions at the kitchen table. I conduct 1:1's and informal conversations from the couch. I have larger meetings or catch up on emails from my makeshift standing desk using a bar stool stacked with books (dust off those thick planning documents!) and keyboard/mouse, with my laptop connected to the TV. That lets me move around, be more productive, and feel more comfortable doing the task at hand.

We also have a group Workplace page where we can share photos of our families, meals, break time activities, and craft projects. Paraphrasing Facebook, we can do more together and create a sense of community by connecting to each other.

It will take some adjusting to get used to this new normal, but we're all in this together.

The next time you're on a video call or conference and someone's kid has a dance party in the background or a pet nudges the laptop camera, embrace the moment. Laugh, appreciate the deeper connection with your colleagues, and reach out to see if they need anything.

Wash your hands, respond to the Census, wash your hands

While you're thinking about what to do with the time you would have spent commuting, fill out the Census. As planners, we rely on the information the Census provides. And all of us benefit, from the local level to the state level, from the funding allocations this decennial population count affects. So please do your civic duty and respond to the Census. When finished, encourage others to respond, whether through social media, or passing someone on bike or on foot (remember to stay at least six feet apart), or while catching up with friends and family via phone or video chat.

Here's to your health!