



For the HR Professional Working from Home with Significant Others

By Jathan Janove, J.D.

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A great many of my HR friends are now working from home. Remote work presents challenges not only in maintaining productivity, but also in getting along with your partner and family members. Always being in close quarters with significant others can test even the best relationships. This is especially so when you add in anxiety about work, your physical health, your colleagues and the economy.

Adopt 7 Behavioral Rules

To reduce the likelihood of what's been called the "corona divorce," try following these seven rules:

1. Listen to learn.
2. Give recognition and thanks for every behavior worth repeating.
3. Keep no undisclosed grievances. If you have a problem, address it directly, promptly and specifically. Otherwise, let it go.
4. Engage with each other to find a mutually acceptable solution to a conflict.
5. When you need to apologize, use the MIDAS Touch (www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/humanity-into-hr/pages/putting-humanity-into-hr-compliance-how-and-when-to-apologize.aspx): Acknowledge that you made a **mistake** and that your mistake caused **injury**; state that, henceforth, you'll do things **differently**; make **amends**; and then **stop** talking.
6. Periodically check in by asking these questions: What am I/are we doing that is working and should continue? What am I/are we doing that's getting in the way and should stop? What am I/are we not doing that would be helpful if started?
7. Interrupt if necessary. If one person thinks the other is deviating from these rules, call an immediate timeout.

Let's dig deeper into these rules.

SHRM RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

Coronavirus and COVID-19 (www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/Pages/communicable-diseases.aspx)

Listen to Learn

There's perhaps no healthier way to get through today's stressors than to practice genuine, active listening. Ask each other questions and attend to the answers. Be curious. Learn from each other; it's relationship magic.

"One nice thing about working from home is that my kids are getting a better sense for what I do and how I do it," said Louonna Kachur, director of talent at KLM Consulting in Indianapolis. "They've become much more interested in my work now that it's not so abstract."

Give Recognition

Nearly 40 years ago, the best-selling book *The One Minute Manager* (William & Morrow, 1982) propounded "catching people doing something right." The authors asserted that the best way to get behavior you like is to give recognition of that behavior. The recognition triggers a response from the recipient to do more of it.

This concept applies in both work and personal relationships. Take nothing for granted. Everything your partner does that's worth repeating merits recognition and thanks. Whether it's the doing the laundry, washing the dishes or weeding the garden, if the behavior is worth repeating, no recognition is too mundane.

Skeptics may think the recipient will feel patronized. Don't worry about that. If so, he or she will tell you. More likely, however, your partner will appreciate the acknowledgement and reciprocate.

Address Problems Right Away

Undisclosed grievances debilitate the person carrying them and affect others.

In the Bible, the book of Genesis tells how Abraham and the Israelites settled in land occupied by the Philistines. Relations between the two tribes got off to a rocky start. However, as the years went by, the king of the Philistines decided he wanted a better relationship. With his men, he rode to the Israelites' camp and proposed something akin to full diplomatic and trade relations.

Abraham agreed, but he also stated that for this kind of relationship to exist, an unresolved grievance must be addressed.

"Several years ago, my people dug a well, of which your people then seized control."

"I know nothing about a well," replied the king. "Take it."

However, Abraham didn't want something that could be construed as a gift. Instead, he proposed a transaction: livestock in exchange for formal recognition of the Israelites' title to the well. The king agreed.

According to Bible scholars, the negotiation of the well produced the longest period of real peace between the otherwise frequently warring people.

The lesson today is clear: If you've got a "well," don't carry it in your mind. Disclose it and seek a resolution.

Make Sure Conflict Leads to Resolution

Conflict is not the problem; how it's handled could be. If someone views conflict as negative, an argument typically triggers the

fight-or-flight response: "How dare you accuse me of X when you are guilty of Y!" or shutting down and avoiding the issue. Neither approach helps.

Instead, view conflict as an opportunity. It creates an opening to make a positive change in a relationship or environment. Instead of using the fight-or-flight method, engage and explore with each other a path to a mutually acceptable resolution. Above all, make no assumptions of each other. Confirm your understanding first.

"My husband Doug and I actually plan disagreements," Kachur said. "I am a 'dukes up, let's go' type of person, while Doug tends to avoid conflict and is apt to shut down and disengage.

"Now if there is a disagreement, we set a day and time to talk it through. It allows him to get his thoughts together so he can really show up and say what he needs to say, and it allows me to put it out of my mind because I know it will be addressed. This approach has helped each of us become better versions of ourselves."

Give a Good Apology

Inevitably, toes will get stepped on. If you're the guilty party and don't apologize, that's a problem. If you're the guilty party and apologize but follow the apology with "but," that's an even bigger problem.

What inevitably follows a "but" apology? Excuse, justification or counterattack: "I'm sorry I was rude, but I wouldn't have been if you weren't such a jerk!" That's an apology that most likely won't be accepted.

The MIDAS Touch provides the necessary discipline so you don't screw up your apology. Each step is key. It's not *if* you made a mistake or *if* you caused an injury. Without qualification, admit the mistake and that it caused injury: "I stepped on your toes, and I'm sure it hurt." Saying you'll do things differently means your apology is sincere: "From now on, I will pay more attention where I'm walking so that I don't step on your toes again." Amends represent a concrete gesture that demonstrates your sincerity and desire for healing: "Honey, you can pick tonight's movie, and I'll happily watch it with you," or "Honey, even though it's your turn, I'll do the dishes tonight."

Make Sure the Solution Still Works

Daily, weekly or at some other interval, check in to determine what's working and what needs to change. Start/stop/continue (<https://blog.shrm.org/blog/hr-s-attaboys-or-attgirls-stop-start-continue>) is a great technique, provided you apply it inward first. Don't ask, "What do you need to start doing?" or "What do you need to stop doing?" Ask "What do I or we need to start/stop/continue doing?"

A willingness to be vulnerable is a great way to deepen a relationship.

Hit the Pause Button

All parties have an unfettered privilege to call timeout.

I worked with a couple who were avid soccer fans. Their timeout technique was using the yellow card. When one felt the other deviated from the rules they'd agreed to, he or she would flash the card. That meant the other person had to cease talking immediately, whether in the middle of a sentence, word or syllable.

Come up with your own version of the yellow card, and agree that when one person flashes it, the other person must stop

whatever he or she is doing or saying and find out what caused the card to be flashed.

Make a Commitment

These seven rules work only if they're backed by reciprocal commitments. Print them out, display them and continually return to them.

"I'm an HR professional working from home alone," said Diana Stephens, senior HR manager at Precision Tools Service Inc. in Columbus, Ind. "Nevertheless, I see application of these rules to my ongoing interactions with others in our company."

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