

ADAPTING TO THE LOCKDOWN

AMCHAM T&T Member and business outsourcing company, Aegis Business Solutions, shares their response and learning development points to managing the COVID-19 lockdown over the last three months in Trinidad and Tobago.



By Catherine Perreira
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"The crisis forced our teams to act quickly with uncertainty and take on an agile operating model. The key player was our IT team who had our basic infrastructure in place that we were yet to fully utilise until now. Our managers and HR teams swiftly reassured our employees across all types of communications – emails, phone calls, whatsapp and video meetings. By the second week of lockdown in Trinidad, we were all officially online with key admin support as a core function," says Chairman, Angela Lee Loy

Preparing for a digital future has always been important to Aegis, however, understandably, not everyone was fully utilising communications technology pre-COVID, because all employees still worked in the office and not from home. Post-COVID, digital collaboration became key to making remote work possible, as Aegis staff reported back continuously on their experiences operating from home with the IT leaders.

STAFF TECH SETUP AT HOME

In your business, you need to make sure that your team members have the technology at home to operate effectively together. This includes a laptop, headphones and a good broadband connection from where they live. For some employees, it makes sense to just upgrade their broadband or enable them to hotspot via their cell phone to help business continue.





One-to-one conversations are important to discuss how to work from home and how to divide home space for quiet time, work time and play time. Home-based jobs require a huge adjustment, not just for the employee but his or her entire family, and it's important to ensure employees have those conversations to manage everyone's expectations at home, especially the kids.

HR IN TECH AND REMOTE WORK

After IT, HR is the second important team player during the crisis. If you don't have an HR manager, then it's you and/or your managers to help ensure conversations are ongoing and everyone is set up to support the continuity of the business with the right remote work policies and guidance.

For small businesses, guidance is available online and in the heat of any crisis, many found themselves directing their team to online links that helped them.

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apping our corporate steps, staff was kept abreast of new and innovated ways of preserving 'self' in unprecedented COVID-19 times. There was zero delay in activating the company's business continuity plan aimed at a 360 approach to communication, accountability and resource management," says Aegis Accounting Associate II, Samantha Daroga.

Aegis's HR team engaged in systematic thinking to be able to adapt to the new situation. In March, they were able to examine processes, ensure coordination, communication and most importantly collaboration across the organisation. With the support from managers, the HR team was able to keep employees together as a unit through training and constant communication.





While there were challenges and this was to be expected, HR continued to update their strategy and gain constant feedback from teams through surveys and keeping channels for communication open.

REFLECT ON YOUR NEW WAY OF WORKING

One of the interesting challenges is recognising how the workflow changes and how employees adapt to a more fluid working structure at home. We are not in normal circumstances and although technology plays a key role, listening and observing yourself and how best to work in this new environment is an important aspect.

Accounting Senior Associate III, Natasha Celestain shares,

"There were times when I did not have a normal 8:00am – 4:30pm day, but instead my day started at 9:00am and probably ended around 6:00pm or possible 7.00pm due to variations of interruptions during the day. However, my priority was to ensure that I put in my 7.5 hours per day."


Whilst everyone can relate to Natasha's experience, understandably for some staff, we must acknowledge it was impossible to achieve 7.5 hours per day due to kids or other family challenges in the beginning of the lockdown in Trinidad and Tobago. Then there were days when the staff ended up putting more hours in due to the goal to keep business running for the sustainability of their jobs and their future.

Can the tasks for your clients and customers be successfully achieved and can you meet client expectations as more people continue to work from home? It is no longer important what time work starts and finishes, but to find out if the job can be done by a clear deadline that works with your wider teams and client service and in keeping with the wellbeing of your staff.

CONSTANTLY REVIEW HOW YOUR BUSINESS IS ADAPTING

Aegis continues to maintain normal operations to local and international businesses and has remained open-minded to welcome change. This is not to say on-boarding new forms of technology was easy for every staff member but in times like these, it became a necessity for survival.

On reflection, we can acknowledge that the COVID-19 lockdown pushed every staff member at all levels in the organisation into the new digital era, whether we liked it or not. No one should be left behind, and it will take a lot of effort to ensure everyone adapts to online collaborative learning environments. You should review how your business is managing on a weekly basis. A hybrid model may emerge of working online and in-person meetings but keeping a tight focus on your strategy, reviewing how your business is adapting to this new operating model in real-time is critical.

Above all, technology without people is useless. Ensure your people are adapting to the new way of working and are learning new technologies to help you push your Caribbean business forward. 

About Aegis Business Solutions

Aegis is the leading local business outsourcing advisory company in the Caribbean helping all types of companies and entrepreneurs with their accounting, tax, human resources, recruitment, local and expatriate payroll, audit, financial advisory, annual meetings, work permits, corporate law and corporate governance requirements. They manage all your back office operations throughout your business lifecycle so you can focus on your core service in the Caribbean region. Visit www.aegistt.com

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