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FlemingMartin's CHRO Lunch Series: March 2021 Notes

Approach to Year
For many, 2021 has started off as a continuation of 2020, but with change and new hope on the horizon.

- "It's been a stressful year. I had the 'Pandemic Response Leader' role added to my responsibilities, and I'm the only person on our exec team who has young kids at home. There is unanticipated economic fallout to our business, which is causing a lot of stress. Also, we lost our VP IT right before COVID hit, so we missed that leadership as we transitioned technology to support remote work. The constant shifting has been a challenge for our exec team. Our staff responded well to resiliency coaching."
- "Fatigue is real. We are having trouble measuring output and keeping some groups productive. We're forming cohorts to bring people together and have them keep each other accountable."
- "Prior to COVID we had no remote culture at all. Now we're talking about shifting to a permanent hybrid, but we're taking it slow. We feel that our culture is being negatively impacted. Also, since some of our employees have to be in the office, we have 'haves' and 'have-nots', which is creating a difficult tension and dynamic. We've been very communicative to stay ahead of that, but we're noticing some issues creeping up."
- "We're treating 2021 as a 'normalization' year. We are returning to performance management, setting and measuring goals & objectives, learning and development, career mapping, etc. We're also rolling out more training, specifically on how to successfully work remotely and, for managers, how to be more flexible. The pandemic didn't change our course but put it on pause for the year while we dealt with stuff right in front of us."
- "We're working on getting things back to normal for people as quickly as we can by leaning into the work and into the routine. It seems to be helping a lot of folks, but not everyone. We're trying to help people connect more using technology. We also tapped into our benefits providers, Cigna and Kaiser, to maximize their wellness programs. We have a Monday morning stretch class on Zoom that is community building and gives people a break. We also do a Chair Yoga class on Fridays."
- "We've got a fresh set of goals, but who knows what exactly the second half of 2021 will bring?"

Burnout and Mental Health Issues
Concerns around burnout and mental health were repeatedly voiced.

- "One of our Organizational Goals for 2021 is to reduce burnout."
- "From the start of the pandemic, we gave employees permission to shut off their computer and do something independent yet together. Everyone go for a run/hike/walk and then take a picture and post it on Slack. It's doing something together but apart. We also encouraged employee events during the workday – cooking class, an employee band, and it's turned out to be a new way for our employees to celebrate who they are and what they do."
- "We are focusing more on Mental Well-Being. One important skill we are training is basically First Aid for Managers. We aren't training them to administer care, but to identify when people may be suffering or need help. We can then point them in the right direction to get help."
- "We are encouraging PTO and long weekends and giving employees time during the day to engage in activities and self-care."
- "We nearly lost one of our top talents to stress and burnout. We gave that person a full month off to recharge."
- Recommended Mental Health resources:
  - [Modern Health](#) (best suited for larger companies).
  - Tap into benefits providers for mental health programs that they offer.

- o Resiliency Coaching: www.bankscoaching.com
- Recommended articles:
    - o www.tanveernaseer.com/3-common-myths-about-leadership-burnout-suzi-mcalpine/
    - o www.lionsroar.com/resilience-self-care-for-tough-times/
- Most CHROs have found annual employee surveys and more frequent pulse checks (often focused on specific issues) to be helpful in measuring employee engagement, stress, burnout, etc. Recommended tools include:
    - o Peakon (being acquired by Workday)
    - o Gallup
    - o Culture Amp
    - o Visier
    - o Worklytics
    - o SurveyMonkey

Internal Communications

With zoom fatigue growing, many have tried to be creative with bringing people together virtually: providing new opportunities to connect on a personal level, facilitating screen time breaks during the workday, varying up stale meeting patterns, etc.

- "Quarterly leadership and sales meetings that had been in-person are now virtual and have increased in frequency (now monthly). This has been very well-received and improved communications significantly."
- "When the pandemic started, we emphasized communication and we got A+ for that in our surveys. However, we are now getting pushback for making up reasons to have meetings. We're trying to find the right cadence of surveys and communications and meetings."
- "We find that many of our employees rely on us, their employer, to provide information about the pandemic, so we're providing as much information as possible."
- "We have encouraged phone calls for 1-1s vs. Zooms. That was well received by employees."
- "We have our 30-minute team meetings start 5-minutes after the hour and 1-hour meetings start ten minutes after the hour. The first 5-10 minutes can be used for watercooler and social interaction for those that join early and want that connection. The idea is to give people some breaktime—especially working parents trying to prepare lunches or get their kids set up on Zoom classrooms."
- "Our all-hands sessions have been difficult, and executives are not building in long enough breaks between meetings. But our fireside chats have been a huge hit."
- "We've hired a leader for HR analytics, and we are looking at what times of day are we seeing the greatest email traffic, are the continuous flows of messaging contributing to greater burnout, et cetera. We're doing these analyses not from a 'Big Brother' perspective but with a global mindset and to envision what a new normal for us should look like, which is likely not a standard 8am to 5pm."
- "We end our meetings 10 minutes before the hour. We also decided that on Fridays, we have no department or companywide meetings. We do hold optional 'Lunch and Learns' on Fridays which have been very well received."
- "Our teams feel more bonded than ever before. We've gotten to know about each other's kids, pets, hobbies, etc. through the pandemic; our relationships are more personal, and the team is now more empathetic as a whole."
- "30% of our executive team has now onboarded during COVID. Nonetheless, our team has jelled. We are sharing goals and working through development plans and all of that very fluidly."

- "With the HR team, we have daily huddles: we (virtually) gather for 15 minutes or less at the beginning of the day to discuss what's on the radar for the team."
- "We did an interactive mixology event with Snake Oil Cocktail which was a total blast…"
- "The best event I've done for work during the entire pandemic was with a group of colleagues where we gathered from 8-10pm at night, we all made 'smores in our respective houses, and talked for 2 hours…"
- "We have been encouraging telephonic 'walk and talk' meetings where teams can get outside, have a change of scenery, and combat their exhaustion and the monotony."

Vaccinations

Many companies have been providing letters and are working with State/County officials to help to get essential employees vaccinated. For most companies, that approach has been effective. Nearly every company is strongly encouraging their entire workforce to get vaccinated, but are not planning to require vaccinations in order to WFO (Work-from-Office).

- "Recruiting and retaining employees is difficult for us, and we decided we can't force our employees to vaccinate, because they may leave."
- "We may require employees who are not vaccinated to wear masks and maintain social distance requirements, while being more lenient with those who are vaccinated."
- "We are working with peer companies/competitors to pool resources and bring in mobile vaccination sites to various locations."
- "We do not have a mandatory vaccine policy."
- "We will not mandate vaccines but will likely do rapid tests."
- We are developing a policy now, but we will strongly encourage our employees to get vaccinated. Most are eager to be vaccinated."
- "There's not much you can do with an employee who refuses vaccination on religious grounds or with a medical exemption. We had one employee who has refused due to religion…"
- "Our return-to-work plan is to have employees be responsible for their own health. The individual will attest that they feel healthy, and all employees will be required to comply with local laws and customer policies. Salespeople will be responsible for tracking who they are meeting. At present, we are not allowing customer visits to our locations."
- "We provided a letter to all of our workers and it was relatively easy for them to receive their vaccinations in our county."
- "We have a location in (the Midwest) and the Governor has not mandated masks there, so that has been challenging for us… we are not going to mandate vaccines, but will provide guidelines."
- "Our incentive will be that one week after you receive your second vaccine, you will not need to wear your mask in the lab…"
- "We have a very different culture at our location (on the East Coast) than in California. There is a dichotomy in views about the vaccine... but, surprisingly, a few of our scientists aren't eager to get an RNA vaccine…"
- "Most of our employees are clamoring to get the vaccine. We are looking into if we can host vaccinations on-site. AbbVie and a few other companies have held 'Vaccine Days' for their employees. We're not forcing the vaccines on employees, but encouraging them… We have armed our employees with letters and there has been little resistance overall."
- "Our employees are happy to get a vaccine. Most of us are tired of working at home!"
- "The majority of our workforce is lab-based; we haven't had a situation where anyone refused."
- "We are planning to move to a mandatory vaccination in order to be on-site."

- "We were going to require employees to be vaccinated but our legal department doesn't feel comfortable with that approach."
- "We do not have a formal vaccination policy, but we did provide letters. I was surprised to find out that my doctors are not even requiring vaccination for their office staff."
- "We were going to mandate vaccination, but if an employee refuses, we would then have to fire. Our external counsel advised us that this would be complex to navigate, and we would rather not bring that complication on. So, we are starting with a full education campaign..."
- "We required people to wear PPE, so if vaccination reduces your risk of being a COVID spreader, then we feel we can require vaccination on those grounds."
- "We are giving our employees a $100 incentive and 2 days off if they get vaccinated."

Return to Work Plans

A large percentage of employees who have been working from home for the past year want to maintain some flexibility. Numerous companies are now planning for a shift to a hybrid approach to work (i.e., 2 days at home, 3 days in the office with hoteling/hot desking). Some Executive Teams have a strong desire to get everyone back into the office as soon as possible due to concerns about weakening culture, missed opportunity for collaboration, and a lack of hands-on and timely coaching. Each company is trying to sort out how to best align their 'return to work' with their core values and organizational DNA.

- "We've abandoned space and are getting used to not having big offices. We are planning to do a lot of hot-desking/hoteling. Maybe our exec team will be in the office 2 days per week?"
- "Our tech leadership team is the most enthusiastic about bringing people back to the office, although the staff prefers working from home. Leaders miss the SCRUM/in-person meetings."
- "Management wants people to get back in the office ASAP. It's going to be pretty tough to do. We feel that new employees, especially younger ones, are missing out on the culture and the development opportunities. No on-time coaching is happening right now. We have some young, smart people that we want in the office to help them develop."
- "For us, a big issue is training managers on how to manage remotely. It's not easy!"
- "Our company was already 25% remote before the pandemic, so we will have a hybrid model on return. We are looking at Deloitte's pixelation of work concept (enterprise crowdsourcing)." [4:20 min video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NQBmPecL64]
- "Our company went public last year, and we plan to be a work-from-office culture when we get through the pandemic. We had a 9% attrition rate last year but expect to potentially see that number double or triple with the work-from-office approach, but I am okay with that. We want a culture that relies heavily on casual conversations. We acknowledge that remote work may be productive, but we are betting that innovation and better relationships can be achieved through an in-office culture—particularly when it comes to development of manager level and below employees… There is very little quality data on remote vs. in-office work today… It is critical to get your talent/real estate/location strategies aligned."
- "CBRE is conducting our return-to-work and real estate project. At present, just 10% of our work force wants to return to the office. Our Head of Engineering has been a staunch advocate of having everyone return but has acknowledged the team is very productive in a remote setting."
- "Doing all remote or doing all in-office is easier than going hybrid. Avoiding 'haves' and 'have nots' will be a big challenge."
- "I think we will see significantly less corporate travel long-term."
- "Our company was at 15% remote prior to the pandemic and our COO is championing a 'Back to Better' approach to returning to work. The objective is to achieve better ways to work, better

ways to live, better ways to care for each other and our communities. We are anticipating multiple types of work arrangements: in office, fully remote (30% of population), flex."

- "We had a culture that was very resistant to remote work pre-pandemic. The unintended consequence is that we have been even more productive while remote. People have been working harder and with fewer boundaries. We have grown tremendously during this period, but have attitudes changed?"
- "The boundaries between work and home are completely gone… For many of our employees, they are in uncomfortable home environments and they can't wait to get back to a real office."
- "We plan to have 30% of our workforce as remote working from home, 20% out in the field, and 50% in the office. We feel our executive committee must be together."
- "It's still a discussion for us but I think we'll ultimately land on a hybrid model. For most roles, we won't mandate a return-to-site if someone prefers to make their core office at home."
- "We aren't going to move back to 5 days per week in the office. Many of our employees believe that commuting is just lost productivity now."
- "We've always been flexible on work arrangements. We're giving employees a choice on where they want to work – if they want to primarily be WFH or have their base at the office."
- "Our CEO believes that the 'switch' has now been flipped back on, but others have different expectations about returning to work."
- "We plan to have no assigned seats upon the return to office. We had 'neighborhoods' without assigned desks pre-Covid. During the pandemic, everyone's stuff was packed up and shipped to them. We will be reservation-based when we return."
- "It's our leadership's strong desire for most people to come back to the office. But with manager approval, the new expectation will be just 3 days per week in the office and 2 days per week WFH. There is much more openness to that type of arrangement than there was in the past."
- "We have worked with our facilities team to build more collaboration space. The new expectation is going to be 1 to 3 days per week in the office."
- "We are planning to operate like consulting companies. We want to copy their playbook in having our employees come back on-site primarily for team trainings/culture-sustaining events."
- "We have executives based at all four of our sites with a few who are remote. We get together as one team when we can, but having a distributed team has worked for us. Our perception is this will be the way forward for most companies."
- "Many of our employees had horrible commutes pre-pandemic, so we are planning to move forward with the reduction of our real estate footprint. Instead, we will look to reserve spaces for our teams to meet and to come together to collaborate periodically."
- "We decided to remain remote for the rest of 2021. It's a whole new ballgame in our mind with expectations of being in the office…"
- "We are committed to giving our employees a full quarter of notice on a call back."
- "Much of our decision on when to announce a return-to-office will revolve around the full reopening of schools. Many parents are still managing their kid's virtual school, or their child's school is only open for partial days during the week. So, we're watching that closely…"

Employees Relocating

Many employees are requesting relocation to areas with a lower cost of living or seek to be nearer to extended family. (Most have not considered their employer's tax implications when making the request.)

- "We may allow people to move out of area while keeping their current pay, but require them to travel back to the office for meetings at their own expense; or vice versa – decrease their pay but increase their travel allowance."

- "We are allowing employees who move to keep their current salaries, but we have communicated that they will not receive merit increases until cost-of-living balance is restored."
- "Using survey data, we categorize states into 3 buckets: High, Medium, and Low Cost of Living, and adjust compensation appropriately."
- "We've said 'No' to some people who requested to move out of state, but we're thinking about allowing moves within California. We are a little slow to adopting long-term remote work."
- "We have had 150 people ask to leave the Bay Area… There has been pushback about reducing compensation from all areas of the company."
- "We pulse-surveyed our company and 40% of the workforce was interested in relocating."
- "I am worried about compensation parity and the idea that a man that moves from SF and keeps their pay could then be paid significantly more than a woman who is hired in the same locale but at the local prevailing wage rate…"
- "We are taking a look at roles on a case-by-case basis. Can you work from home or do you need to have boots on the ground in that job? We hired someone last week who will not relocate anywhere near us. So, we are certainly hiring more out of area than we ever did before."
- "We don't plan to distinguish compensation by geography. We are trying to be competitive in the overall marketplace for talent. But we are expecting people to travel at their own expense if they move far away from one of our office locations."
- "Except for our field sales team, employees can live wherever they want to -- until Labor Day."
- "We have done a comp analysis around national versus premium areas. If you live in a non-premium area, you'll be on the national average for the position. We're not looking to make changes until next year. But we will categorize each job as either remote or HQ-based."
- "We are making exceptions for 'known commodities' who want to move out of area. But our executive committee must approve every relocation…"
- "We are planning to 'geo-band' pay at the time of hire."
- "We are geo-banding pay at the time of the employee-initiated relocation. But our leadership is reticent to let managers move away from their teams…"

Hiring/Onboarding
For many life sciences and tech companies, hiring has been moving full steam ahead in 2020 and 2021, but successfully onboarding and integrating new employees while remote remains a challenge/concern.

- "Buddy cohorts are not perfect but are helpful for onboarding. Facilitating intros is even more helpful. We give each buddy a day off after they help onboard someone new."
- "We hired 4,000 last year during COVID and are planning to hire another 2,000 this year. We are using Pre-Hire assessments to compensate for fewer in-person interviews."
    - The Caliper Profile
    - PSI 16pf
- "Our buddy program for new hires has been pretty successful. We created a new hire committee, and we are getting substantive feedback to help hires get assimilated. We have held discussions with those who have virtually onboarded to discover how we can get even better."
- "We are anticipating movement and even greater competition for talent when offices reopen."
- "Since we are planning to continue to be remote, we are bringing aboard more experienced talent. We will count on them to be more self-guided, but our talent is coming from everywhere geographically, so we have more choice and believe the flexibility will give us an upper hand."
- "We think that flexibility around working from home long-term will be a competitive advantage from a recruiting standpoint."