Strategies for Working Remotely: Advice from colleagues with experience
A Panel Discussion
April 3, 2020

Panelists:
- Mike Bernhardt, ORNL – ECP Communications and outreach lead
- Lois Curfman McInnes, ANL – ECP ST Deputy Director
- Mark Miller, LLNL – IDEAS-ECP team member
- Kathryn Mohror, LLNL – Co-PI of ExaIO project in ECP
- Elaine Raybourn, SNL – IDEAS-ECP team member

Moderator: Mike Heroux, SNL – ECP ST Director
Who are we?

- Staff at U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) laboratories
- Involved in the DOE Exascale Computing Project (ECP)
  - https://www.exascaleproject.org
- Have experience working remotely
Agenda

• Brief introductions from panelist addressing prompts:
  – Advice you would give to someone just getting started.
  – Challenges you have experienced.
  – Unforeseen benefits.
  – Opportunities to look for from this experience.

• Q&A:
  – Type name and question in the Zoom chat box.
  – Moderator will ask you to ask your question.

• Slides, bios from today:
  – https://www.exascaleproject.org/event/remote

• Google doc Q&A link:
Mike Bernhardt – Opening Remarks

- **Advice:**
  - Don’t think of your work-at-home situation as:
    - “I’m at home and I should try to get some work done.”
  - Do think of it as:
    - “I’m at work, but at least I don’t have far to commute.”

- Discipline is paramount
- You must make a mental leap each day: you left your house and went to work
- A designated work area (permanent or mobile) is really important

- **Challenges I’ve experienced:**
  - WFH is not for everyone. Some employees didn’t adapt.

- **Unforeseen benefits**
  - Learned the art of brevity. (not brevity as in shortness of time, but brevity as in “concise and exact use of words in writing or speech”)

- **Opportunities to look for from this experience**
  - Time not commuting is valuable. Take advantage of it.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

- Just another tool
- Video etiquette
Lois Curfman McInnes – Opening Remarks

• **Advice**
  – Proactively stay in touch with others
    • Regular communication among collaborators + informal communication with colleagues
    • Yet ensure plenty of time for deep work
  – Effective remote working (+ a balanced life) look and feel different for everyone. Find what works for you.
    • “A long time ago — like, last week — we would have talked about setting up a home workspace and setting personal schedules. But this is a new world now.” … *Figuring Out Work and Family in the Age of Coronavirus*, F. Donner and C. Purtill, New York Times, 03/19/2020

• **Challenges**
  – Pay attention to ergonomics – desk, chair, keyboard height (not too much slouching on the sofa!)
  – Take breaks to move

• **Unforeseen benefits**
  – Build skills with distributed collaboration, focus, efficiency

• **Opportunities to look for from this experience**
  – As a community, we can create better approaches for distributed, collaborative computational science
Mark C. Miller – Opening Remarks

• **Advice**
  – Maintain your “normal” schedule (wake, breaks, meals, off-hours, sleep)
  – Have a ”work area” and close it off your when not “at work”
    • Close door, cover with a sheet/blanket, turn off screen/sound
  – Look for the humor in things

• **Challenges**
  – Interruptions from others you live with
  – Too much snacking

• **Unforeseen benefits**
  – Fewer interruptions from co-workers

• **Opportunities to look for from this experience**
  – Learn new technologies and skills for remote interaction (e.g. pair programing with WebEx)
Kathryn Mohror – Opening Remarks

• **Advice**
  – Choose a dedicated space for working
  – Find a way to indicate to your family when you are in a meeting
  – Choose your work hours and stick to them, take breaks!

• **Challenges**
  – Stress from feeling like I always have to be “on”
  – Voice-only communication lacks information
  – Missed opportunities from hallway interactions

• **Unforeseen benefits**
  – Multitasking! Better able to focus on long telecons if I am doing something mindless
  – More time with family, more downtime
  – Better exercise habits (work in between meetings more easily, walk on telecons)

• **Opportunities to look for from this experience**
  – Learn what you actually like about being at work
Elaine Raybourn – Opening Remarks

Advice
• Be a team player, and if you lead a team – do it.
• Leave digital footprints that are persistent, collaborative, and shared
• Know the pros and cons of communication and when to use for best results (this takes practice!)

Challenges I’ve experienced
• Motivate team members, build trust and rapport
• Co-located vs dispersed teams require leadership that is expressed differently
• Need results? Adapt, change your approach

Unforeseen benefits
• Learning new skills, unlearning old habits

Opportunities to look for from this experience
• New perspectives on diversity and inclusion
• Expanded mental model of “productivity”
• Keep process changes that are positive – challenge assumptions and “how we used to do it”
• Resources for Maximizing Remote Working
  Elaine Raybourn, 3/18/2020
  – Remote versus co-located work
  – The remote work playbook
  – 15 questions about remote work, answered
  – How to lead in the age of newly remote teams
  – 8 strategies to set up remote work during the coronavirus outbreak
  – COVID-19 and the shift to remote work

• Clean Your Work Surfaces: One Way to Help Flatten the Curve
  Mark Miller, 3/19/2020

• And more to come …