

top tips



FROM EBONY BELHUMEUR



ADJUSTING YOUR SKILLS TO A REMOTE ENVIRONMENT

We are living in strange times

The world around us is changing at a breakneck pace. Feelings of confusion and emotional overwhelm abound. The state of the global economy remains an open ended question, no one quite sure how it all ends.

For so many assistants the idea of working from home seems counterintuitive. So used to providing in person assistance and being able to quickly address any needs our executive might have makes it difficult to be so far away. The stress has also mounted for many us, with no in-office face time, employers have started to question the value of our work.

If you're in either of those positions I'm going to walk you through the three steps you need to not just survive but thrive during times of chaos. To continue through this or pick up in a better place after the dust settles will require you to commit to doing more.

I've been working remotely for the Founder and CEO of a Fintech company in Silicon Valley for over a year now. We have 150+ employees distributed across the globe, we have over 7 different languages spoken across 5 different continents. Working this way has been incredibly rewarding but comes with its own set of challenges.

What I've learned over the last year is how to make a demonstrable impact on my team and throughout the broader organization by focusing on three key areas; **Culture, Analysis and Meetings**. These three areas of focus are where we already have a huge amount of visibility allowing us to influence them and create lasting change.



be a culture builder

Stronger together

The importance of a company's culture can be difficult to tangibly explain. Without a strong culture, where employees feel supported and inspired, productivity plummets. People retreat into whatever psychological activities provide them with what Lara Hogan identifies as the five BICEPS or Core Needs.

Belonging
Improvement/Progress
Choice
Equality/Fairness
Predictability
Significance

Each represent what we need in order to be successful in the workplace and in life. When a company fails to deliver on one or more of these needs, we quietly check out, deadlines slip across the org and the disillusionment that leads to burnout begins to spread.

Coming undone

When culture is just so-so, not particularly toxic but nothing to write home about, less astute leaders do nothing. They make zero investment into signaling to their employees that this is a priority, they would rather let sleeping dogs lie. Often, especially in times of crisis, leaders are so frazzled and overwhelmed themselves, they are afraid to make things worse. Occasionally some leaders do, by engaging in disingenuous or downright nasty talk that set in motion an ugly chain reaction of hurt people hurting people.

Assistants take the helm

This is where the power and influence of assistants can be leveraged to its full potential. These are the moments where we step into our natural role as leaders and insist on something better, by creating it ourselves. In a previous role we had a toxic administrative culture, competitive and non supporting, it wasn't the Shangri-La I desperately wanted. So I worked to change it, intentionally and strategically.

Start and join fun, engaging conversations

Start and join fun conversations in the workplace.

If your organization is on Slack, start up fun channels where people can unwind and engage in the fun watercooler talk, they're used to at the office.

#Parents - Topic: A place for parents to share joys, triumphs and struggles. We all love to drop in pictures of our kids, share hilarious stories that only other parents would get. Over time we developed a wonderful community of wisdom, insight and trust.

#TheATeam - Topic: Doing the work of the ATeam. Here we all collect as assistants to offer advice, celebrate wins and share a laugh about things only assistants would understand #thestruggleisreal

#Pub - Topic: Grab a pint, sit down and enjoy. The pub is our virtual adult water cooler. You've wrapped up at work, wherever you are in the world and are ready to unwind with great memes and pub talk.

Source awesome meeting backgrounds

Recently we've all found ourselves having to talk into a screen, finding ways to make it more enjoyable and tell us more about what people like and dislike is great. I send out over email or drop in the chat a wide variety of fun and entertaining background.

Here are some fun themes you could try:

Harry Potter

Cartoon Favorites

Disney Princess

Lord of the Rings

Dinosaurs (kids love this one)

80s Theme



*"unwind
&
engage"*



provide analysis

Our role as assistants can feel a bit empty if we don't have a person next to us, spelling out exactly what they need help with. During these times (and hopefully going forward) it's up to us to find places to add value in unique ways. One of the most important things I've learned working remotely is to help provide analysis on the way we work. There is a lot of trial and error happening even within companies who work remotely all the time. The best way to ensure your company grows from this is to help document all of the goings on.

Logging learning during this time will be key. Here is what you need to document:

- What went right? Why and how?
- What went wrong? Why and how?
- Proposals for addressing these issues now and in the future. You should research what other companies are doing. It's great to ask for anecdotal help but you should also be looking for news articles and blog posts by companies who have been doing this longer than you.

be a meetings hero

Finally, I've learned that where I can really make an impact is meticulous management of the details, the one's everyone else lets slip. This has been the most valuable work I've done within my org because they are unburdened with the knowledge that someone is there to manage the million little things.

Schedule with emotional intelligence

Document and understand the various team members' unique situations. Who has kids, who's working from home and being a teacher? Do you know what their schedule looks like? Most executives want meetings scheduled, and they don't care how it gets done. However we know that people who are coming into meetings stressed and distracted aren't going to be productive. So I take care to schedule with the emotional state in mind.



Detailed note-taking and accountability

If meetings are continuing to happen in your org, make sure you are there. If you haven't attended before this is the perfect opportunity to make the case for it. Be sure to document decisions and insist on reaching alignment before the close of the meeting. Every single executive I've supported has been incredibly grateful to have someone in the meeting who is driving alignment rather than allowing ideas and proposals to scatter to the four winds.

Final thoughts

This transition isn't going to be easy, in fact there are already many casualties across the globe as a result of this pandemic. However we can use this time to be alert to the changes taking place and to focus on what we can take action on.

additional resources

Recommended Books

- **Deep Work** by Carl Newport
<https://amzn.to/2xaku3U>
- **The First 90 Days** by Michael Watkins
<https://amzn.to/2XonF2A>

Resources

Conway's Law

<http://www.melconway.com/Home/Home.html>

Meeting Calculator

<https://hbr.org/2016/01/estimate-the-cost-of-a-meeting-with-this-calculator>

Glue Work

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCIAPipnKqw>

THIS IS PART OF A COLLAB SERIES WITH



THE OFFICIALS

EMPOWERING ADMINS AND ASSISTANTS THROUGH
COMMUNITY, COURSES AND COACHING

X



THE ASSISTANT'S LIST

THEASSISTANTSLIST.COM

Visit us:

jointheofficials.com
theassistantslist.com



@jointheofficials
@theassistantslist



@theofficialshq
@assistantslist