

Life Science CHRO Thoughts on Working Virtually, Returning to Site, Engaging Employees, Etc.

These last two weeks, I have spoken with nearly 30 CHROs from Bay Area-based Life Sciences companies about present challenges and opportunities at their organizations. We have discussed the status of their return to site and how they are keeping a virtual workforce engaged, among several other topics. Some highlights from these conversations are featured below.

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6 Top Takeaways from Bay Area Life Science CHROs:

I. Most Lab Staff are Back Onsite, Employees are Returning to the Field, & New Precautions are in Effect:

- *“A modified skeleton lab crew is at our site right now. We are allowing on-site weekend work and evening work, and we will continue to be flexible with modified schedules/hours. Many employees who are parents and primary caregivers need that continued flexibility.”*
- *“We have lab employees onsite now and they are maintaining 6 feet of separation. We’re looking at phasing the rest of our team back after shelter-in-place is lifted. We’ll prioritize research and we’re determining how many people we can safely accommodate at our site.”*
- *“We don’t have our own lab, so we have zero people onsite. We have been purely virtual.”*
- *“We just have a small sub-team onsite. Lab schedules are on a staggered basis and we’re still figuring out how a larger return-to-site will be phased in.”*
- *“We’re involved with a COVID-focused program, so we’ve had people onsite in a large lab space on strict schedules. No office work is to be done onsite with shelter-in-place, only lab work. We have planned a larger return-to-site in three phases.”*
- *“We have a limited amount of people going into the lab. We put together some strong policies and we have face shields for everyone. Plus, no one is required to come in if they’re not yet comfortable doing so.”*
- *“We’re working on coming back into the office on June 1st. I’ve recently dug into the local county ordinances and there are a lot of requirements for reopening!”*
- *“The vast majority of our team is sheltering-in-place, but we have a small number of R&D employees onsite. We’re planning on bringing back our production team in mid-May. We’ll have half come in one week and half the following week. We’ll have day and evening shifts.”*
- *“We’ve implemented rigorous scheduling/calendaring for all people in our lab. Some have the shift of 3am to 9am in the morning. We have the rest of the team working from home including several with underlying health conditions.”*
- *“Most people on our team have been working remotely from home, but we have had some people onsite, including our warehouse staff. The finance team comes in for the check run. We have one rotating HR team member at the front monitoring arrivals at the facility.”*

- *“We’re having production teams onsite 3 days per week. As we think about bringing more employees back, our managers will determine who needs to be on campus and who does not. We’ll factor in childcare, and people anxious to return vs. those wanting to stay home.”*
- *“Some of the employees back on-site have been very frustrated by the staggered schedule we’ve implemented in order to not have too many people at the facilities at any one time.”*
- *“We have commercial team members back out in the field – they’re returning to healthcare sites and calling on doctors and clinics again.”*
- *“Our field forces go to allergists’ offices and we’re asking them to do their work remotely right now while the offices remain closed.”*
- *“We have field staff in over 40 states and 30 countries, so it’s been challenging keeping informed of what’s happening in every region with many different policies.”*
- *“Some field employees are feeling comfortable returning, but that’s really dependent on customer protocols. There are a range of experiences based on which states and countries are opening back up. It’s very administratively burdensome to track the range of policies.”*
- *“Some field sales team members have been more effective selling virtually, believe it or not.”*

II. Divergent Views on Taking Employees’ Temperatures Upon Site Entry, Dispensing PPE is a Challenge:

- *“We have a standing machine taking temperatures upon entering the facility. We’re moving to an open-desk concept so that we’re able to properly deep clean the facility every night.”*
- *“We’re operating with a level of trust; our employees take their own temperatures at home. They are not allowed to come to the facility if they self-report a fever.”*
- *“We have outsourced our temperature checks to nursing assistants. It’s not foolproof, but we’ve had requests for this since it provides peace of mind for some. Others are not comfortable coming back to site until there is widespread, regular testing readily available.”*
- *“We purchased a bunch of thermometers to give out to all employees so they can take their own temperatures at home. They must sign off before coming in; it’s built on the honor system.”*
- *“We’re a virology company and our leadership has not recommended taking temperatures. If you have a fever, you will already not be feeling well... And there are asymptomatic carriers.”*
- *“Our CMO said: ‘No temperature screening.’ There are asymptomatic people who have COVID, so temperature screening provides a false sense of security. It’s just not a foolproof indicator.”*
- *“We’re recording temperatures and if someone is above 100.4 Fahrenheit, we send them home. They’re also asked to fill out a form saying they haven’t been recently exposed to COVID-19.”*
- *“One of our employees admitted that he would have likely come into the facility even with a fever, but he knew he wouldn’t ‘make it past’ our temperature checks at the front.”*
- *“We have masks onsite being distributed by facilities. Our masks took weeks to come in!”*
- *“For our people in the field, a major challenge has been securing ample PPE for them.”*
- *“We’re ordering PPE for all specialists. The field employees get two N-95 masks each, hand sanitizers, wipes, and shield masks. Our county requires masks for everyone in the office.”*
- *“We’re shipping masks to all employees around the world from corporate HQ. It’s a large effort.”*
- *“With reps across the U.S. and globe, our logistics/procurement is very busy with PPE dispersal!”*

III. No Major Reductions in Force, but Budgets Tightening, Small Number of Layoffs, & Slowing of Hiring:

- *“We had a small number of layoffs last week.”*
- *“Our leadership cut budgets with HR’s being reduced significantly.”*
- *“We are instituting a hiring freeze and that brought down morale a little bit.”*
- *“While we are recruiting still, it’s not in as great of numbers as before the pandemic.”*

IV. Childcare Considerations Remain Top-of-Mind and Major Hurdle to Returning-to-Site

- *“If the company is deemed essential, then the employees are thereby essential and childcare centers are re-opening for many essential workers. So, we’re helping connect our employees to a childcare center they trust. But we’re adopting a flexible stance and telling our team that they can continue working from home as long as they need to...”*
- *“We have offered to pool childcare resources. If you want to have other colleagues’ kids at your house, we will pay that employee as if they worked that day. So far, no one has volunteered!”*
- *“The County won’t allow our employees to bring their children onsite, even if we have ample space for them. That’s due to OSHA rules.”*
- *“It has been difficult getting the managers who are not parents to fully understand how much school/daycare closures are complicating parents’ lives.”*
- *“We have agreed, as a company, that all our meetings should end at 10 minutes before the hour and that there should be no meetings at all between 12:00pm-1:00pm every day. This is to give parents the ability to check in on their kids and attend to whatever they need to.”*

V. Working Virtually is Changing Mindsets & Also Presenting Challenges Around Home Office Setups

- *“Previously, our CEO was concerned about people working from home and if they’d be truly productive. So, this has been a great ‘proof-of-concept’ in showing that our employees can be productive working virtually. We’re leveraging our Microsoft Teams channel for all-hands calls.”*
- *“I just sent out a pulse survey and I was happy to learn that employees felt even more supported while working from home. They shared: ‘My manager is checking in with me’ and ‘My manager is understanding of my caregiving responsibilities’ and other comments like that.”*
- *“We were not a culture that worked from home previously, but we’ve quickly switched gears. Our CEO has been tremendous and sends regular videos to the entire workforce.”*
- *“The sentiment from employees has been: ‘I am super productive at home’ and ‘It would be great to be able to work virtually, on a regular basis, even after the shelter-in-place is lifted.’”*
- *“The largest shift has been in building efficiency into the day: what a ‘productive’ day looks like at home is different for me than at the office.”*
- *“Our challenge is going to be: how do we provide flexibility moving forward for people who need to continue to work from home versus those who are interested in getting back to the office?”*
- *“Our CEO was strongly against working-from-home before the pandemic and the question is: ‘What’s going to be the mode for us longer-term?’ I think we will be forced to be flexible with working virtually until there’s a vaccine or a much greater measure of safety in our community.”*

- *“We were running out of space at our facility pre-COVID and now this will cause us to rethink our setup longer-term. Are there functions that can work from home permanently now?”*
- *“We were a company that thought we needed a certain ‘hive activity’ onsite to be at our best, but we haven’t seen productivity losses since shelter-in-place.”*
- *“For home offices, there’ve been questions around ownership/potential returns of varidesks or second monitors that were recently purchased. How do we manage it from an inventory or asset standpoint? What are the policies around clawing it back? What’s the shelf life of the product?”*
- *“Helping employees with remote work setups has been a new challenge. Originally, we tried to control equipment distribution centrally, but shipping costs were exorbitant. Now employees put in a ticket for IT and receive Amazon links for purchasing with instructions on the expensing.”*
- *“We’re modifying our reimbursement policy for equipment, but we can’t afford the ‘blank check model’ where everyone is given a \$1,000+ to spend on home office arrangements.”*
- *“We are now offering ergonomic assessments conducted via Zoom.”*
- *“An ergonomist came to our Lunch & Learn to help advise our employees on their home offices.”*

VI. New Tools for Engagement, Making Workforce Feel Appreciated, & Providing Mental Health Support

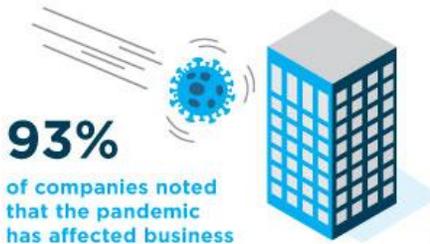
- *“We are using [Kazoo](#) for recognition and it’s been a great tool.”*
- *“[Wellness Coach](#) has been excellent and they are offering a 90-day free trial.”*
- *“We are using [the Big Quiz Thing](#) to kick off our virtual happy hour event.”*
- *“[MindGym](#) has helped us to adapt to the remote working arrangement.”*
- *“I recommend using the [Kahoot](#) learning platform for a fun quiz during all-company meetings.”*
- *“We held a ‘Bring Your Kid to Virtual Lunch’ last week which was fun.”*
- *“Every Friday afternoon we have a Toast & Close as well as a Thursday Lunch & Learn.”*
- *“We have started producing a company newsletter.”*
- *“We have a fitness culture which we’ve kept going with yoga and Tabata Training via Zoom.”*
- *“We have a weekly 4:00pm Paint & Sip featuring a paint-by-numbers activity with beverages.”*
- *“We sent care packages that were delivered to our employees’ homes with branded sweats. Also, we gave everyone a gift card for online yoga sessions.”*
- *“We’re providing lunch via [DoorDash](#) for everyone who needs to come into the office right now.”*
- *“We gave our employees [DoorDash](#) e-certificates to support local restaurants where they live.”*
- *“We’re hosting fireside chats and are also offering a 15-minute meditation session weekly.”*
- *“Our company set up an Independent Living ERG (Employee Resource Group) for our employees who are home alone. They are uploading pictures of meals, talking about pets, etc.”*
- *“We’ve built an additional EAP (Employee Assistance Program) onto our existing infrastructure.”*
- *“We upgraded our telemedicine package.”*
- *“We are using [Talkspace](#) as our therapy offering. They have packages with 4-5 free services.”*
- *“Some didn’t feel comfortable with individual sessions, so we’ve got virtual support groups now.”*
- *“We’re partnering with [One Medical](#) to provide employees with more mental health resources.”*
- *“We are allowing our employees to cash out half of their PTO if need be.”*
- *“We had ‘Mental Health Monday’ where we gave the whole company a Monday off from work.”*

A Few Additional Resources

- a) [Biocom's](#) Return to Work Task Force Survey:

IDENTIFYING COVID-19 TESTING
and the **RESOURCES REQUIRED**
by **CALIFORNIA'S LIFE SCIENCES**

Biocom's Return to Work Task Force has released the results from a recent survey of nearly 100 California life science companies. Key findings will inform industry leaders, health care officials, government groups, and service providers as they work together with Biocom to develop guidance and provide critical support once employees return to the workplace.



- b) PwC's [Automatic Contact Tracing](#) Product
- c) CBRE's [Reopening the World's Workplaces](#) Briefing