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## COVID-19 Update for WTIA Members - April 10, 2020

When do we go back to work? How? What do we need to plan for?  
This is how it may look...

I have been studying what WA government officials are considering and combining that with company reports about coming back to work in China after some restrictions were lifted or modified. Today, I want to share what I have learned.

Our highest priority was containment, which failed miserably in the US due in part to slow government reaction and weak testing capabilities. That left us with mitigation, which seems to have worked well, at least locally. The best case scenario, without mitigation, was a 1-2% death rate for those who contracted coronavirus. We could easily have had a death toll in the US of 1-2 million people, but because of mitigation steps taken, the death rate may well be below 100K. That's still an awful number, and yet also a miracle outcome thanks to all the stay-at-home efforts.

I cannot stress enough that this blunt instrument -- quarantine the entire population and shut down local economies -- was needed because we did not rapidly test the wider population and isolate those who tested positive. That is how containment works. South Korea and Germany are model nations for that approach. As of this moment, we still barely have enough testing capacity for only the highest risk populations. The threat of 1-2 million dead still looms if we "go back to normal" which is why our government will ease restrictions carefully.

**Now that we have seemingly "flattened the curve", the big question is how and when does the lockdown end -- and the economic recovery begin?** Here are some specific lessons coming out of China combined with

some rational thinking about how we operate a business in the US with far less restrictive government control and inadequate testing systems.

**The first question is should we open our business**, even if the stay-at-home orders are lifted in late May or early June? We must adapt to a world in which we assume the virus is still spreading and is carried by people who seem perfectly healthy. We will not have a vaccine or cure until sometime in 2021. We will not have proven tests at scale to quickly identify those who have immunity or those who have the disease until late 2020. **This means we need a strict process to safely come back to work** until testing, vaccines, and successful treatments are available everywhere needed.

- **Step one** is basic screening. The most common is a temperature screen using an infrared thermometer. This is easy to administer and non-invasive. Quite literally, this means checking the temperature of every employee and guest who wants to enter the building. Too warm? Go home.
- **Step two** is keeping employees and guests safe. Since temperature only screens out the few potential carriers who have a blunt symptom indicator, the best protection is masks for all employees and guests. Minimum 6 foot distance between each person in all common areas. No hand shakes. Improved ventilation filtering. Hand sanitizer at every workstation, building entry, and conference room. Limiting the number of people in a confined space such as a conference room. Wash your hands before entering a conference room. Disinfect the table, door knobs, chairs, and any other common surfaces after the meeting. Cleaning crews to disinfect all common hard surfaces in the building after every workday.
- **Step three** is planning who comes back to work. We should allow for people who feel uncomfortable returning to the office to remain working remotely. This means that all the remote tools you are using now for video conferencing and online collaboration must continue for the foreseeable future, blending those who do come to work and those who do not. There are vulnerable populations who have never disclosed their health condition and we as employers owe them the privacy to choose to work remotely without disclosing their rationale. We must take extra care that our teams do not ostracize those who choose to stay remote for a day, a week, or as long as they need, for any reason until we live in a world with more certainty about who has the virus and who doesn't.
- **Step four** is self-certification by every employee or guest, openly expressing confidence that he or she has not been in contact with a known COVID case and is not experiencing any of the symptoms. We need to impress upon our employees and guests that they owe their co-workers and their families the clear declaration that they are OK to the best of their knowledge. We have invested trillions of dollars to avoid the

carnage from this virus. We owe each other the due diligence and respect to ensure that the investment was not in vain.

While these tactical suggestions can help you plan how and when you bring your employees back to work after the stay-at-home orders are lifted, **you will need to remain vigilant** about the local and global state of the pandemic. Remember, we are about 2 months ahead of the rest of the country and most of the rest of the world. Unless there is a massive travel restriction to our state, we will have visitors who almost certainly will be carrying the virus back into our community.

**This has implications for your travel policies.** These are the questions you'll need to ask and determine answers for. Will you restrict travel to only those meetings that are required to be in-person? Who has authorization to travel and for what purpose? Anytime you leave our state, you enter a much higher risk of infection on a plane, train, or just meeting people in another state or country. How will you handle employees returning from a trip? How will you handle employees returning from a personal trip? How will you handle visitor requests from other locations still in lockdown? How will you handle visitor requests from places like China or Korea, who are returning to normalcy?

**Now is also the time to plan how you will build a protocol for what happens if one of your employees or guest tests positive for COVID.**

Who should be notified and how? What will you declare in your communication? What are the privacy and HIPAA implications? What cleaning protocol will you use to protect the other employees and guests? Will you shut your office or operation down? How will you restart?

For what it's worth, our small team of 55 people at WTIA is also working through all these planning ideas and questions. We are all learning. Let's learn together. WTIA will be hosting a few online webinars in the coming weeks to allow you to learn and share with each other about how you are addressing these new business challenges.

**Our first webinar** is on **4/17 at 10 am**, where I'll be speaking with Washington native and US Congressman, Derek Kilmer, to demystify the federal stimulus package and help us forecast what additional actions Congress might take in the near term to support our economic re-start. **Anyone in your company can register for that [here](#).** You can also share the registration link with all colleagues or friends who would find this information useful. Future webinars will be announced at least a week in advance so you can schedule time to join.

Thank you for your support and your courage in this strange time.

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