



# Negotiating the obstacles of Covid-19

Since the coronavirus has had such a huge impact on our daily operations, it has required a complete rethink of operation matters and customer care. The latter being even more important a time of heightened stress.

## Obstacle 1: staff having to work remotely

For a company where staff work from a central location is a serious adjustment to make when they no longer work from the office.

The first problem to face was access to emails and the phone system, as we need to try and keep a 'business as usual' approach. As a company, we opted for a VoIP phone system early on in our growth and at the same time we embraced a paperless office mindset.

The purpose of these decisions was to allow staff to work remotely if really pushed to do so. Now this process has been (forcibly) tried and tested. With snagging issues resolved, once the lockdown is lifted, we know we have the ability for staff to instantly work remotely, should the situation arise, without interruptions to business operations.

## Obstacle 2: site visits

How was this going to work when we are unable to attend our sites or meet with clients without breaking the lockdown? I began to think outside the box and as we still have to have regular visitors to our sites, such as cleaners and



## Benjamin Hume explains how the coronavirus crisis has impacted the daily operations of property managers



fire precautions testing.

These contractors could be asked to report any concerns, issues and problems. This was important as anxiety was clearly running high and we cannot simply down tools and let our blocks fend for themselves. So we told our clients this is how we will look after them.

## Obstacle 3: meetings with staff

We're all scattered around the region, but we all still need to discuss ongoing concerns, emergencies, etc. Internally, we started to use Microsoft Teams; this was a whole new way of working for us and took some getting used to. Once we could see each other, it gave us some reassurance that no matter where we are, we're still a team. (I would go as far as saying family!)

## Obstacle 4: Client meetings

These were a little trickier as Microsoft Teams is quite technical to set up. We discussed ways to engage with our clients, but we could not employ very technical solutions as our clients may not be as "techie" as me. We eventually settled on Zoom as it works well with smartphones, tablets and computers. We started to advertise to our clients that we had this facility. What we desperately want to avoid is a sudden explosion of meeting requests once the lockdown is over, where a lot of these meetings could be held virtually even before the lockdown. Once the lockdown is cancelled, we will look to employ this virtual video conferencing solution more often.

The most important consideration is the mental health issue. With most staff used to a defined working day, location and routine, having staff wake up and sit at their kitchen table is no doubt going to have taken its toll.

So, I have worked hard to ensure we have a morning meeting at 9am each day.

We regularly speak during the day and keep things positive.

Some staff have children and some meetings have to end early if they have issues with their children, so it is about being flexible to enable

these already under-pressure staff feel they are still positively contributing to the business and their work is valued.

We also need to factor in our customer and residents' mindsets. With emotions and stress levels running high and concerns and anxiety flowing throughout, we have to be extremely flexible with our approach to otherwise routine operations. For example, arrears and other low-level issues while upholding the lease covenants. How would you feel if your income suddenly dropped and you were struggling to make ends meet? Understanding this gives you the tools to respond constructively and positively.

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