



The Pelican

Your Best Source for Local Business News and Information | April 2020

Volume 2 - Edition 4

The Pelican is a community initiative made possible with funding and support from Community Futures Lac La Biche. Please forward comments, suggestions or story ideas to contact@cfllb.com



Gene Wesley, General Manager, Community Futures Lac La Biche

Is there any place in the world for a pen and paper anymore? If you are like me and working from home, you are probably relying on technology more than ever. It is wonderful when it works but can also derail your day when it doesn't. I love technology so much that it would absorb all my available time if I let it. I learned a long time ago that there is a necessary balance.

If you have been in my office, you have probably seen the little notes and post-its all over my desk and walls. They may seem random, and maybe I'm fooling myself, but I'll try to explain how I think I'm trying to preserve a dying art and why:

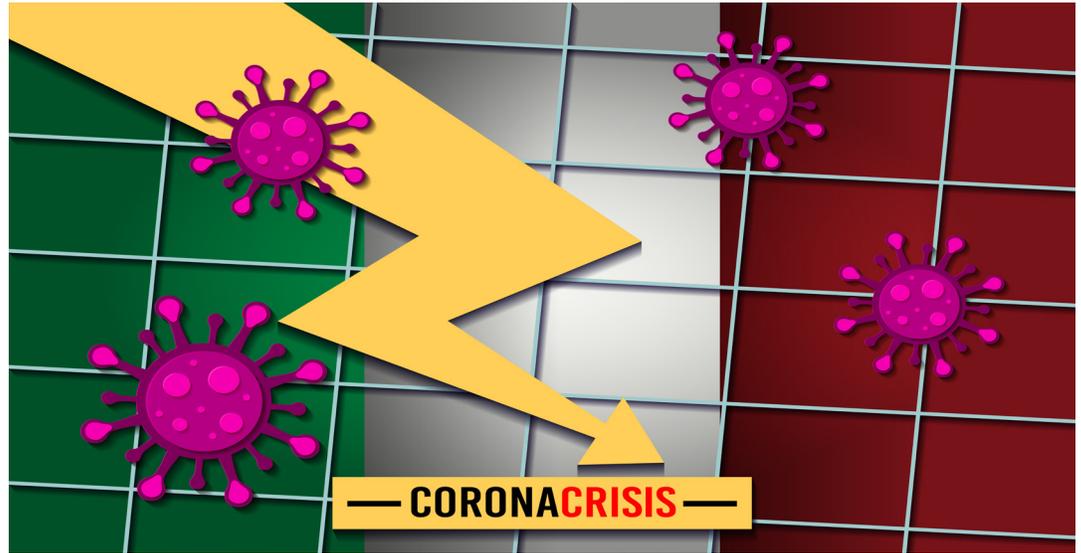
With pen and paper, you are in control.

There is no program to start or directory to find. Just two things laying there. This is efficient and respects the time of the person you are meeting with. Pro tip: It must be legible. If your boss asks you to write more clearly and suggests using the other hand you may want to slow down. If you can't read it later, it's not efficient.

Ideas and brainstorming flow more easily because I doodle what I'm talking about and this helps me visualize what is being discussed. It's a creative act.

The act of writing by hand commits things to memory better. Having your brain and hand in sync with the thought for longer than a millisecond in this instant digital age slows things down and gives it time to "process".

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Working from Home -BEST PRACTICES

In the last few weeks, there has been a lot of changes to our work environment. For those of us who are lucky enough to be able to work from home, the shift hasn't been simple. Getting things accomplished while keeping kids occupied and dealing with pets isn't easy, nor is relying more on your computer to connect into meetings. Given the pandemic, a few nuisances like these might seem somewhat secondary to staying healthy. Just the same, staying as productive as possible while working at home is key to keeping your mental health in check. Here are eight best practices for working at home.



1. Look the part

Part of the psychology of putting yourself in the right mindset for working at home is treating the process the same as you would if you were driving into work and meeting with others at a different location. Get up early. Take a shower. Dress for the job. You will be surprised how you will be able to retain focus and how much more you will accomplish when you look and feel like you would when you are working at your regular location.

2. Keep to a schedule

Whether you are working at home or not keeping to a routine is an essential part of ensuring that you can accomplish as much as possible every day. Don't let your household chores get mixed up with your work responsibilities. You may need to make adjustments if you have children at home. Rather than working a regular nine-to-five schedule, you might find it more productive to work in blocks of time earlier or later than you usually would, to accommodate working from home and family. If this is the case, make sure that your boss and clients are aware of these changes and, most importantly, stay consistent.

3. Ask for what you need

If you are required to work from home, make sure that you have what you need to get the job done. During a pandemic,

it's neither practical or safe to return to the office or workplace to get this or that. Make arrangements to bring home your computer, files, stationery and other tools necessary for your job. If you have a desk job, consider bringing home your chair as comfort and familiarity will help you to get in a working frame of mind. Consider any ergonomic factors that will need to be accommodated. If Internet and phone costs are to be incurred at your residence, ensure that you have discussed with your organization how you will be accommodated. Remember, nobody wants to be surprised by the expenses that they weren't expecting.

4. Create a space that is yours

You may not have an office at home that allows you to work in private. Given that, it is essential to let everyone in your household know where your home-office will be, whether it is at the end of the dining room table or on the games table in the basement. No matter where you decide to work, establish your space and make it your own, even if it is just for a few weeks.

5. Set boundaries

Once you've established your routine and hours of work, it is crucial to establish boundaries for your family, friends, and co-workers. Let them know when you will be working and try your very

best NOT to answer that email from a colleague at 9:30 PM. Just because you are working from home and you are now home most of the time, doesn't mean that you are therefore working all of the time.

6. Take breaks

Most of us who have had full-time employment have come to know about morning and afternoon coffee breaks, where workers in the organization have an opportunity to meet, talk about the day, their kids, or the news whether they even want to drink coffee or not. The important thing about the coffee break is that it is a dedicated, short amount of time to de-stress, think about something other than work, and to socialize. When you are working from home, these short breaks are equally important. Take 15 minutes to phone a family member, make some tea, or catch up on the news. In some organizations where staff are required to work remotely, virtual coffee breaks are hosted via Skype to build a sense of community. The only rule, in this case, is that shop-talk is not allowed.

7. Get outside

Even though we may not be able to get outside as much as we would like to during the pandemic, activities like walking your dog, clearing some snow, or just sitting on the front step, provide you with

an opportunity to catch your proverbial breath, feel refreshed and help to maintain a bit of sanity.

8. Remote supervision of employees is critical

If you supervise employees from your home office, regular check-ins are essential. Check-in with your staff regularly to assign work, review progress, and monitor outcomes of performance and maintain a sense of connection. You also need to check-in to ensure their health and well-being. Establish a protocol early, as to who will contact who, and at what frequency to ensure ongoing communication as necessary. ■

Funny Things You Hear...

If the kids are out of school much longer a parent will find a vaccine for the corona-virus before the scientists do.

There was a time when I would spin the toilet paper roll like a contestant on the Wheel of Fortune, now I carefully turn the roll like I'm cracking a safe.

I used the bathroom at a local restaurant. I washed my hands. I opened the stall door with my elbow, and raised the toilet seat with my foot. I turned on the water using a tissue. I opened the bathroom door with my elbow. And when I got back to my table I realized that I forgot to pull up my pants. ■



TIPS FOR YOUR BUSINESS DURING THE PANDEMIC

In recent weeks, everything about doing business has changed. From social distancing to working remotely, a lot of what we do has been turned on its head. Essential services like grocery suppliers, pharmacies and liquor stores have seen an increase in sales and all of us have had to make accommodations in one way or another. Keeping a small business in operation in these times takes courage, effort and proper management. Here are a few things that you should consider if you haven't already.

Be a champion communicator.

Be upfront with your staff. Let workers know your expectations, how you will operate moving forward to the best of your ability. More importantly, let them know that their welfare is your primary concern. Don't be afraid to let your customers know that you are operating differently now, whether it is related to delivery times, stock availability, or delays due to staffing issues. Most everyone will be understanding during an emergency.

Switch as much of your business online if at all possible

From staff meetings to interactions with customers, look at ways to use technology to facilitate your operations. Now more than ever, a strong social media strategy will prove to be an advantage. Encourage employees to work from home. Find ways to engage as many of your stakeholders as possible with remote technology to minimize the number of in-person contacts.

Be Flexible

During this time of emergency, your staff, contractors and clients will have a host of

other things to deal with besides normal business operations. Provide them with as much opportunity as possible to get the job done. Your efforts will be appreciated long after the pandemic has ended.

4. Review Insurance

Although it is too late for this particular event to go shopping for business interruption insurance, it is not too late to start investigating the acquisition of this type of safety net for the next time. Unfortunately, there probably will be a next time.

Hygiene is a top priority

Whether you are working from home or still coming into the shop, ensure that everyone follows the very best hygiene practices. From social distancing, not touching your face, staying away from everyone else even with just the slightest sign of a cold or flu, to washing your hands thoroughly at every opportunity, cleanliness is no longer only a nice-to-have attribute. Keep all surfaces, everything from counters to doorknobs disinfected with routine cleansing.

Keep on top of support programs

Regional, provincial and federal governments have initiated programs ranging from tax deferrals to salary support for small business owners and employees. Keeping abreast of what is available is not an easy task as supports are evolving daily. Make it a routine to visit the appropriate websites to see what is available and when.

Lac La Biche County has assembled a comprehensive list of services and supports on their website for businesses and individuals affected by COVID-19. To view the complete list, link to: <https://bit.ly/llbcbizinfo>



Didja KNOW?

Lac La Biche County is home to the largest feather sculpture in Alberta, if not Canada. Artist Melanie Braund, with the assistance of the Lac La Biche Art Club, invested more than 345 hours in the 30 foot tall work located in the centre of the traffic circle outside of the Bold Centre. ■

BUSINESS PROFILE: BRITTON'S YOUR INDEPENDENT GROCER

Grocery stores are an essential service, especially during the times we are now experiencing. Bill Britton, owner of **Britton's Your independent Grocer** took a bit of time from his hectic schedule to answer a few questions from The Pelican. Here is what he had to say:



What changes in your business have you noticed since the onset of the pandemic?

Shopping patterns have changed dramatically. Rather than shopping for the week, customers are purchasing enough for 2 weeks or more. Staples like flour, grains, yeast, and legumes

are quick to leave the shelves more than prepared foods. Customers using the PC Express Pick-up Service has increased by more than 200%.

Have you been able to keep stock on the shelves?

Yes. Although things like toilet paper and frozen vegetables have been sold out from time to time, availability is becoming more consistent.

Do you have any tips for customers?

There are several things for shoppers to keep in mind:

- As the number of people in the store is now limited, only one person from a household is allowed in the store at any given time.
- Come in with a list and know what you want. Organize your list in terms of departments so that you can quickly move through the store. Make use of the signage.
- Be patient, kind and be prepared to experience line-ups.
- Use less cash and make use of debit or credit whenever possible.

How has the pandemic affected staffing?

We've recently on-boarded 20 new people. Production jobs, like meat-cutting, baking, preparation for catering etc. have transitioned to the night shift to make better use of the staff and time available.

How has your parent corporation stepped up to help your business?

Loblaw Companies Limited has gone above and beyond to find new vendors for products that have become difficult to source. They have been flexible with illness leave, especially for those directly affected by the pandemic, and have instituted a pay

protection program for these folks as well. The organization has reinforced the importance of safety, Plexiglas barriers for our cashiers as well as offering access to mental health resources during these stressful times.



Is there anything else that you would like to add?

The most important advice that I can give is "be kind". As an essential service, grocers are doing the best that they can without the additional stress of those who are not thinking about the greater good of the community. Stay safe, and practice social distancing. ■

HOME OFFICE ALTERNATIVES



(Gene's column, cont. from page 1)

They are timeless and don't need Internet or electricity. There is a definite sense of control and simplicity that is often lacking in our lives now. A bit of balance to all the electronic.

Out of sight out of mind gets forgotten. Urgent notes are on my monitor or keyboard and things to do today are front and center.

They make me feel better when I can crumple them up when they are done and throw them in the waste basket.

Maybe more than anything, using pen and paper gives you a sense of calm and a way of getting back to basics when life was a lot simpler and digital technology was a luxury, not a necessity. Given all of this, I think I'll try to write things down by hand even more often than before. *Now, if only I could find a pen that works.* ■



Put your business on the map and be part of the App by registering it on the Lac La Biche Region Business Directory at: www.llbbusiness.com
Download the phone App on iTunes or Google Play.
Search "Lac La Biche Region."

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