

## **COPING WITH COVID 19 LOCKDOWN**

By Anna Plange, Deputy Registrar, Ghana Psychology Council, Industrial and Organisational Psychologist.

Since Ghana recorded her first case of Coronavirus the President of the Republic, His Excellency Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo-Addo has introduced a number of measures to help contain the virus and to limit its spread among the general populace. Some of the measures include social distancing, ban on social gatherings and lockdown of cities considered hotspots.

Most organisations which were exempted from the lockdown were encouraged to reduce the number of employees to very critical staff to ensure continuous service provision. However, organisations that were not exempted had to close down and look for alternative means of staying in business. Some organisations are using online portals to stay in touch with clients and employees as well as suppliers and other business partners. As a result, many employees are working from home; a phenomenon which is not very common in Ghana.

Working from home has its own challenges especially if this is worker's first time. It is therefore important to know and understand the challenges and how to handle them.

As employers, it's important to help employees with all the necessary tools required to work with away from the normal work environment: computers, internet services and resources or information needed to work with from home. IT officers need to train and set other staff members up to be able to receive work assignments and to report back completed assignments, have conference calls and online meetings. They also need to be available to offer supportive training as and when needed. There is the need to secure office data and information if employees are to work outside the office from cyber attacks which is less likely usually within the office environment because of the security measures in place.

Communication is very important for businesses. There is the need to maintain communication lines with employees, clients and business partners and vice versa. Providing regular, accurate and timely information is important during this period of uncertainty. There should be clear lines of sending information to staff (including work assignments), sending information to clients on available services and products and how to assess them.

In as much as COVID 19 is novel, working from home is equally novel for a lot of employees. Working from home poses a lot of challenges for employees. They are faced with distractions from children, spouses, television and social media, food, feeling of loneliness and isolation.

Employers therefore have a responsibility to design and assign work to make it easier for staff to work. People could be assigned to teams where a person's work depends on the other so that there is communication amongst team members.

Employees on the other hand need to work on themselves to be able to stay focused to perform assignments and to meet deadlines. Working on oneself means setting schedules for waking up, going to bed, attending to work assignments, spending time with the family, etc.

Time for work assignments should be agreed with family to minimize distractions. Where it is possible have a room to yourself where you could escape to have some quiet time to do your work. If not, agree with your family members to allow you some time to work. You need to train yourself to use the necessary online portals to stay in touch with work colleagues, management as well as clients. You also need to ensure all your work on your computer is safe from cyber attacks as well as family members especially children who could play with your computer and destroy it accidentally.

One good opportunity this pandemic has brought to us is the opportunity to spend time with family. Let us make the best of it. Do fun activities with your family, i.e. things that will get everyone involved, like cleaning the house, cooking together and playing games. Do you remember all the things you planned to do but never got the chance to? You now have the opportunity to do them. Also spare sometime to call up family and friends you have not seen or heard from in a long time as well as work colleagues to check up on them. This is to maintain social connections. Help your children with online studies and you could as well learn new skills online like gardening and sewing, depending on your interest.

Finally we should try as much as possible not to over indulge in food. A lot of people tend to indulge in emotional eating when they panic or are afraid, or when they feel isolated and bored. As we are home, if we do not control ourselves, we will find ourselves eating things in the fridge anytime we enter the kitchen.

Let us all try to limit the negativity and focus on positives. History has taught us that pandemics of such magnitude happen from time to time: the Spanish flu World War II, SARS, H1N1, deadly Ebola, and now COVID 19 yet we are alive. And we shall continue to live. Let us make the best of the opportunity: opportunity to be with family, learn a new skill etc. Let us continue to observe the protocols as we have been taught, seek right information from credible sources, maintain good health, eat well at the right time and do exercises. But above all don't give up hope, God is in control.