

## Weeks 3-4 in the Alert Level 4 lockdown: Making it work – further tips and resources for managers

For many people the initial adrenaline surge of the early weeks of Alert Level 4 has passed. Brene Brown describes this as a time of vulnerability where we need to dig deep for strength and focus on simple sustainable practices. [Leading in a VUCA](#) (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) environment means that different and wider anxieties and complexities are arising including home schooling, family members without jobs and practical implications of Levels 4 or 3 for work and home. It is now that [leadership is particularly important](#); providing clear communication, fostering a sense of confidence that we can work through this together and making clear-sighted decisions about opportunities and risks. Whilst the resources in Weeks 1 and 2 concentrated on using existing skills to help achieve extraordinary changes at work and home, we need to start embedding ways of working to see us through upcoming weeks and months.

These four tips and further resources on [remote working](#) build on the earlier materials available in the [Archive](#) and the [Coronavirus COVID-19 information](#) page on the University of Otago website.

1. **Continue to start with yourself.** Lead by example and visibly promote healthy working habits. The recent break provided a pause to refresh and refocus in our bubbles. Were there any things that you did which you could keep in your work day routine as part of sustaining your energy? Block time in your diary in advance to do something every day which sustains your well-being. Deliberately create some JOMO moments (Joy of Missing Out) where you step back from the digital devices to do a puzzle, read a joke or have virtual coffee with a peer. In order to re-focus between tasks, actively create micro-pauses such as looking out of the window between meetings. As you work and lead from home, start each day identifying the priorities and accepting that, under current conditions, some things cannot be done or can only be completed to a standard which is “good enough”. It is not Business As Usual – it is Business Amidst Unusual Circumstances.
2. **What is your role as a manager and leader at this time?** At the heart of leading during uncertainty is *communication and connection*. Amidst the large volumes of information from multiple sources, your staff need clear and regular communication from you. Stick to the facts, answer questions honestly, say when you do not know the answer and, where possible, try to find out the answer from your manager or peers.

One function of a leader is [“to point the way ahead”](#) and this awaits Government decisions about future Alert Levels. So, concentrate on simple messages about the focus of work at this time; share this frequently with your team. Keep a sense of agency and purpose in your message and choice of words, “We are here to provide/do... in the next month”. Depending on your context, it may be possible to spend some time with your team [brainstorming about future options/actions](#) which helps move people from a reactive to a proactive mind-set. This is an exercise in [optimism](#).

*Watch out for your team* – many staff are working under significant pressure with new learning about technology, processes or teaching required within short timeframes; now is the time to plan to make this sustainable. Revisit and clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations. Now that people have had a couple of weeks working remotely, consider the individual differences amongst your team members and their circumstances.

Are some people feeling concerned or guilty that “things take longer” than when on campus? Are there people who are struggling with motivation or procrastinating because they feel unsure about which activities to prioritise? Are there people who are overworking because of setting up new ways of teaching or because of the need to be as, or more, effective than when working in the past? As a manager, ask questions to explore how people are approaching their work and their concerns. Focus on [coaching](#) and supporting them in areas where they may need encouragement, feedback or help.

When viewing the different ways national and local leaders are approaching this time, what stands out for you and how might you change the way you lead? Reflecting on our management/leadership styles provides an opportunity to [“reboot”](#) as we adapt to [the needs of those we lead](#).

3. **Pause and take stock in order to look ahead.** Alert Level 4 has led to changes in the way we work and how we connect with each other. Consider how these changes might affect the way we work and connect in the future. As you connect with other people, build a library of stories around the *personal* aspects of working remotely (e.g. the cleanest house ever! – or your favourite COVID-19 cartoon or song). Some teams are building a repository of photos and videos as a historical record and sending these to the COVID-19 archive. As you connect with peers and team members, start sharing the *professional* aspects of working – what practices might you develop and keep in the future? Planning and discussing future events are optimistic behaviours, which sustain us during uncertainty.

4. **Look ahead.** Celebration of significant events builds team cohesion. Have there been events that might not have had full acknowledgement in recent weeks such as birthdays, retirements, birth of a baby, research grant success or publications? Would it be useful to mark these events now or will you wait until a future date when everyone is on campus?

When thinking about Alert Level 3 in the future, what might this mean for your team? What are the opportunities as well as risks? [What networks do you wish to retain](#) or rebuild? What plans or activities have been placed on hold and might need to be reconsidered or recommenced? What accomplishments do you wish to celebrate? How will you foster the leaders of tomorrow in your team who are critical to the University's future success?

*Show up, be seen, answer the call.*

*Daring leadership is ultimately about serving other people, not ourselves*

*[Brene Brown](#)*

*Thank you to leaders and managers for contributing some of their lessons learned to this tip sheet*