



Staying Connected While Keeping Apart:

How Wellness Professionals Can Support
Employees, Executives and Clients in the
Time of Physical Distancing



**WORKPLACE
WELLNESS**
CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

We are in an unprecedented moment in history.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, at least 43% of the American workforce performed their jobs remotely. Now, with nearly every organization in the world switching to a work-from-home model, that percentage has increased exponentially. ([ref.](#))¹

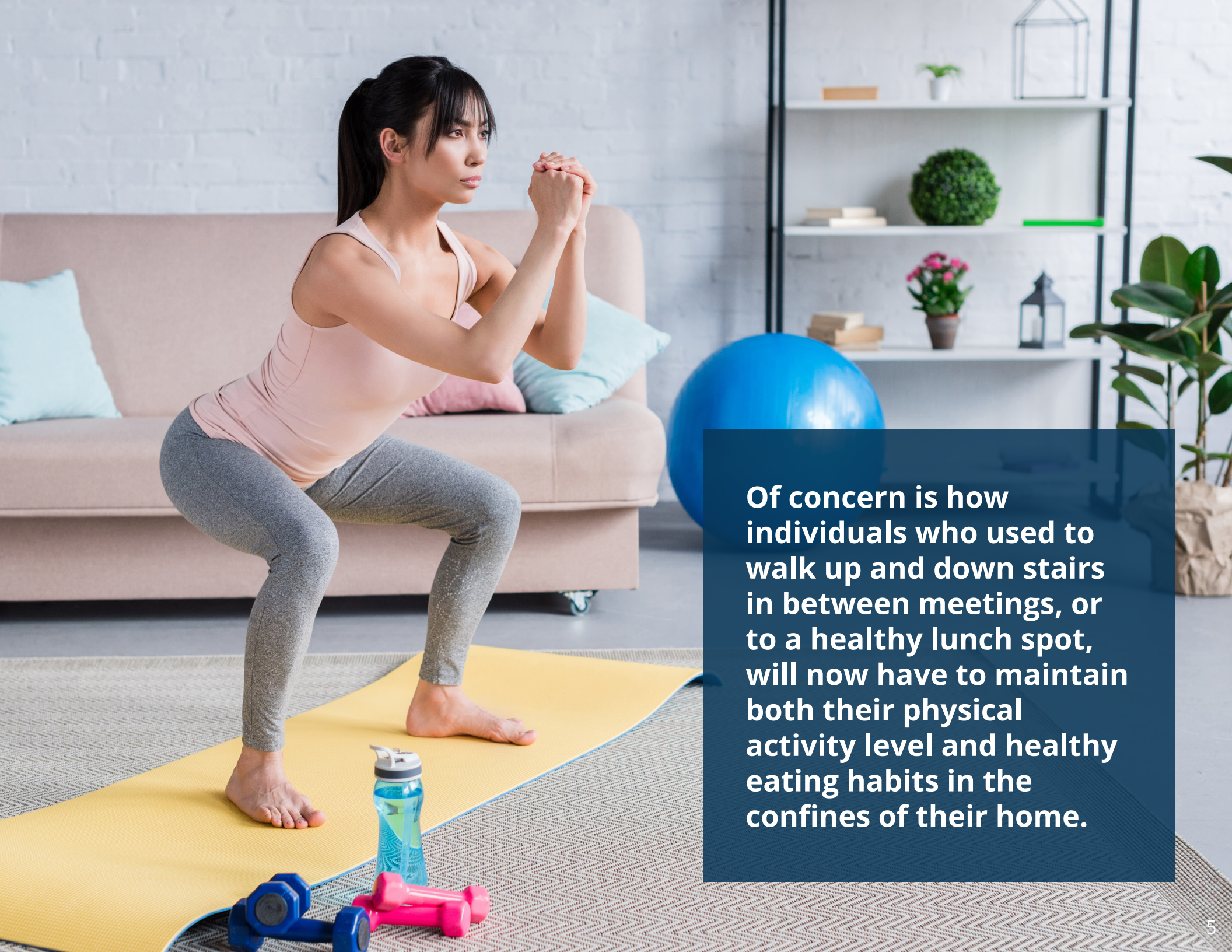




As wellness professionals, we are needed—now, more than ever—to support clients, employees and executives through this transition.

**We must be attentive to supporting both
their physical and emotional well-being.**





Of concern is how individuals who used to walk up and down stairs in between meetings, or to a healthy lunch spot, will now have to maintain both their physical activity level and healthy eating habits in the confines of their home.

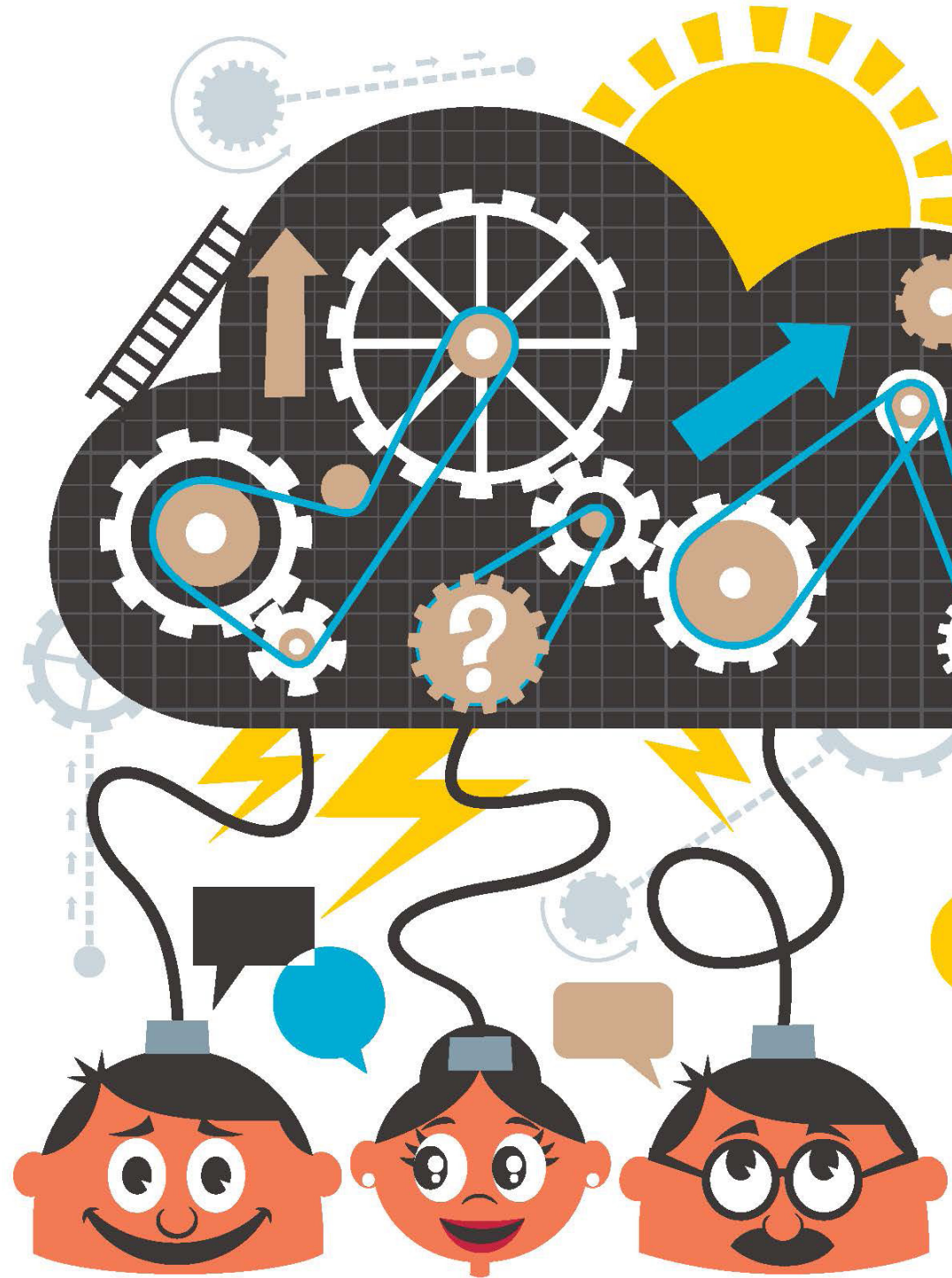


In the days, weeks and possibly months to come, we will also face a bigger challenge: **keeping mental well-being on track**. With clients facing physical distancing and limited opportunities for person-to-person connections, wellness professionals have a crucial role to play in helping protect employees from feelings of loneliness and despair.

This help may come in the form of **online group fitness classes** or **virtual 1:1 coaching sessions**. Or it could even come in the form of a **virtual employee retreat**, designed to boost morale and engagement at every level of the organization you support. In this guide, we'll review various opportunities for you to help employees and organizational leaders stay connected during this trying time.

The guiding principal for wellness professionals is clear:

now is our moment to **serve and support** organizations and their employees.





As wellness professionals, we must step up and offer our support. We must be **positive role models for physical and mental health**, and we must do so quickly, as our clients' needs are greater than ever. Let's explore now the tools and strategies we can harness to do just that!

The New Art of the Meetup

As many employees shift to a work-from-home model, **virtual** meetings and how they are facilitated, will be more important than ever.





Physical distancing and isolation will be extremely impactful to everyone's mental health. ([ref.](#))²

Finding ways to stay connected will be crucial.

One important way for you as a wellness professional to do so is by transitioning your wellness programs and services to a virtual platform, such as Zoom.



During this pandemic, utilizing virtual supports will be critical to not only help manage and motivate employee work and team meetings but to check in to ensure they are doing ok.
Enter the Zoom meeting.

As with onsite meetings, virtual meetings require preparation, guidelines and meeting norms (i.e. who will speak during the meeting, who will manage questions, who will take notes and who, if anyone, will need to tackle other roles.) It may even be prudent to appoint a co-host to help you run this meeting, or to take over as host if you are unable to lead the meeting.



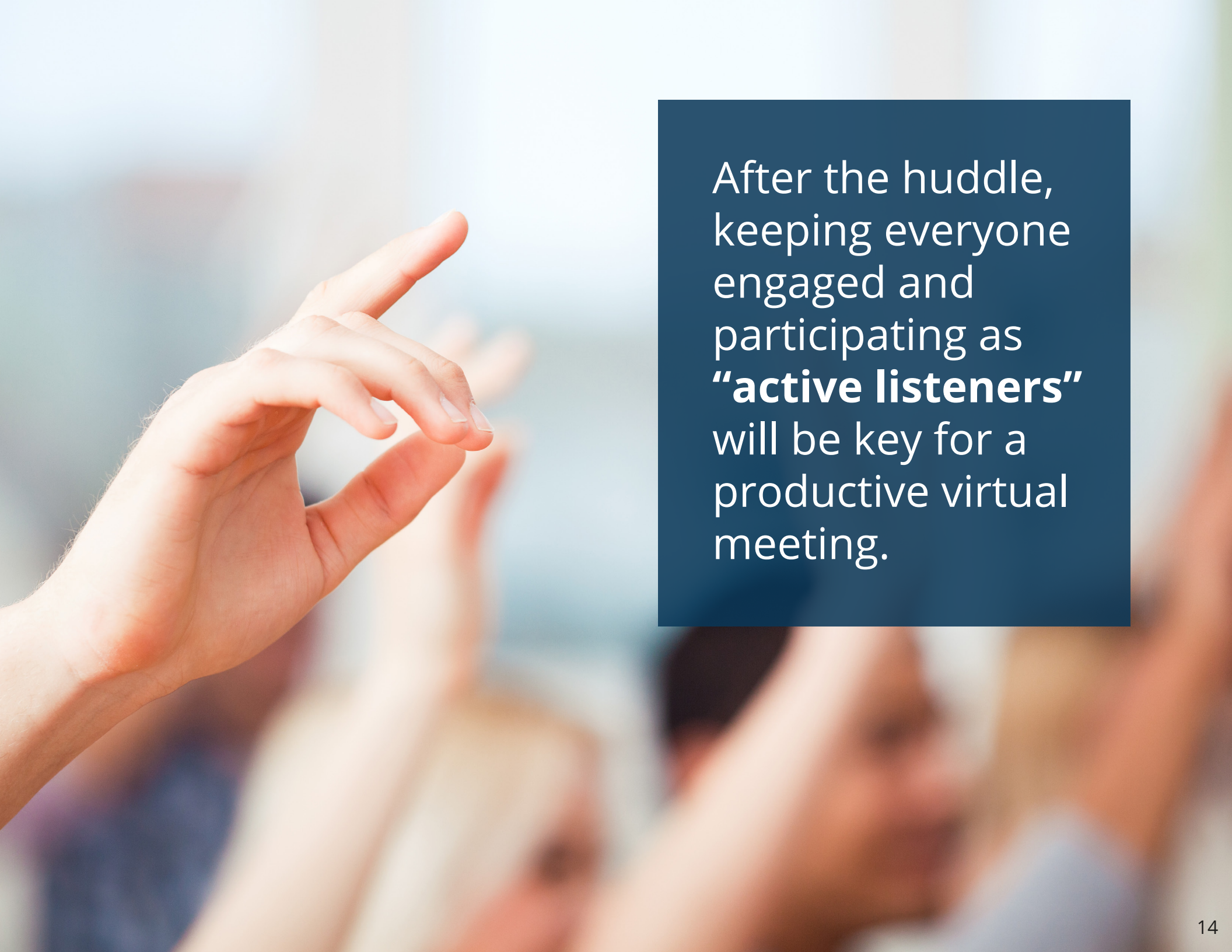
Next, it is crucial to create an **engaging and purposeful agenda** for your meeting. After all, in the privacy of their own homes, it's very easy to multi-task beneath the screen, or to 'show-up' without really checking in. Thankfully, Zoom has some great features that, along with smart meeting tactics, can help make your sessions more interactive—and engaging for employees!

You may even want to adopt **Simon Sinek's** method for opening a team meeting, called "The Huddle."³

Team meeting huddles foster connection, wellness and engagement.

This is what it looks like for Sinek, but you can customize your Huddle to meet your group's needs:

- Begin with a **team 'grounding' activity**, such as a deep breathing exercise.
- Next, go around to each of the meeting attendees, allowing every member, or just a select few, to share their **'High Fives' of the week**—moments they'd like to celebrate.
- Then you can introduce a **question of the week**, or just check in with all your attendees, giving everyone the opportunity to share what's on their heart, and to support one another.
- Finally, you may want to call on a select group of employee volunteers to share a story of 'WHY' we do what we do.



After the huddle,
keeping everyone
engaged and
participating as
“active listeners”
will be key for a
productive virtual
meeting.



Justin Hale and Joseph Grenny explain in *The Harvard Business Review* that, “The biggest engagement threat in virtual meetings is allowing team members to unconsciously take the role of observer. Many already happily defined their role this way when they received the meeting invite.” [ref.]⁴

To optimize virtual meeting experiences and engagement, it is best to assign key roles to attendees at the start of the meeting.



If you have a large group of participants, you might involve a small group brainstorming activity using **Zoom's Breakout Rooms**.

Best practices for such include having a time limit for the activity and assigning sub-group members a specific role or task (i.e. facilitator, timer and reporter). Indicate that each breakout group will be asked to share their key ideas via the reporter in a follow-up full group debriefing.





Working with a small group, or an individual client?

You may not need
breakout groups, but
interactivity will still be
crucial.

Consider using the **Zoom Poll** feature to encourage active participation or the **Zoom Whiteboard** for note taking. The key point here is to **get people as engaged** as possible during a virtual meeting.

“By giving people tasks that they can actively engage in...there is nowhere to hide.” [ibid.]






Another key consideration for supporting and promoting employee well-being while they work from home is to include **movement activities** such as a **virtual meeting warm-up** or an energizer mid-way through a session.



In a Zoom meeting, physical activities such as our **WWCOE “Walk of Life” energizer**, led by an on camera meeting facilitator or employee (and run with the Dire Straits song playing in the background) can be fun, motivating and team building for employees – especially when working remotely (i.e. if you have a long agenda, it can help prevent endless hours of sitting.) Here, again, the *when* matters less than the *why*: practicing self-care, including healthy eating and physical activity, are some of the best ways to protect mental health during this very stressful time. [[ref.](#)]⁵

As role models and wellness coaches, it is our duty to give clients additional self-care opportunities. As such, introducing movement in your meetings will serve a dual-role: **encourage engagement *and* provide a self-care boost!**



A top-down view of a collaborative workspace. In the center is a silver laptop. To its left is a white mug of coffee. To its right is another white mug of coffee. A smartphone is on the left, and another is on the right. A stack of colorful sticky notes (yellow, pink, orange) is in the lower left. A pen holder with blue pens and scissors is at the bottom. A person's hand is writing on a sticky note. A newspaper with the word 'BUSINESS' is on the right. A small potted plant is in the top right corner. A dark blue semi-transparent box with white text is overlaid on the right side of the image.


The rest of your virtual session agenda can and should look as similar as possible to your regularly scheduled meetups. After all, sticking to your 'normal' routine is yet another way to stay mentally healthy and productive during these anxious times. [ref.]⁶

An effective technique for closing meetings, including virtual ones, is doing the **Start-Stop-Continue Retrospective**.

At the end of each meeting, ask for suggestions of protocols or activities that could help improve subsequent virtual meetings (i.e. these will go under a **Start** list for future consideration and implementation.) Then, ask for feedback on what did not work well to capture in a **Stop** List (i.e. to omit or avoid in future meetings.) Lastly, discuss what worked well for everyone and add to a **Continue** list.

Tip: Record each list in a Word file via screen share mode and then email to all employees. Be sure to review this document at the start of each meeting!





Now that you have a framework
for optimizing virtual meetings,
let's review how to stay
connected between sessions.





It is important for employees to feel seen and remembered all throughout the week — that is why **now is the moment to master the art of the “check-in”**. Here are some great ways to do just that.

In Between Screens

In between virtual meetings, there are many ways you as a wellness professional might stay connected with your clients, employees and executives within the organizations that you support. One simple, yet effective, tool to consider is **regularly scheduled email check-ins**: choose a frequency and stick to it.





In these emails, you might offer **mini wellness tips** such as **stretching exercises** for **correcting and protecting posture when sitting at home desks** all day. This is a great way to show you care, and to help keep your clients on track with their wellness goals, especially during these trying times.



Another great strategy is to give **homework assignments** to be completed in between virtual meetings. For employees, this could come in the form of a job task, a brainstorming activity for an upcoming meeting or a new role they may not have previously performed. Or, you might even **offer prize incentives and prize draws** of Amazon gift cards, for example, to incentivize and reward completing

assignments ahead of schedule or for perfect meeting attendance. These incentives do not have to have high monetary value, but they will show that you care and help keep employees motivated in times such as these. Arranging to have hand-signed cards sent to employees or emails with a motivational message from supervisors or the CEO can also do wonders for lifting employee spirits.

Additionally, depending on the services you offer, you may find it helpful to create **virtual group spaces** for your clients or employees to connect in between meetings. Consider private Facebook groups, where you can also use the Facebook Live feature to offer additional face time.



Virtual meeting activities and best practices such as those listed in this guide will go a long way in supporting employee and client well-being and help minimize the feeling of isolation during this Coronavirus outbreak.





Also, don't forget the **leaders in the organization(s)** you are working with. They need care and attention just as much as their employees.

As wellness professionals, you might offer to help them maintain their well-being during this pandemic by providing them with virtual wellness coaching and resources (i.e. nutrition, fitness, meditation, and sleep tip sheets).

One final thought: in addition to mental and physical challenges, many of your employees, clients and client organizations may be facing **financial hardships** in this moment. Be mindful of this fact and try to accommodate this reality in any way possible. While you clearly still need to make a living, consider offering your services at a discounted rate during this pandemic. Or, if you are able to do so, provide certain services free of charge. Just remember, we are all in this together.



The more we do to support one another, the less challenging this COVID-19 pandemic will become!



About the WWCOE

The **Workplace Wellness Centre of Excellence** (a registered division of Kelly Wellness Consulting Inc.) cultivates healthy employees and high-performing organizations through **innovative, cost-effective workplace wellness training, certification programs and virtual/ worksite solutions.**

Our centre's mission is to foster a **collaborative landscape** that mobilizes the development of inclusive, results-oriented corporate wellness solutions benefiting organizations, employees, and communities at large.

Through dynamic and responsive programs, the "Workplace Wellness Centre of Excellence" trains wellness enthusiasts/professionals and industry leaders in how to **champion vibrant, growth-oriented work cultures.**

To learn more, contact:

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1. Gallup Report, *State of the American Workforce*
2. Myworkplacehealth.com, *COVID-19: How to Cope with Social Distancing and Working from Home*
3. Sinek, Simon. "The Huddle." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKEtm3HCrsW>
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A special shout out to Jordana Rothstein White and Nicola Harris for helping with the preparation of this guide.

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