

## **1. Ideally, be prepared**

All important services, systems, and applications should be remotely accessible and usable on the go by all staff and students, whether from a mobile device, tablet, or laptop computer. We were fortunate in that most of SIS's services had been trending in this direction for a while and only systems that were non-critical for day-to-day teaching were sitting in servers behind our firewall. While nobody predicted that we'd be in this situation, relying on cloud-based services and making certain self-hosted services accessible from home without VPN connectivity made for an easy transition. I can't begin to imagine the horror of trying to get our school remote-capable after the necessity becomes reality.

## **2. Assess support capacity**

As the coronavirus issue occurred as people returned to hometowns in China for the annual Chinese New Year break, we had one person stuck in their hometown and unable to return to Shenzhen. This person had no laptop and no phone. As such, the level of support they could provide would be limited. It was important to know what we were capable of doing, what we were not capable of doing, and assign tasks and set expectations for users accordingly. Our team member with no laptop in his hometown handled simpler support calls that could be done over the phone and video calls.

## **3. Create a new work plan**

Much of the IT team's time during a normal workday is taken up by users wanting ad hoc walk-up support. In our current situation, such walk-up support is nonexistent. This has two effects. Firstly, when requests come in, they can be very urgent and important. Secondly, when requests aren't coming in, the team is suddenly free. In a focus-oriented industry like IT, time to focus is invaluable. The team can learn and do things they didn't have time to do before. For us, there are a LOT of IT projects that we've been wanting to get done that we haven't been able to do until now. In fact, our team members are often even discussing technical things on the weekends because, now that they're in the flow of things,

things just keep naturally moving. It helps that they have nothing else to do while stuck at home, and I can't expect this pace of work when we're back to normal.

#### **4. Have regular face-to-face meetings**

As everyone, both team members and users, are spread out throughout the world, information is also spread out. It's important to have regular face-to-face group meetings via video calls (we use Microsoft Teams for this) to ensure that people stay connected, and more importantly, so that everyone stays on the same page for what issues exist. It's easy to get lost and not keep up with everyone else when you're an island.

#### **5. Expect the unexpected**

Some teachers were stuck on vacation and forced into distance learning paradigm without having their devices on hand. Some, like our team member, were forced to conduct classes and give assignments by phone. In rare necessary cases, we've been playing by ear how to get devices into certain staff members' hands, ranging from our accounting staff who previously worked on desktop computers, to teachers stuck far far away.

#### **6. Be understanding**

Sometimes, team members had to be away due to illness or attending to an ill family member in the hospital. As long as we notify each other what's going on, we're fine. There's no strictness about our work, as long as the work gets done and our users are happy.

#### **7. Don't forget your sense of humour**

As the days pass, some with stress, and some with mundaneness, it helps to laugh. The IT team has laughed more in the group chat than normal during this period. Stay calm and carry on! Whether it's the situation or the freedom afforded by being away from everyone's observing eyes, I think this is a great thing. I hope it continues when we get back to normality.

## **8. Remember why we're here**

Our principals send out data about how classes are going and the experience of teachers and students. We're in this together, and it's gratifying to see that although the IT team works in the background unseen and unheard, we have an important impact on the ability of people to deliver and attend classes. So when there's data that shows things are running smoothly, we can take some pride and pat ourselves on the back too. Even so, it's all for the kids.