



Michala Anderson, branch manager at Robert Half.

From 3D printers to Zoom meetings, tech an ally across multiple industries

by Michelle Leach

Editor's note: This article is part of a series sharing first-hand experiences from local organizations on how their respective industries are adapting to COVID-19.

As restrictions are eased, organizations that represent the various stages of one's personal and business journey reflect on the often unexpected changes made thus far, and on the lasting effects of COVID-19.

Graham Construction is applying its expertise in controlling construction dust, spanning 37 certified infection control and 10 certified health care constructor professionals, to handle threatening airborne particles.

"When one of our longstanding hospital customers said they needed help turning regular patient rooms into spaces that could contain patients with

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COVID-19, we had the expertise and equipment available to quickly convert the spaces," said Project Manager Matt Leaders.

Its work with UnityPoint Health-St. Luke's in Cedar Rapids, Iowa provides a classic example of Graham's approach of looking at every situation from the owner's perspective.

"When our superintendent learned of the hospital's shortage of face shields, he immediately started looking for ways Graham could help," he said. "It started with simply buying supplies at local stores and assembling masks out of transparency film, double-sided tape and rubber bands. After a couple of days, our superintendent found a 3D printer we could use to produce rigid frames for the face shields. You won't see 'face shield production' in Graham's normal scope of work. But if we see a customer facing a challenge, we're going to find a way to help."

Forest Lawn Executive Director/Funeral Director Steve Brunken and Family Service Director Angela Erickson are supporting families coping with loss amid the crisis, by providing

constant contact via the likes of Zoom meetings.

"In addition, we are using Facebook Live to stream services; however, many families are posting on their own Facebook page as well," Brunken said. "To respect the 10 and under crowd-sizing, most families have opted for a private graveside service with extra attendees staying in their car for the service and we ensure social distancing is followed. Most families will be having a celebration of life when the restrictions are lifted, which we know will be important."

To allow more families to have the opportunity to view, Erickson said viewing hours are scheduled from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. (instead of the usual two to three hours of viewing).

"Families have opted for celebration services later, so out-of-state families can attend in the future as well," she said. "The most important element is to serve our guests during this sensitive time and ensure we are still there for their services."

They encourage families to focus on the time with their loved ones, the 92 years of life, for instance, rather than the passing.

"Talk to each other, tell stories of your loved ones, get together with other family members by Zoom and celebrate loved ones in different ways," Brunken said.

With proper preparation, Erickson said, families who have lost loved ones to coronavirus can still have viewings and hold services.

"When the restrictions begin to lift, we will adjust as needed to ensure the continued comfort of our families," she said.

As employers and employees embark on new chapters, Branch Manager Michala Anderson indicated they've helped many companies move to remote work setups.

"How they work is changing, but work is continuing — often, with an even faster pace because the environment is shifting daily," she said.

Accordingly, clients' biggest concerns span motivating employees, boosting morale, and communicating frequently; Anderson said candidates' biggest concern is finding a job in this environment, while the currently employed are "extremely concerned" about keeping their jobs.

"We've seen many layoffs in the past few weeks and Nebraska's statewide unemployment rate increased from 2.9% in February to 4.2% in March," she said.

Remote workers are grappling with having the right equipment to work from home long term, and maintaining productivity while juggling work and caregiving responsibilities.

In addition to an increase in employees who can work from home, and a rise in video calls and videoconferencing, Anderson surmises a greater respect of one's personal and family life when working remotely over the longer term.

"Previously, workers may have been embarrassed if their dog barked or child interrupted them while on a work call, but nowadays it's par for the course and much more accepted and disregarded," she said. "Companies may also look to redesign current roles/positions within the organization — allowing for more autonomy, moving away from routine tasks and more towards strategic projects. A number of factors may be at play here, from the rise of artificial intelligence to simply allowing workers to do more with less."