



# COWORKING

*by Corro*

A community to help you grow, scale and thrive.

## Flexibility is a Skill



Flexibility thinking is an important skill that allows you to adapt to change quickly. Flexible thinking means you think about things in different ways. Flexibility is an executive skill, which is a key component of helping you to develop different strategies for tackling problems.

## Flexibility is a Timeless Skill

We will explore flexibility from the perspective of the employee and the employer.

Do these statements sound familiar?

- “We’re looking for dynamic graduates.”
- “We want an open minded candidate who loves a challenge”
- “Looking for a self-starting go-getter.”

What the organization means is they are seeking a candidate who is able to adapt or be flexible. It may really be saying, “Be prepared to work longer hours during busier periods.”

Companies value employees who are:

- Willing to provide mutual support for difficult or hard-to-navigate situations
- Eager to learn new skills
- Prepared to assume responsibilities outside of their original job description
- Not going to overreact to unexpected events
- Equipped with the social skills to work with others.

Companies are experienced enough to understand that the workplace can be unpredictable. Driven by technological advances and shifts in the global market or political landscape, the company may have to adjust its course to remain competitive, and they need employees who have a receptive and versatile approach to their work.

If you have undergone any recent changes in your responsibilities at work, how quickly did you adjust? Was it difficult? Unworkable?

Has your organization recently undergone a major change of one kind or another?

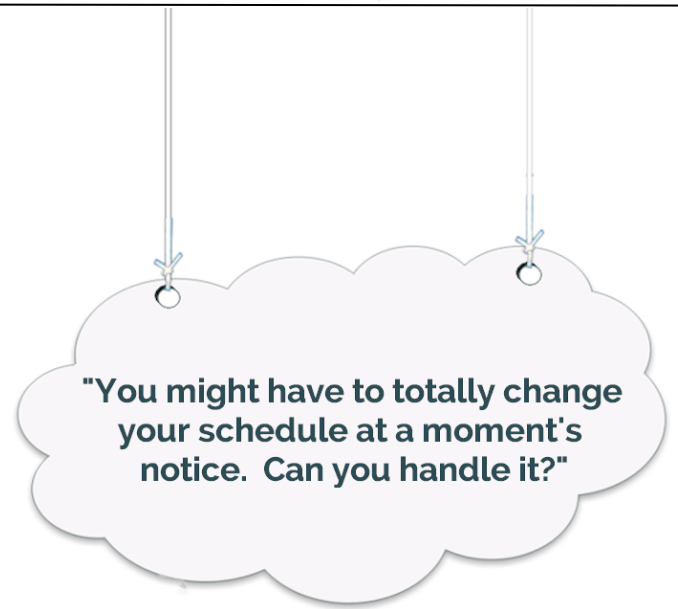
What types of changes have you gone through because of Covid 19?

Do you resist learning new ways of doing things?

Do you boss people around to get them to do what you want?

Has being rigid in your thinking adversely affected your interactions or ability to solve problems at work?

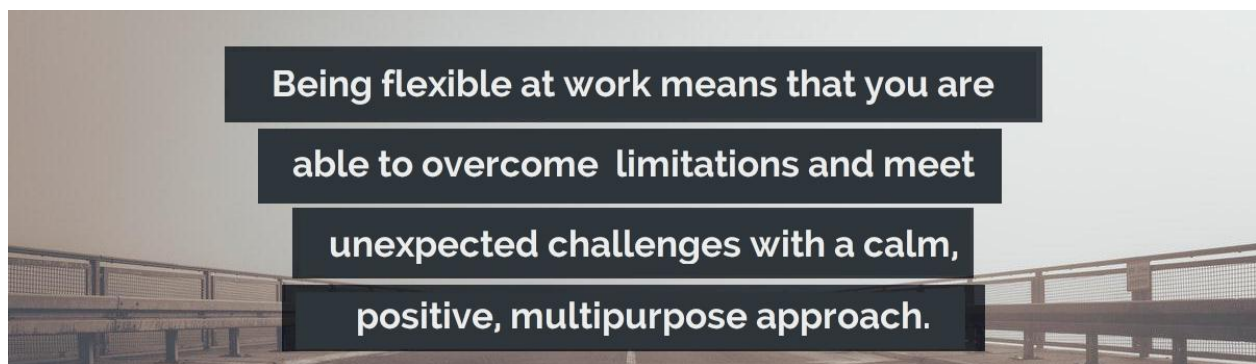
Companies also know that flexible, eager employees will quickly adjust to changes and cause fewer problems.



## Flexibility Thinking

Flexibility thinking is an important skill that allows you to adapt to change quickly. Flexible thinking means you think about things in different ways. It is an executive skill, which is a key component of helping you develop different strategies for tackling problems. Along with working memory and self-control, flexibility serves the command center of your brain, which allows you to manage your thoughts, actions and emotions in order to get things done. Flexible thinking allows you to shift gears and think about something in more than one way and plays an important role in both learning and daily life and of course in your job.

Flexible thinking has led to several innovations or inventions. Scientists, inventors, or chefs, they aim to create something very specific and succeeded in creating something unexpected – penicillin, x-ray machines, potato chips, fireworks, chewing gum, pacemakers, to name a few. Think about the person who repurposes recycled goods to make something useful instead of tossing it into the landfill. How often has your flexible thinking prompted you to use something differently or creatively?



Having a flexible approach to thinking means you will not be anxious, overwhelmed or stifled by unpredictable circumstances in your life or workplace, that you are able to change your plans or get used to new situations with very little difficulty. Removing the negativity and stress in your life enhances your overall well-being and also help you be more flexible in your work. Flexibility in your work and personal life exposes you to new experiences, which psychologists claim could be one of the keys to a happy life or a successful career.

### Benefits of being Flexible

Flexibility is important because:

- It removes the negativity and stress, which gives you better work/life balance
- Flexibility allows you to manage the unexpected or adapt to change
- It allows you to be more receptive to shifting dynamics or difficult situations which gives you more direction over your career development and personal life.
- Employers value flexibility in the workplace because they see you grow with the business which expands your career opportunities and can provide long-term job security.

## Workplace Flexibility

Workplace flexibility is a strategy that emphasizes your willingness and ability to respond to changing circumstances and expectations, particularly regarding how and when work gets done. Flexibility is a trait most employers look for in an employee. An organization hires you because you are qualified for the job, but it will recognize and promote you because of the extra things you do. Evidence of your effort and commitment are the extra steps you have taken to enhance your career – technology you learned, certifications you earned, degrees you attained.



The things that make you stand out relate directly to your flexibility and adaptability.

Rigid employees are locked into a pattern of working, refuse to budge and the overall objectives of the business become secondary to their personal goals. Rigid thinkers can deplete the energy of a team or undermine the contribution others can make.

On the other hand, workers with a flexible approach never say, "It's not my job" or "Do I have to?" Instead, they deal with the unique demands of each situation with a flexible attitude, tailoring their efforts to the task. Basically, they demonstrate a willingness to meet the needs of the company:

- Learn complex new software that will increase efficiency
- Cover the responsibilities of a colleague while they are ill or on vacation
- Work extra hours during a year-end crunch
- Set aside work to respond to an emerging problem
- Help a colleague meet a deadline, even if it means working extra hours
- Listen carefully to constructive criticism

However, you simply cannot and should not be chameleon-like 24/7. There are situations at work where it is better for you to be rigid rather than flexible. For example, when you have to follow legal procedures or the established logistics of a complex operation, there is little leeway for flexibility.

For work-life balance, the key is to be flexible when the situation demands, but at the same time remain true to yourself. This is more apt to be possible when workplace flexibility meets the needs of both the business and its workers.

## **Flexibility is a Two Way Street**

It is a lot easier to have flexibility in the workplace, when management takes a similar approach by treating employees as individuals and making an effort to accommodate personal styles and needs, and flexible work arrangements.

More and more organizations realize this. Streamlined workforces, shifts in technology and a changing market are just a few reasons why flexibility is the new norm for many organizations. Embracing flexibility in the workplace enhances work-life balance for employees and alters the culture of the office. Flexibility as a management decision signals that the organization values diversity, that the environment is probably mutually beneficial to the employer and its employees. Flexibility leads to greater satisfaction, builds trust and commitment, drives teamwork and results in retention of valuable employees. It places business on the cutting edge in their respective fields. Everyone wins. Employees who approach their job with a flexible mindset are typically more highly valued by employers. Similarly, employers who cultivate a flexible work environment are attractive to employees.

## **Be Flexible in your Approach – it is a Skill**

You probably find it easier to adjust to predictable changes. You prep to go away to school, move into a new apartment, or await the arrival of a new baby. How do you prepare for changes that are unexpected or out of your control? Can you learn to be flexible? The answer is yes! Flexibility is not an instinctive trait. It is a skill, developed throughout your life.

If you feel that you may be too rigid, too judgmental, or strict you can transition to more flexibility and being more mellow by preparing yourself and using some self-improvement reasoning:

- 1) Accept that change is inescapable
- 2) Rise above your behavioral history
- 3) Have faith in yourself
- 4) Identify places where you could compromise
- 5) Overcome limitations where possible
- 6) Edit your language choice
- 7) Avoid extremes by adopting an open mindset
- 8) Stretch yourself by practicing flexible actions
- 9) Reward your choice to retreat

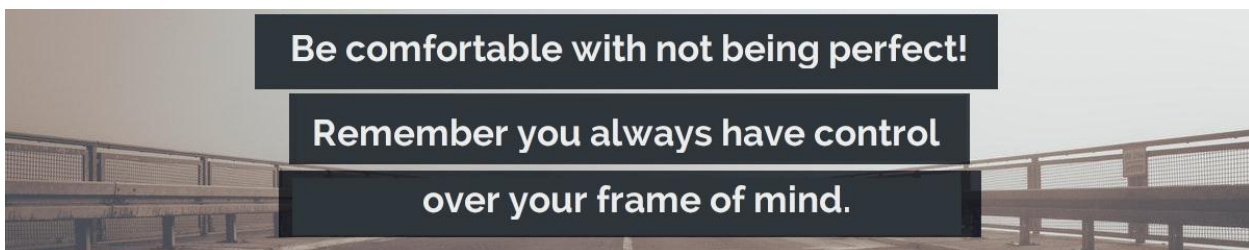
### **1) Acknowledge that Change is Inescapable**

In life change always occurs. Due to forces outside your control, plans can change and will change and you will just have to adjust. Think of the change as an opening to improve aspects of your life. You will have new and interesting experiences and advance your problem solving strategies. Nelson Mandela said I never lose. I either win or learn. Accepting that changes are coming can lessen the kinds of anxiety you may have previously experienced in similar situations.

## 2) Rise Above your Behavioral History

Sometimes people learn to approach tasks with a specific mindset and do not branch out to do things differently because they fear making a mistake or appearing incompetent. When you do something impressive or skillfully, your ego ascends a throne in your brain, your happiness hormones are in a state of bliss. Sometimes you adopt a take-charge attitude because you did something outstanding in the past which resulted in recognition or praise, and you seek to be revered and rewarded over and over again. Deep down, it feels great. Because feeling great always ranks higher. Feeling even a little bit wrong or incompetent would send your ego and happiness hormones into a depressive swan dive. Thus, you may avoid thinking or doing things differently. It is not that you plan to. Sometimes you simply do not reflect on your effectiveness or efficiency in completing tasks.

However, what is impressive or right or even acceptable can change when the people or circumstances are different. Do you have any negative behavioral tendencies that make it difficult for you to be flexible? When was the last time you told someone, “You were right. I was wrong”? If you are motivated to develop a more flexible attitude or approach to doing things, accept you made errors and that those negative behaviors happened in the past. You do not have to be unhappy or penalize yourself for the past in order to actively change things that you believe are in your best interests. Becoming more flexible is a great wellness goal.



## 3) Have Faith in Yourself

You can feel ready to handle what comes next by having faith in yourself. This is self-confidence. Confidence is a skill that requires mindset and action. You can increase your resilience and optimism by finding ways to make yourself comfortable with potential changes. Be comfortable with not being perfect. One way to do this is prepare and plan for it. Think about potential change as a series of tasks, break it down into sub tasks and proactively determine the changes you want to see in your life. Have faith that when the unexpected happens you still have control over aspects of the situation: actions you can take, places you can look for learning more about a situation, or people you can talk to or ask for help. Above all, you have control over your frame of mind.

Being able to react calmly to the unexpected is a sign of confidence. Correcting past behavior is a sign of confidence. Perhaps you feel confident already and simply seek to increase your level of confidence in your day-to-day interactions and at work. You can do this by setting aside time to get to know the people and learn more about the company and its mission. If you are the type of person who is meticulous, trust that you can still do that within the aspects of the situation you do control.

#### **4) Identify Places where you can Compromise**

Parents do it at the hockey game when they cannot simply sit and cheer from the bleachers. They undermine the coach's authority by taking their kid aside for instruction on how to play, or worse yet yell at the coach or referee from the sidelines. We all know people at work who cannot help but interrupt or are the first to point out everyone's weakness. There is a fine line between being assertive or domineering, especially in the workplace? You cannot become more flexible unless you recognize situations where you may be too forceful, where you could opt to compromise, where you could give someone else an opportunity to take the lead. For example, you could volunteer for undesirable tasks. The key is to identify and record points in your day where you could be more flexible or mellower, so you can work on changing the undesirable behaviors that make you unyielding or severe.

#### **5) Overcome Limitations where Possible**

Flexibility comes from overcoming limitations so you can work in a way that is most appropriate for you. Identify limitation in your job or studies that place you under pressure or might hold you back? Would taking special training or a class help you manage or overcome the constraints you identified?

#### **6) Edit your Language Choices**

Try saying "yes" instead of saying "no". Certain words signify inflexibility. The word "but" is another example of a narrow-minded conversation response. It sends a negative message that you refuse to acknowledge another person's opinion as having any validity. It can come across as disrespectful, uncompromising, offensive, and antagonistic. Confrontational responses provoke arguments, lead to frustration, impede honesty, and can be a conversation stopper. Make a note every time you use the word "but" or a synonym like "however" in a conversation. At the end of the day count them up. How many times did you use the word "but" to interrupt the speaker while they were still talking? When you used the word think about how the conversation ended. How many times could you have done better?

Even if you do not agree with the speaker's views, take the open-minded flexible approach by finding different avenues of response to engage in conversation rather than offend or stifle the speaker. You may be pleasantly surprised at how easy it can be and how the direction of the conversation benefits you. Here are some suggestions to keep the conversation open and on a positive track:

Begin your response with words like "Interesting" which gives the speaker respect and him or her latitude to continue.

"Let me understand what you are saying" allows you to paraphrase what you heard which leads to deeper understanding. o take your response in a new direction.

"Please explain how you arrived at that conclusion." Asking a questions rather than contesting the statement leads to clarification and better understanding.

"Why do we see things differently?" This forces two people to look at each other's side of the disagreement and creates a much more productive conversation.

## 7) Avoid Extremes by Adopting an Open Mindset

Earlier we touched on you having control over your frame of mind. Let's discuss what it is to keep an open mind. Let's start with one truth: You are not as open-minded as you think. We do not say this to offend you. It just happens to be true for just about everyone. When was the last time you changed your mind? No, choosing a salad instead of your regular pasta does not count. When was the last time you changed your mind about an opinion or something important? When was the last time you told someone, "You were right. I was wrong"? In acting or thinking open-mindedly, we must be readily willing to acknowledge our own shortcomings.

Why is it true that most people are not as open-minded as they would like to believe? We'll try a quick explanation with a reference to the brain. Our minds are designed to develop an idea or category of knowledge, and file that data in our cabinet of knowledge, so to speak. As we come across new information, we tend to want to sort it into one of our existing categories in the filing cabinet.

Our brains views, the idea or category as a whole concept. However, our brains are designed with optical and psychological blind spots. Deep in our psyche while our egos and happiness hormones jump around in excitement over the knowledge, the brain can do something kind of nasty. If what we learn does not quite fit with what we already have in there, our brain creatively fills the gaps.

Since our brains prefer consistency over accuracy, it fill the gaps to protect us from contradictions or improbabilities. As a result we tend to focus on the first thought or conclusion that comes to mind. This worked thousands of years ago when our ancestors were responding to imminent danger. Today, this type of thinking is not always helpful when our brain completes the narrative of a story, without knowing all the facts. When the gaps are filled, we are deluded into thinking we do not have blind spots or an incomplete picture. Other people might recognize these blind spots, but often we do not.

The good news is you do not have to let your brain lie to you. Start by being open-minded about accepting that your brain is capable of that type of deceit. Essentially, you have to change how you think in order to deal with new information. That filing system in your brain has endless room for new information. You simply have to put in more effort to recognize and understand the new or different information so it fits one of the files with what you already know.



Let's try three exercises that illustrate this blind spot.

### **Exercise #1**

The first one might be very difficult. Ask other people, "What do you wish I was more open-minded about?" Listen to what they say without responding. Just absorb what they say without any judgment about what you might hear. Take it seriously. You may have to admit you were wrong. You may find it confusing, maybe painful. However, it could also be affirming or life-changing.

### **Exercise #2**

The second is one you can do by yourself.

1. Pick a topic. You must have an opinion on some current, controversial issue going on in the world that has subject to debate. For example, global climate change, effectiveness of the United Nations, gun laws, or human trafficking. The issue should be something that would be easy enough for you to debate based on knowledge that most people could be expected to have. Here are some examples:
  - Human cloning should be legalized.
  - Animal testing should be banned.
  - Juveniles should be tried and treated as adults.
  - Violent video games should be banned.
2. Decide which side of the debate you support. Write it down, because it might be tempting to change your mind later.
3. Make two lists.
  - arguments in favour of the issue, and
  - arguments against the issue.
4. Drawing from your existing knowledge, add arguments to both lists. You do not have to research the points, and you do not have to agree with any of the arguments. Your goal is to identify and think about the different arguments on both sides of the issue as you write them down.
5. Count the arguments on both lists. Which one has more ideas? How does the number of ideas you listed on that particular side relate to your personal stance on the issue?
6. If you found it difficult to list the arguments that did not align with your opinion, you may be favouring evidence in support of your own point of view and under-valuing evidence that goes against your viewpoint.
7. Because you personally have a chosen side, you may need additional time to generate more arguments to add to the opposing side of the issue. The key to this exercise in open-minded thinking exercise is not only being open to alternative points of view, but actively seeking them out. If you were able to identify arguments on both sides even if you did not agree with them we applaud you for on being an open-minded thinker.

You can take this exercise to another level by conducting more research to explore the issue from every angle imaginable. Examine all the evidence, not just the ideas that are closest to your beliefs. Do other people have different facts that could be important? For every fact you collect you must add evidence on one of the lists. Anytime the evidence mounts too much in favour of one side, come up with contradictory evidence to balance the lists. It does not mean you will change your mind, but hopefully you will see the matter from different perspectives.



In real-life situations that call for you to think more open-mindedly, you may have to remind yourself to keep an open mind, and rely on this exercise to help you.

In any situation in life, at work, in any given setting where change could occur, there may be factors and options you do not know about. Not everything is black and white or right and wrong. All ideas start out with a range of uncertainty. Think about it. Is it possible that the strength of your beliefs or practices will have a grey area because you could be drawing conclusions from limited knowledge or experience? Maybe you have limited your investigation of information to things that confirm your beliefs or way of doing things. After all, we humans tend to seek the easiest and fastest way.

Being open-minded in every situation is not always easy, because you might have to admit you are not perfect, that you may be wrong, mistaken or misguided, and we all know your happiness hormones shun that kind of feeling.

If you have formed an opinion, based it on some sort of evidence, and then been trapped in a routine, a way of thinking or method of doing things, you might not realize that you are dismissing evidence or other people that pose a contradictory positions or methodology. You may squander important

opportunities to engage in enriching discussions or explore new avenues that can help you grow intellectually and professionally. This can happen to any of us when we take things to an extreme.

However, you can make it a game-changer by adopting a mindset that ventures outside of your normal reading, viewing, listening, or doing. You can start by opening your mind a little bit extra right now, today. You can adopt and practice an open mindset, by being ready, willing, and able to change your mind about things by looking at all the evidence whenever an opportunity presents itself.

## **8) Stretch Yourself by Practicing Flexible Actions**

Set a challenging goal that forces you to think outside the box, meet new people, explore new methods and strategies, new industries, and new ideas. In these exercises your goal does not have to be lofty, just reasonable. If it seems bold or uncomfortable, it is supposed to be, because real growth happens on the edge of our discomfort. The philosophy that practice makes athletes stretch beyond normal limits can be applied to practicing flexibility. We do get better when forced to do things differently. Achieving a bold or lofty goal shows dedication and leads to more positive work habits and academic or career success.

Because patterns of inflexible behavior develop over long periods of time, changing them is a big challenge. You could start by practicing flexibility in small ways. The exercises that follow are meant to let your mind open enough for something you didn't expect to sneak in and give you the motivation or confidence to appreciate the true meaning of being open-minded in more important situations in your life or career. You will also notice some of the stress being lifted from your life.

**Alter a routine**, so long as it does not affect your commitments. Change the order in which you get dressed in the morning. Go to bed an hour earlier and get up an hour earlier to do something you would not normally do in the morning, even if it is just relaxing, or talking to your father. You could learn to cook a healthy breakfast or enhance a soft skill. If you are the type of person that must tidy your bathroom or kitchen after every use, try doing otherwise 2-3 days per week. If you normally exercise at the gym, change your routine and go outdoors on some days. If you are the person that organizes the monthly book club hand it over to another person. Delegate laundry or lunch-making tasks to your children. You will have to practice biting your tongue when things are not being done to your standards. Sure, anything you choose will be uncomfortable, that is the point. Each time you stretch yourself in a new way, you are learning to become less rigid.

**Choose how many times you will be flexible** in a day and add one flexible outcome every day after that. Write down your goal, post it where you can see it often, and track those new flexible behaviors as they happen.

**Adapting** might be easier than you think. Try changing the way you work to suit the situation or environment.

**Change your identity.** What we mean is do it for a day or at least a few hours. Challenging your beliefs and opinions challenges your identity, which is very difficult. You could try something very different and change your identity entirely by pretending to be someone else for a day. Dress the part, wear a disguise. Walk in another character's shoes. Act the role. If you are a take-charge outspoken person, do the opposite for a full day. If you are the artistic type, try playing the role of a body-builder. Experience a different environment while playing the role. People who have tried this find it incredibly freeing. Role playing allowed them to view things from different angles without challenging their true identity.

### **9) Reward Your Choice to Retreat**

When undergoing a transition from rigid to flexible behavior, you can use a reward system to keep you motivated to grow your flexibility until going with the flow starts to become a more natural reaction. Reward yourself with a treat for being flexible instead of perfect.

### **Conclusion**

We admire people who are smart and strong-willed and have the ability to persuade people to do great things. Our great leaders are distinguished by two additional characteristics – flexibility and open-mindedness. They are flexible enough to think differently, admit when they are wrong, and can adapt to dynamic conditions. In a world of copy-cat, thinking they see things with new eyes.

## **Inspired and Committed, We Celebrate Your Journey**

At Corro, we believe in the power of people. We are inspired to expand humanity's capacity for wisdom, compassion, and courage.

In our commitment to helping you achieve long-term personal development and use your organizational platform for positive impact, we celebrate the journey of lifelong learning while fostering an all-inclusive community driven environment of meaning, personal connection, and fun.

**Corro is not just a Work Space – Our Aim is Helping the Community Thrive through People Success**