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Firm Management Strategies

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Part I

Recession & Pandemic: Staring into the Abyss

"It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change."
--*Charles Darwin*

The current pandemic and resulting economic contraction are reminiscent of the 2008 recession even if for entirely different reasons. While many maintain that the economy is strong because the stock market is strong, many small businesses are either already in tatters or staring down a bleak financial future.

Interviews were conducted with six AIA member firm owners from across the country with firms of varying size and types of practice.

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Firm Management through Downturns

"Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose." --*Bill Gates*

Overall, the Great Recession of 2008 and beyond had a long tail for smaller and mid-sized architecture firms particularly, negatively affecting their staffing levels and debt ratios for years afterwards. Larger firms focusing on public projects were not as heavily impacted initially but as work in the pipeline dried up, found themselves forced to make cutbacks and other changes later while those practicing in the private arena endured more immediate consequences. The pandemic impact may not yet have been truly realized for any sized firm as the situation continues to develop in what promises to be a prolonged evolution.

<u>Small Firms</u>

For a smaller, New York City firm, the 2008 recession had a huge impact on their firm which struggled for years to get back on track. Pre-recession, they had around 13 employees and while natural attrition accounted for the decline, they stayed at just six employees for several years. This was not unlike most NYC firms which commonly lost about 50% of their employees during the great recession. However, considering the staff reduction, they did not have to implement any furloughs or pay cuts then.

With the pandemic, most NYC firms have experienced employee reductions. Some of the smaller firm's clients stopped their jobs so while they began the year with 17 employees, they had to cut four employees at the end of May because of the reduced workload. While they have five jobs currently under construction which were in the pipeline before the pandemic-forced shutdown, they may run out of work soon and then be forced to cut more staff.

Now in their fifth year, a small midwestern firm that was planning to expand this year based on steady growth is now focused instead on maintaining current clients and proactively exploring alternative collaborations and new client opportunities. Even with firm revenue increasing, their profits have not, so last fall, the firm outsourced its CFO function, aiming to manage finances more strategically. This spring, they implemented a new financial system to give the firm a clearer financial picture and improved project management. They plan to factor their new financial management approach into their business planning and then to reassess and refine as needed.

Mid-Sized Firms

A medium-sized firm of 25 staff in the South Atlantic region took substantial reductions in partners' pay while also reducing staff hours and salaries to get through the 2008 recession. Because the firm's focus was on public buildings, the situation was not dire, but they did lay- off three staff. Another firm in the same region focused on retail and as a result of that drying up, almost folded but was able to successfully merge with a larger institutionally focused firm.

A mid-sized Southern firm established in 1998 found during the 2008 recession that their public projects continued to a lesser degree. They kept all their staff with no cuts utilizing their line of credit which resulted in debt that took four years to pay off. They do not intend to operate similarly in the future and will continue staff and pay cuts as needed depending on the effects of the pandemic on their business.

Large Firms

During the Great Recession, a large national firm which focused on higher education was not as badly affected as other segments; public university work continued. Unfortunately, private clients decreased due to declining revenues from fundraising which mostly dried up. However, there was also more competition for fewer projects as other firms moved into the public segment. The firm eliminated partner bonuses and both partners and employees took a 10% pay cut to address the smaller workload and less income issues. Because of their focus on public buildings, there were no significant layoffs, mostly cutting staff through attrition about 10%. They found that some owners switched from new buildings to renovations to save money and the firm marketed this option as a money-saving opportunity. They were aware of other large firms which, because of their private focus, had to take much deeper pay cuts – as much as 50% -- and endured many staff layoffs.

As for the current year, it has been one of their best so far – but they anticipate that may decline in the future considering the prolonged pandemic, so they plan to explore marketing other types of services. If they determine that they need to reduce salaries as the major overhead expense, they will first analyze each stage for its effective impact and start at the top by first cutting senior partner bonuses then salaries, and then other staff bonuses and then salaries if needed – and then staff layoffs only if necessary.

A large West coast firm with 80 employees found that during the 2008 recession, they were able to postpone the hardship of dealing with employee compensation issues because they had several large healthcare projects at that time including a hospital. But by 2011, they had to face the economic downturn by first implementing staff leadership pay cuts of 40% for firm principals followed by staff pay cuts of 20% and then additional waves of cutbacks that included lay-offs as the last resort, ultimately losing about half of their staff.

Now with the pandemic, their staff continues to work from home and a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan has been an enormous help, precluding what otherwise would have been as many as a half-dozen staff lay-offs. They requested staff volunteers for work-sharing to reduce jobs to part-time with benefits as well as for those willing to be furloughed and receive unemployment; they got some volunteers for both. By being upfront with staff in this regard, they ensured the continuation of the firm and overall employment for another six to eight weeks that they would have not otherwise had. However, once the pipeline of projects dries up by next year, they will likely be forced to deal with the pain of losing staff.

One small firm principal was working for a larger firm in 2008 in a geographic area where unemployment hit 50% for architects at that time. Then firm leadership and staff were confronted with 40% pay cuts and a staff reduction in force of 50%. Working at 60% pay lasted for several years until the economy turned around.

In a recent nationwide survey, larger architectural firms see projected revenue growth in 2020 ranging from flat to a 20% decline as compared with 2019. While the majority of firms have not made any staffing changes, most firms have recently had or are considering lay-offs or furloughs in the near future. In addition, while most firms had a higher utilization of employees working from home, they did not see a greater amount of revenue. Most of these large firms see new opportunities on the horizon but also sliding project schedules or current projects being cancelled so they project that growth in 2021 will be flat or change, either decline or increase, by 10%.

How Project Types Weather the Storms

The firms interviewed with public projects in the education and healthcare arena as well as those designing civic buildings and affordable housing have continued to do well during economic downturns as many projects are funded years earlier. Therefore, these firms keep going with a constant if sometimes diminished workload. But their futures are less certain.

One small firm has now diversified into segments that include higher education and laboratory planning, affordable housing, offices, and some retail space – and are also considering residential projects and possibly development, understanding that comes with higher risk. As a woman-owned business, the firm has been able to secure some city contracts which they see as very positive.

Another small firm has been marketing more than in the recent past and while they are sticking with the same project types, they have also expanded into healthcare and are partnering with another firm that specializes in this area on a project resulting from Covid-19.

A mid-sized firm has seen that the recent pandemic has resulted in lost work – but also new work including public projects such as a local school and an airport authority. Larger projects have slowed as have private clients in general. A PPP loan has been extremely helpful in maintaining staff; however, an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL), due to its restrictions on multiple businesses, was too complicated for their firm to apply for since they have multiple businesses. They have indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity (IDIQ) projects from US Federal government contracting for which they remain on call with no procurement process needed; however, their implementation is now up in the air.

One small firm has found public university projects difficult because of their firm size since universities tend to associate big firms with “world-class architecture” and small firms do not have a similar breadth of experience. Often, larger firms partner with local small firms for large university work, but competition is fierce. The firm’s current strategy is to focus on small university projects that can be given out through procurement and gradually augment the project size up to $300,000 fees.

New Approaches: Reimagining the Firm

"Great companies foster a productive tension between continuity and change." - *James C. "Jim" Collins*

As Albert Einstein observed, “You can’t solve a problem on the same level that it was created. You have to rise above it to the next level.” Transforming what you do is not only forward-thinking, it can be inspiring – to your staff as well as to your clients. Some architecture firms have built new businesses in sync with what they already do (architecture) to diversity their offerings and capture a market ready to buy. Some firms have reexamined their current management practices and implemented strategic changes in marketing and financial management that make them more profitable and more efficient.

For example, a large firm implemented a new approach to their practice during the 2008 recession: increasing their focus on strategic planning and master planning. Their experience since then has made them much better in that arena now, by building a business development component into their work. In doing so, they have positioned their firm to help their clients with long-range and strategic business planning, keeping themselves connected to their clients so that they are “right there with them” when they’re ready for the next project.

Their business development enterprise indicates that more clients are looking to future renovations rather than new buildings when post-pandemic lives and the economy return to a more normal state. Since the pandemic has altered lives and workstyles so dramatically, it makes sense to look at renovating the workplace of the future. They are striving to position their firm to be the go-to for transforming workplace interiors – and much of this was a result of their strategic planning with clients. They also plan to pursue behavioral and mental health-related facilities which are increasingly publicly funded.

This revised project approach will guide any necessary future staff cuts for the firm, based on needed skill sets. Ironically, they may need to recruit these skill sets for next year’s competition in those arenas and are already seeing how much more competitive the marketplace has become with many more firms competing for the same jobs.

Another large firm increased their master planning studio by about 20% during the Great Recession which was the genesis of their space analytics studio which successfully continues to this day.

A mid-sized firm is maintaining a diverse set of projects and clients while consistently limiting their debt. During the Great Recession, they started their facilities maintenance company to further diversify the firm along with adding real estate consulting services to help clients apply for tax credits and rebates. Both enterprises have helped to balance out their income over time and during the current pandemic.

A small firm proactively marketed during the Great Recession and got a tighter hold on the firm finances by figuring out how much they really needed and focusing on meeting that amount or figuring out what else to do. They continue to employ those strategies during the current pandemic situation as well.

A small Midwest firm finds that their strategic marketing approach and business development are what helped establish them as an award-winning firm in their city, so they continue to refresh their marketing strategy. They plan to outsource a Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) function to assess the marketplace, what their clients want, what their firm can offer and how to strategically reposition it effectively.

As a pivot resulting from the Great Recession, a firm of 20 employees added a manufacturing component in 2009. This new separate company manufactures large prefabricated building components and has more than doubled the firm staff size to 50 employees over the last 10 years. Demand for their manufactured buildings that use nested parts to make better buildings faster has grown manifold as the building types include free-standing ER departments, regional hospitals and patient rooms, offices, and churches. Their manufacturing plant now has international clients and 400 employees, and their biggest challenge is determining how to meet the growing demand.

Returning to Offices

"The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence—it is to act with yesterday's logic."
—*Peter Drucker*

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Returning to the office for most firms now means focusing on needed flexibility to meet their workers' varied home situations with employee safety being paramount. There are also considerations for travel whether locally to job sites or across country for various meetings. Some real concerns about liability issues resulting from potential employee infection and transmission were expressed. All firms are thinking through their existing and needed policies, addressing state and federal regulations, alleviating office hazards, and identifying various employee issues including public transportation safety and childcare/education.

CBRE Group, Inc., the largest commercial real estate services company in the world, recently published a report entitled, *Reopening the World's Workplaces*, that outlines a response-to-recovery process for those managing workspaces. Key is establishing a centralized, multidisciplinary task force involving essential stakeholders to plan and oversee recovery efforts across the spectrum of job functions. Their recommended process includes defining business requirements and work arrangements as well as procurement and financial considerations to evaluate potential alternatives and solutions with a goal to revise workplace strategies in a balanced manner that considers business needs. The report identifies preliminary recommendations for facility readiness criteria as well as reconfiguration of workspaces.

Several large firms interviewed for this article remain open to remote working. Their philosophy is based upon individual choice as key with safety first – along with a focus on rebuilding the culture of the firm and on social responsibility. In two cases, because the firms straddle more than one state and more than one set of state regulations, they are following the stricter of the state regulations for multiple locations, evaluating how to implement needed protocols and requirements, and developing workable frameworks that makes sense for their firms, recognizing the investment of time and resources required.

Nonetheless, for the longer term, these firms are addressing questions about reentry that include: taking employee temperatures and self-screening, plexiglass shields and desk arrangements, face shields for employees, guidelines and signage, office cleaning, and changes to restrooms, common areas, and HVAC systems.

Some of the smaller firms interviewed also continue to manage well through the pandemic by working from home and making a return to office voluntary. The loss of collaboration is an ongoing concern and most hold daily virtual staff meetings or check-ins via Zoom or other teleconference platforms – as well as having project managers check in with their respective staff daily. This avoids someone wasting time heading down the wrong track and substitutes for those frequent in-person meetings they used to have in their offices.

One small firm has updated their Covid-19 policy regarding exposure and testing—if exposed to the virus or testing positive they must remain at home to self-monitor and seek healthcare as needed. Additionally, they plan to close the office for two days for exposure to sanitize – and for seven days if an employee tests positive. They have not yet identified any CDC guidelines on third-party exposure; however, they implemented a policy based on their PEO's recommendation (see appendix 1).

The firm cleans the office weekly and maintain flexibility for staff with a mixture of home and office workers based on individual discretion. The principal has moved her office into a small conference room since her children are back in school with greater exposure. The firm has a standing sign-in for any visitors to the office. They also maintain an increased expectation of communication and conduct a daily "check in". Their PEO assists with their HR-related tasks including finalizing their employee handbook. They found that their local chamber of commerce has a useful resource page which served as the foundation for their back-to-work process.

Another small firm of five people has sufficient space to have everyone report to the office. A sanitation station with supplies is maintained. They offer some flexibility for those employees dealing with childcare issues.

Given the situation in NYC, considering when to return to the office will be tricky for a small firm located there, and they need to have some flexibility for those who must commute via the subway. Since they do not currently have staff with young children, the distance learning and childcare issues are not at issue.

For reentry, one medium-sized firm is ready with 12-foot areas to maintain distance between staff and utilizing a satellite office. The firm has also upgraded the mechanical systems adding ionization and regular air filtration as well as installing guards between desks.

Most firm policies restrict visiting a job site to only when necessary to be seen in-person and wearing a mask; otherwise, staff conduct meetings remotely. Most firms are not allowing plane travel for employees and even once restarted, most anticipate requiring up to a 14-day quarantine before returning to the office.

What has been extremely helpful in guiding one firm through this process is holding informal calls with other firms in their city to share what's going on, discuss the effects of working from home as well as issues of isolation and depression, especially among single employees.

A recent article by Perkins & Will, The Post-COVID Office, discusses how to design workspaces for greater health and wellness. It finds that planning for and integrating elements of successfully returning to offices pose both challenges and opportunities for change leaders. As employees call for greater long-term flexibility between in-office work and remote work, tracking results rather than hours will become the best way to measure productivity.

Another recent survey conducted by the Cameron MacAllister Group of seventy-five design firm principals from a majority of architecture or A/E firms explored firms' perspectives about how the new circumstances and changes brought on by the pandemic are impacting their firms. They found that nearly 70 percent of participating firms discovered staff productivity was unchanged or even increased with remote work and the primary concern was the lack of spontaneous employee interaction. They also found that there was little effect on firms' client communications.

The survey also indicated that most firm leaders now view remote work much more favorably than before the pandemic "shutdown" which may suggest wider acceptance of remote work in the future. In addition, most firms expect to reduce office space and related overhead due to both remote working and the revenue downturn. Most firms surveyed avoided staff layoffs or furloughs into spring while some still had significant reductions.

A recent White Paper: COVID-19 Impacts to the Workplace published by Bala Consulting Engineers, a multi-disciplined engineering design organization providing services since 1982, explores the many challenges about a return to the workplace to ensure appropriate precautionary steps well into the future. Their paper discusses HVAC solutions in detail including filtration and ionization issues along with UVC light, pressurization, air flow, humidification, and air purification among others. Plumbing and technology solutions are also discussed in some detail. Importantly, necessary precautions including various alternatives for controlled access to and separation within the workplace, PPE and cleaning protocols are presented.

ASHRAE, a global professional society committed to serve humanity by advancing the arts and sciences of heating ventilation, air conditioning, refrigeration and their allied fields, published a news release in May 2020 discussing outcomes of their Epidemic Task Force which developed guidance on mitigating potential health risks during reopening of buildings closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes numerous links to more details about water systems, filtration, transportation, occupancy guide, building readiness and more.

Overall, every firm and study agree that challenges abound when considering a return to office space and given the many unknowns about the Covid-19 virus, may be ever-changing well into the future. Concerted planning that considers all factors within an office and the complexity of human lives and needs as well as business needs and requirements with flexibility and reexamination built in is the best route to proceed for now.

Part II

Cyber Attacks

"It takes 20 years to build a reputation and few minutes of cyber-incident to ruin it." – *Stephane Nappo*

Cyber risk is not new and big breaches make big news. While most architecture firms do not make the nightly news like retail giants and government agencies, they nonetheless can suffer substantial pain – to their finances, their client list, and their reputation. In some cases, a cyber-attack may cause construction delays or even lawsuits. As firms increasingly utilize online tools such as BIM and CAD to improve efficiency and quality, they may be increasing the firm's cyber risk as well. Most prevalent among all sizes of architectural firms are phishing scams that defraud firms of thousands of dollars. Another common occurrence is implementing security protocols – including buying cyber liability insurance – only after the attack. Firms may want to consider what they can do <u>now</u> before their firm is hit to sufficiently protect their practice.

While many firms are experiencing the effects of imposter emails requesting immediate payment via a well-disguised but misleading email, some come from hackers that have monitored the firm sufficiently to mimic the style and tone of the supposed sender. In some cases, the FBI has gotten involved when a sizeable transaction has taken place. In several cases, the firm caught these requests before the transactions went through, thereby preventing any losses to the firm. Double-checking with the authorizing person via telephone before making the transaction has paid off in numerous cases – and was particularly important when the firms had no cyber liability insurance. At least one firm which experienced this phishing scam is considering adding it.

One of the larger firms finds that their six IT staff which conducts daily back-ups of all files has prevented the firm from having to address ransomware demands which they have received. They too have dealt with the phishing emails going after the "whales" or senior management who could enable such large transactions. To educate staff about security awareness to protect against future attacks, a series of educational videos about computer hacking are required viewing for staff. The firm's IT staff also regularly conducts their own fake phishing attacks to monitor staff comprehension of cyber risks and educate them further.

In one instance, a principal was contacted by someone posing as their CFO requiring $150,000 for a specific and believable reason; fortunately, cyber insurance reimbursed most of the loss. New security protocols were then implemented including upgrading platforms and firewalls, adding third-party authentication for email, and requiring phone calls for financial transactions among other initiatives. However, when the firm opted to block international email because it frequently can be the culprit with hacking – they later realized that they had also prohibited potential international clients from contacting the firm. Since then, they have made clear through their website and other communications that international clients should call the firm directly. Another firm got a request for qualifications for an international project that they determined to be bogus.

Having your IT personnel successfully identify and remove any computer viruses on an ongoing basis and backing-up files *daily* are vital steps, necessary in today's vulnerable online environment. Establishing firm protocols for staff to double or triple check any financial transfers including via phone calls as appropriate is also imperative. In all cases, ongoing staff education is key to preventing fake transactions but importantly, protecting your data with daily back-ups and implementing cyber liability insurance coverage add an important layer of protection for any firm.

Other security protocols to consider implementing today:

- Make sure networks are password-protected.
- Implement third-party authentication on a VPN for logging into your firm data.
- Be sure any websites visited include the "S" as follows: https://.
- Maintain vigilance on your computer or laptop including locking your office, avoiding using laptops in public places or ever leaving one unattended.
- Encrypt any confidential or proprietary documents and send passwords separately.
- Update firm firewalls regularly with any new security measures.
- Conduct daily file back-ups.
- Implement regular employee education about cyber security.
- Educate staff to review carefully emails from unknown senders or questionable domains, and not to click on links unless verifying with sender.
- Implement payment policies that include verbal verification.
- Expand policies to include cell phones, including six-digit PINs or fingerprint IDs., back-up phones regularly to a computer or cloud, and use Bluetooth judiciously which can sometimes enable outside access.
- Consider cyber liability insurance for your firm.

Visit the AIA Trust webpage regarding cyber liability that includes a listing of resources about considerations for buying cyber liability insurance, managing cyber threats, and more.

Part III

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

"Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization." -- *Mahatma Gandhi*

Equity, diversity and inclusion are more of a priority in today's workplace than ever before, as racial discrimination and underlying issues around racism have been highlighted nationwide on the heels of the Me Too movement. Firms are now devoting unprecedented time and resources to ensure that not only their mission statements address these vital issues but that their strategies and practices support a diverse workplace to leverage the resulting benefits that will enable them to achieve a competitive business advantage. Creating a diverse, inclusive, and equitable work environment means that a company will become more responsive and adaptable to client needs and to the world around them, maximizing creative possibilities and attracting and retaining top talent.

One large firm finds the majority of its staff favor new programs and policies to address equity issues within their workplace. The firm now enables staff to share their thoughts and ideas about diversity and equity on a virtual staff bulletin board – although they have found that 5% of the staff oppose this initiative. There is now a staff committee charged with staff training and education around issues of diversity. A concerted effort is made to staff projects with diverse teams.

Another large firm finds that the policies that are in place are more a statement of culture and now are aiming to gather staff feedback on specifics, planning firm-wide Zoom meetings to accomplish this task. The firm has committed to supporting and uplifting those who have been oppressed and marginalized and want to build their efforts on recent momentum.

The firm pledges to hold each other accountable through a commitment to an expanded initiative for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) within a four-pronged framework to evolve in the firm's efforts to be antiracist on an ongoing basis. They are now focusing on developing this framework for change with staff work groups addressing each of the four areas listed below.

Grow

Include book groups with required reading, seminars, and sharing information in various formats to address:

- The history of racism in America
- Critical Race Theory
- The stories of black Americans that have experienced racism
- The history and role of architecture and design in systemic injustice and ways we can re-envision design's impact on social justice.

Engage

Address issues around team building, staff recruitment patterns and new initiatives for recruitment, paths to partnership, and building relationships with consideration given to:

- Updating minority-owned, woman-owned, or emerging small business (MWESB/BEE) plan to increase diversity in every project
- Supporting BIPOC and mission-based organizations through service and financial contributions
- Expanding engagement with external clients, partners, and collaborators in support of Black Lives Matter

Imagine

Continually challenge themselves to recognize where biases, structures or processes in design have excluded Black, Indigenous People of Color and their perspectives. Examining how they create mentorship opportunities and build project teams are part of this initiative. Through empathy, understanding and the pursuit of human-centered design, the firm aims to design spaces together that are engaging and welcoming for all people.

Act

The goal is for the firm to "walk the talk" through their policies and their implementation, defining specifics and becoming proactive, prioritizing their efforts to maintain momentum. Actions to be implemented include:

- Advocating for underrepresented communities in our work
- Aligning the work SRG pursues with our values
- Evaluating and updating our structures and policies
- Recruiting to expand the diversity within our company

While a mid-sized firm noted that it does not have existing policies regarding diversity and inclusion, it strives to maintain a diverse set of both clients and staff, with many public works, not-for-profits, and others for the public good. Regarding clients, the firm is dedicated to empowering individuals to have a place and engage in their spaces. Regarding staffing, the firm supports professional engagement of all types and works to achieve diversity so that current and prospective clients see themselves in their staff and the staff understand their needs and goals.

A small, minority-owned firm with both partners African American and several minority and women employees has not seen a need to put in place policies to address equity issues. The firm has not identified any related problems experienced to date. One firm principal noted that his early experiences at several architectural firms indicated that he would not be promoted – but added that this is frequently be the case for any architect regardless of race or gender since many larger firms expect to hire young architects who leave after just a few years' experience.

Another small firm now sees an urgency to focus on developing policies that address diversity and inclusion. The principal has become active in local committees that prioritize minority and gender diversity within the profession. One challenge is figuring out how to allocate and commit the time needed for volunteerism and advocacy within a small firm.

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Note:

For descriptions in this article, the AIA-designated firm sizes have been used and are as follows: small firm = 1-9 employees; mid-sized/medium firm = 10-49 employees; large firm = 50+ employees.

Appendix I

Sample policy regarding employee Covid-19 exposure:

- If an employee is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 infection and it has been less than 7 days since the sick employee has been in the facility:
    1. Close off any areas used for prolonged periods of time by the sick employee.
    2. Wait 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting to minimize potential for other employees being exposed to respiratory droplets. During this waiting period, open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in these areas.
    3. Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment (like tablets, touch screens, keyboards, remote controls, and ATM machines) used by the ill persons, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.
    4. If it has been 7 days or more since the sick employee used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary. Continue routinely cleaning and disinfecting all high-touch surfaces in the facility.
        - Direct Contact of Positive and Identifiable COVID-19 – Office Closure of 48 hours
        - Indirect Contact (2 off) of Positive COVID-19 – notify Supervisor immediately

- Determine which employees may have been exposed to the virus and advise of need to take additional precautions:
    1. Inform employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality
    2. Ask infected staff member to identify all individuals who worked in close proximity (within six feet) for a prolonged period of time (10 minutes or more to 30 minutes or more depending upon particular circumstances, such as how close the employees worked and whether they shared tools or other items) with them during the 48- hours period before the onset of symptoms.
    3. Follow the Public Health Recommendations for Community-Related Exposure and instruct potentially exposed employees to stay home for 14 days, telework if possible, and self-monitor for symptoms.

It is recommended that you advise your staff that an employee had a 3rd party exposure. Allow any staff who may want to work from home to do so. Tell them to continue to monitor themselves and follow your current guidelines for working onsite. Let them know you are monitoring the situation and will update them as you learn more.

Regarding returning to work for persons who have symptoms, here are the most recent recommendations (as of 7/31/2020):

- **Option 1**: If, in consultation with a healthcare provider and local public health authorities knowledgeable about locally available testing resources, it is determined **the employee will be tested** to determine if the employee is still contagious, the employee can leave home after these three conditions have been met:
    - The employee no longer has a fever (without the use of medicine that reduces fevers) AND

    - respiratory symptoms have improved (for example, cough or shortness of breath have improved)
      AND
    - they received two negative tests in a row, at least 24 hours apart.

- **<u>Option 2</u>**: If, in consultation with a healthcare provider and local public health authorities knowledgeable about locally available testing resources, it is determined **an employee will not have a test** to determine if they are still contagious, the employee can leave home and return to work after these three conditions have been met:
    - The employee has had no fever for at least 72 hours (that is, 3 full days of no fever without the use medicine that reduces fevers)
      AND
    - respiratory symptoms have improved for at least 72 hours (for example, cough or shortness of breath have improved)
      AND
    - at least 14 days have passed since their symptoms first appeared