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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Companies Plan to Keep Some or Many Workers WFH**

### **VIDEO MEETINGS MAY ADD TO WORKER ANXIETY DURING PANDEMIC**

**CHICAGO, June 11, 2020** – The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many companies to implement remote work options for all or a large portion of their teams, and many plan to keep workers at home. In fact, a recent Challenger survey found 73% of companies plan to keep their teams working from home (WFH) post-COVID-19, with 30% of those respondents reporting they would do so after testing WFH capabilities specifically because of the pandemic. However, the video meetings that have now taken over how people work and socialize are causing additional burnout to workers already anxious due to a global pandemic, according to one workplace authority.

“As we do our work remotely and keep our distance from our closest friends and family, meetings are occurring throughout the workday and into the night, but the phenomenon known as ‘Zoom fatigue’ is a reality,” said Andrew Challenger, Senior Vice President of global outplacement and business and executive coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

The slang term refers to the videoconferencing app Zoom, which has been around since 2011, but whose business has grown exponentially this year. The exhaustion being experienced by people participating in virtual meetings – whether for business conferences, family get-togethers, or friendly cocktail hours – can also be seen in those on FaceTime, Skype, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, RingCentral, or any similar platform.

Video conferencing was introduced by AT&T at the New York World’s Fair in 1964, but it wasn’t until the 2010s that video calls became popular, right around the time when Apple’s FaceTime app launched. Skype, which first appeared in 2003, has been a popular platform, with users able to make video calls via the Internet to other users for free.

With a market value of nearly \$58 billion, Zoom reported first-quarter revenue of \$328.2 million, up 169% from 2019. More than 100,000 K-12 schools around the world are free Zoom participants. Approximately 265,400 corporate clients with more than ten employees use Zoom, which is up 354% year-over-year. Total revenue is expected to be about \$1.8 billion for the full fiscal year 2021. This growth is despite privacy, security, and service issues (including “Zoom bombing” by hackers during meetings), all of which the company reports to be addressing.

According to technology news website The Verge, Zoom stated it had 300 million daily meeting participants in April, up from 10 million in December. The Verge also reported that Microsoft has 75 million daily active users of Teams, Google Meet reached more than 100 million daily meeting participants, and Cisco reported a total of 300 million Webex users.

“Psychologists agree that these virtual meeting places can be taxing on the brain. It goes beyond simply having too many meetings to attend in one day,” said Challenger.

For instance, the nonverbal cues our brains pick up during face-to-face interactions are missing. As we stare at a screen with multiple faces, this important information is lost or is incomplete. The brain has to decode all those faces, and it can be difficult to retain focus. Also, looking at oneself during these meetings can be distracting. This can lead to fatigue and burnout.

“This way of communicating is not going anywhere anytime soon, especially as long as the virus keeps workers and students at home and social distancing continues. Employers need to be mindful that their teams may be experiencing some burnout from the totality of the pandemic as well as the videoconferencing, and should make accommodations to take some of the strain off workers,” said Challenger.

Challenger offers the following ideas to combat videoconferencing fatigue:

- Try not to schedule too many meetings in a row. If you have multiple meetings planned for a day, take a break between meetings – the longer, the better. Take a walk, eat a snack or meal, meditate, or get up and do stretches. Be sure to add your virtual meetings to your calendar so it is clear if you are heading toward overload.
- Consider switching some of the meetings to the “old-fashioned” way. Will a phone conversation accomplish what is necessary to complete a task or connect with a colleague, client, or customer (or friend or loved one)?
- Although we may feel we cannot look away during a meeting, we all do so during in-person gatherings. It is okay to take notes while someone is speaking – in fact, this often helps people keep their focus and retain more information. If you doodle during an uneventful meeting, who will know? But do not multitask, such as replying to emails or composing a memo, during a meeting. This can be even more exhausting.
- Experiment with different screen-view options. Make yourself smaller, or bigger, to see if it helps with attention. The Zoom app has a function that hides your video, which may help you stay engaged with the material instead of worrying about your own appearance.

- These meetings are also tough on workers’ physical health, as they facilitate more sitting and staring at a screen. This can lead to body aches and eye strain. Change positions, switch to a different seating option, or stand during a meeting. Have a different space to conduct business than where you take personal meetings.
- Make meetings enjoyable. A pet on our laps, our favorite comfortable pants, or bare feet do not have to be seen. Have a favorite, meeting-appropriate beverage nearby. Keep your mic on mute until you need to speak so you do not have to worry about interruptions due to unexpected background noises.

“There are a lot of benefits to video meetings. Most people are more productive if they get dressed and groomed to take a visual meeting. People also enjoy seeing and not just hearing their colleagues. They no longer have to worry as much about their wardrobe or commuting to attend, and they can immediately return to other tasks once a meeting ends,” said Challenger.

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How are you currently addressing COVID-19 for your business? (Please select the most relevant options.)	
All employees are working from home (WFH).	33.3%
Most or part of our workers are WFH.	40.0%
We plan to keep many workers WFH even after the pandemic passes.	43.3%
We tested WFH and implemented it successfully, but plan to recall workers after the pandemic passes.	13.3%
We tested WFH, implemented it successfully, and are transitioning some employees to WFH even after the pandemic passes.	30.0%

*Source: Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc. © survey conducted online between June 11 and June 20 among 150 Human Resources executives at companies of various sizes and industries nationwide.*