

**Managing People**

# **Chevron Created a Virtual Summer Camp for Its Employees' Kids**

by Rhonda J. Morris

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**Summary.** When Chevron human resources chief Rhonda Morris realized that the Covid-19 crisis would extend through the summer, creating even bigger headaches for the company's working parent employees with kids whose virtual schools were ending, she had an... [\*\*more\*\*](#)

Back in March, after we worked through the initial shock of the Covid-19 crisis, and what it meant for our California-based multinational energy business, we began to accept that our employees' professional and personal lives had fundamentally changed. The new normal included working from home and, for those of us who are moms and dads, trying to keep children whose daycares and schools had gone virtual engaged.

Suddenly, we working parents had to be everything to everyone, 24-7. We were teacher, coach, tutor, and oh yes...employee, colleague, manager, leader. Most of us initially saw summer as the light at the end of the tunnel. In the United States, the "peak" of the pandemic was projected to be sometime in May, so by June, we hoped, the kids would be in camps or have summer jobs or at least be outside playing with their friends. Whoever made that forecast made weathermen look like prophets.

When we realized that social distancing protocols would need to continue indefinitely, we knew we needed to get creative. My own 17-year old daughter had already become a master at photo-bombing my virtual meetings, and I knew that Chevron employees with younger children were really struggling. We love our kids. But we also needed — wanted — the freedom to focus on our work.

I had an idea: a virtual platform where teenagers casting about for something to do could virtually tutor, or otherwise entertain, middle school, elementary and preschool kids. I suggested this at a regular meeting of our Inclusion Counsel, which is comprised of leaders of Chevron's 12 employee resource groups and the C-Suite, led by our chairman, Mike Wirth, and on Chevron's internal social media channel. The response was overwhelmingly positive. So we then activated our citizen army of ERG leaders, retirees, virtual summer interns, and corporate partners to launch Camp Chevron. It was operational just five short weeks after conception.

Thousands of parents from around the world registered their kids for classes in topics such as sign language, Spanish, Black Innovators in STEM, arts and crafts, mindful meditation, finance, and the supply chain of toilet paper. One of the highlights was story time where executives posted videos of themselves reading some of their favorite childhood books. Mike Wirth read *Green Eggs and Ham*, while Hew Pate, our general counsel, read *Ferdinand*.

It was a huge success — one we've built on as the pandemic continues. Chevron has had an Employee Assistance Program, which focus on mental health and well-being, and Ombuds, employees to whom people can confidentially submit anonymous concerns or complaints, for decades, but, when virtual schooling resumed in the fall, we added new programs like “Rethink,” a resource to assist parents with remote learning, including for kids with special needs, and *Caregiver's Marketplace*, through which employees were able to create remote learning pods with co-workers or volunteer to tutor or help colleagues caring for kids or seniors.

We also created a communications platform to share their personal and inspirational stories of resilience. We heard from one employee who escaped Vietnam as a nine-year-old in 1973 and a mother who described the strength of her special-needs child.

Finally, to address upcoming school vacation days, Camp Chevron — Holiday Edition — is back.

In a different time, this kind of support would have come from governments or churches. It now falls to employers. Here's what we learned from our experience.

**What happens at home affects what happens at work.** The lines between work and home were blurred before the pandemic, and they're even more so now. Organizations have a responsibility to understand that dynamic and address it. If there are some resources employees need but can't get elsewhere, we should consider providing them.

**Solutions born in crises can stick.** We've all learned that telecommuting is a more effective way to work than we once assumed. Similarly, the programs and platforms we've developed to help working parents during this time are not crisis- or season-bound. They can be available going forward for any school break in the future. If we are the same after a crisis as before, then we have been sleeping in class.

**Good ideas and execution come from everywhere.** Camp Chevron was my idea, but a host of our team members brought it to life and expanded it. The Caregiver's Marketplace was the brainchild of our Women's Employee Network, and the sign language courses were sponsored by our Enabled Network, the ERG that supports people with disabilities. The real aha is that these great ideas were probably always there percolating under the surface of day-to-day work. Our challenge is to encourage employees to put them forward and to help give them life before the next crisis.

When our people know that their work family cares about their home family, everyone, including the organization, benefits. Together, we can carve out some sanity and sanctuary in an unpredictable world.

**Rhonda J. Morris** is vice president and chief human resources officer for Chevron Corporation and has led the company's human resources, health & medical and diversity & inclusion groups since 2016. She also serves on the company's Executive Committee.