

The most current information on how financial professionals can increase cash flow & control costs.

July 28, 2020

KEY FINANCE FIGURES

	Curr*	Lst Mo	Lst Yr
■ Leading Rates %			
Prime Rate	3.25	3.25	5.50
Fed Funds Rate	0.25	0.25	2.50
■ Money Market Rates %			
<i>London Interbank (LIBOR)</i>			
1 month	0.18	0.19	2.37
3 months	0.27	0.31	2.34
6 months	0.36	0.46	2.26
■ Stock & Bond Indexes			
DJIA	26,086	25,763	27,359
S&P 500	3,155	3,067	3,014
NASDAQ	10,391	9,726	8,258
5-Yr T-Bill	0.30	0.33	1.84
10-Yr T-Bill	0.64	0.71	2.09
■ Employment Stats			
Unemployment rate (%)	11.1	13.3	3.7
Payroll employment (thousands)	4,800	2,699	182
Average hourly earnings (\$)	-0.35	-0.31	0.09

*As of 7/14/20

The Cumulative Effect of CFO & Controller Alert

With the pace of change accelerating and the competition tougher, what's the best chance to keep up performance and get two steps ahead of the competition? A reliable source of continuous information.

It's the **cumulative effect** that helps, not any one reading. Our unique function is to deliver solid, focused information in your area of responsibility in a fast-read format twice a month to help performance.

Coronavirus-faking worker cost this firm \$175,000

■ FBI warns employers to watch for this costly trend

First there were fake mask and other PPE schemes; then came the opportunists exploiting the coronavirus for business email compromise. Now there's a new way folks are jumping on COVID-19 to cost you money.

And it hits a lot closer to home.

Some people have started faking a COVID-19 diagnosis ... with costly consequences.

One of your peers recently lost \$175,000 in productivity after shutting down its manufacturing facility when an employee lied about testing positive for the coronavirus.

While you hate to think one of your own people would do something similar, it does happen. It's gotten so serious, the FBI put out a warning to businesses about these scams.

With cases spiking in many parts of the U.S., the temptation – and the likelihood an employer will believe it – is greater than ever.

Here's how you can guard against a similar and costly situation.

Had the documentation to back it up

It's not like the employer in this case took the diagnosis on the

(Please see \$175,000 ... on Page 2)

New 401(k) e-disclosure rules effective July 27

■ Now you can text, email employees to stay ERISA-compliant

Your company can now tap email or even text to pass along key retirement plan disclosures.

The Department of Labor recently released a final rule, effective July 27.

Here's what you need to know to stay in compliance with ERISA.

Saves you money

Your printing and mailing costs will plunge now that you have the following two options to get plan disclosures to participants:

- send an email with an attached file of the disclosures, or

- email or text employees a message with a link to the disclosures online.

Of course, there are conditions. For starters, you'll have to send employees a paper notification that your disclosure process is changing.

And make it clear that employees always have the choice to opt out of e-delivery.

Info: You'll find a DOL fact sheet explaining all the new requirements at dol.gov/agencies/ebsa/about-ebsa/our-activities/resource-center/fact-sheets/electronic-disclosure-safe-harbor-for-retirement-plans

\$175,000 ...

(continued from Page 1)

employee's say-so. The fraudster came in with documentation supporting the COVID-19 diagnosis.

But after growing suspicions this employee was looking for some time off, some follow-up on the documentation revealed it wasn't legit.

Unfortunately that was only after the company shut down its production line, disinfected the entire facility and quarantined other key workers who'd come into contact with the "infected" employee.

All of which came with a six-figure price tag.

Of course, this is a serious and scary time, and you may well have employees who end up testing positive for the virus.

But you also don't want to get taken for a ride when people are

simply looking for a vacation on your dime. Or start a company-wide panic as co-workers fear for their own health.

Which means you need to have a policy in place to handle this issue,

Always contact the providers on work excuse documents.

seeing as it isn't going away anytime soon.

Safeguards straight from the FBI

The FBI Office of Private Sector sent select members a warning about this troubling trend and proposed some safeguards that you'll want to consider adopting:

- always contact the medical providers listed on work excuse documents to confirm they're legit (that's how the company in the earlier example uncovered the fraud – the phone number was invalid), and
- check for any inconsistencies in font and spacing or signs of computer editing on any documentation employees submit.

The Society for Human Resource Management also encourages employers to treat all requests similarly to the way you would with Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requests you might find suspicious or ambiguous.

Ask questions for clarification. And of course remind employees of the consequences of submitting false requests to keep folks from taking advantage of the current situation ... and your company's good will.

Adapted in part from "FBI warns companies of employees faking coronavirus test results," by Josh Campbell, at cnn.com

Sharpen your JUDGMENT

This feature provides a framework for decision making that helps keep you and your company out of trouble. It describes a recent legal conflict and lets you judge the outcome.

■ Ex-employee sued for severance: Did he collect?

HR Director Wendy Mills knocked on CFO Bill Keeper's door.

"Hi, Wendy, come on in," said Bill. "Tell me, how did our company handle severance pay when Jim Thomas was president?"

"It was at his discretion, but typically he'd give severance of one month a year of service to anyone who was terminated in good standing," said Wendy.

"Well, our new president, Roger Edwards, isn't following that same policy," said Bill. "A former employee, Jesse Mitchum, is suing us. He claims we owe him severance, but we don't have a severance policy now."

"Yes, that's true. Jesse was terminated under Roger's watch, so why is he saying he's owed any severance pay?" asked Wendy.

'Others received severance'

"Jesse is claiming that other employees received it, so he should, too," said Bill. "In his lawsuit, he provides a list of people who received severance and the amounts they received."

"They were all terminated when Jim was president," said Wendy, after looking at the list.

"Then we should fight this, since there's no formal policy in writing now," said Bill.

Did Bill's company win?

- *Make your decision, then please turn to Page 6 for the court's ruling.*

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2021 health insurance premiums: Will COVID-19 drive them higher?

■ *What firms can expect, and what specific cost drivers to watch for*

In a normal year, the American Academy of Actuaries outlines the factors driving health insurance costs for the next plan year. However, things are tricky this year due to the coronavirus.

Yes, COVID-19 cases are resulting in some sky-high hospital bills, such as a Seattle man whose two-month stay cost \$1.1 million. Yet, at the same time, there's reduced demand for doctors' visits and hospital services.

2021 rate increases

However, rates are expected to rise due to the following uncertainties:

- COVID-19 treatment costs
- a second wave of COVID-19 leading to more hospital stays

- patients flooding clinics for non-urgent services delayed by the lockdown, and
- hospitals charging insurers more to compensate for 2020 losses.

There's also a lot of variation from health experts on the amount of increases, such as between 4% and 40%, according to health insurance marketplace Covered California's analysis.

The big players have weighed in. Aetna projects 7.4% for its HMOs and 38% for its PPOs.

United Health expects a 17.4% increase for its HMOs and 11.4% for its PPOs.

Adapted from "2021 health insurance premiums: What to expect," by Jenna Greene, at [benefitspro.com](https://www.benefitspro.com)

FOR MORE ...

To download the American Academy of Actuaries' brief on 2021 health insurance premiums, go to actuary.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/PremiumDrivers2021.pdf

Why your vendor file can't wait for a cleanup

■ *86% of A/P pros feel this critical tool needs some TLC*

Spring may have the rep for being prime cleaning season, but when it comes to your master vendor file (MVF), Summer is prime time.

It may be long overdue. According to a recent online poll by our sister publication, *Keep Up to Date on Accounts Payable*:

- 67% of A/P pros said their MVF could use a little cleaning, while
- 19% admitted their file is a total mess.

Here's why it can't wait.

Get ahead before this year-end

This year-end is going to be dramatically different for your A/P

team. And it's all thanks to the revived Form 1099-NEC.

Which means now they'll be filing the usual 1099-MISCs, plus 1099-NECs for non-employee compensation.

With these additional reporting responsibilities, the last thing you want is out-of-date, inaccurate or duplicate data muddying the works.

You also might suggest A/P add a field to flag whether a vendor is a MISC or an NEC recipient to prep for a smoother year-end.

Info: You'll find instructions for the 1099-MISC and the 1099-NEC at [irs.gov/instructions/li1099msc](https://www.irs.gov/instructions/li1099msc)

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

■ Recovery stalled? Depends which Fed prez you ask

It was a busy week for the presidents of the various Federal Reserve Banks around the country. Many of them spoke on where the economy is currently and what the rest of the year will look like.

But if you're looking for a unified answer from the central bank, you're not going to find it here.

Check out what the various Fed presidents believe is in store for us.

Beware the 'air pockets'

The majority of Fed presidents aren't painting the rosiest picture.

Atlanta Fed President Raphael Bostic, Boston Fed President Eric Rosengren and Richmond Fed President Thomas Barkin all stated in separate speeches that the recovery we started to see signs of in May and June may be stalling.

And they attribute it to what Barkin characterizes as "air pockets."

On the business side that's the exhaustion of orders that were on the books that haven't been replaced by new orders.

For households it's the end of unemployment benefits and other types of support that buoyed them.

And those air pockets have the ability to derail any rebound we've been experiencing.

However, if you're looking for more hope, look to St. Louis Fed President James Bullard. He believes that many jobs lost during the pandemic will rebound by year's end.

(Adapted in part from "Fed officials suggest U.S. recovery may be stalling," by Howard Schneider, at [reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com))

Summer storm season is gonna be a doozy! Are you prepared for it?

■ *There's still time to check on these key areas*

It figures, considering how 2020 has gone thus far – on top of a plague, here come the floods!

Check out what we can expect for the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season:

- 13 to 19 named storms (winds of 39 mph or higher), of which
- six to 10 could become hurricanes.

That forecast comes straight from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association and is considered “above average” storm activity.

And like just about everything else, COVID-19 makes this situation more troubling this year.

Here's why hurricane season could prove more costly for businesses this go-around.

Took their eye off the ball

With so many businesses, especially on the east coast, closed for so long,

disaster recovery/business continuity plans may not been given the attention they usually receive.

Not only that, but key tasks may not have been performed on the regular, such as:

- files being backed up or moved for off-site storage (IT's been pretty swamped), and
- routine maintenance on your building which could leave you extra vulnerable to flooding.

While the season runs from June 1-Nov. 30, the most severe storms tend to hit in the second part of the summer. So there's still time to review your plan to make sure you're prepared.

Touch base with everyone from IT to your facility manager to ensure you're ready.

Info: Read the full forecast at noaa.gov/media-release/busy-atlantic-hurricane-season-predicted-for-2020

No on-site audits? Inventory counts go on

■ *Tech advances mean that your team will still be counting widgets*

It might seem like companies are off the hook for inventory audits while the coronavirus crisis continues.

And employees might be happy for one less chore to handle amidst all the other accounting and recordkeeping challenges they're facing.

While regulators are making some allowances, however, it doesn't look like they'll eliminate audits even if facilities are down to skeleton crews.

Tech finds a way (unfortunately)

Companies can expect to have to figure out alternatives to on-site visits. For example, you may have to capture and stream live video of inventory

counts so auditors can conduct required observation and verification.

In that scenario, one of your crew might have to strap on a video camera connected to a smartphone.

The audit team will guide the inspection and capture strong, if nontraditional, video evidence to greenlight your figures.

And don't expect remote audits to be the end of tech-driven changes; audits using artificial intelligence and drones are on the horizon.

So it's a good time to get some of your Finance team trained in using and verifying these new techniques.

Info: tinyurl.com/audits585

MANAGING FOR RESULTS

■ Better than business as usual: Build a stronger team

Despite the fact that the whole world has changed in the last few months, companies – and their leaders – that adapt quickly to change will not only survive, but thrive, through this pandemic and beyond.

Think collaboratively

But how do you create a strategy for success in the midst of a crisis?

It requires a mental shift, says organizational change expert Jason Myers. In other words, leaders need to think collaboratively rather than authoritatively. It's all about letting employees know the company values them and their contributions:

- **Build a culture of trust.** Create a safe space so employees can talk about their concerns and challenges. However, it doesn't stop there. Managers need to be transparent about company challenges and solicit employee suggestions and solutions.
- **Connect the dots.** Often, companies dole out information, particularly during a crisis, on a “need to know” basis. Instead, take the time to help the team see the big picture and how their contribution affects larger company goals and challenges.
- **Ask for input.** As your firm prepares to reopen and rebuild, engage employees in the process of ensuring their safety as well as addressing other concerns, such as childcare. By adopting a more transparent approach to leadership, it will make the recovery process much smoother.

(Adapted from “Stronger Together: How to Forge a Team that Defies a Downturn,” at td.org)

Our subscribers come from a broad range of companies, both large and small. In this regular feature, three of them share success stories you can adapt to your unique situation.

1 **Why our move to the cloud was so smooth**

We've considered an essential business, so we've been in the office since the start of the public health crisis.

During this time, we have had to be really aggressive with our approach to quoting, to get business and with pinning down expenses so that we could keep running as usual.

We noticed that our software could use a bit of an update to keep up with our new processes and procedures – so we thought now would be the perfect time to upgrade.

We knew that diving into a new system without extra training could be anxiety-inducing for some. So we brainstormed a way to solve it.

We created a sample version of the program where people could practice their jobs as if the new system was already up-and-running.

Practice makes perfect

We even uploaded some of our database to the system so that staff can go in and place test orders with familiar customer and vendor info.

All the steps are the same as if it were live, but there's no way to mess up any orders or data in the sample program.

Now that people have been practicing, we're confident that when we go live with our new system everyone will be comfortable with the transition. It's given our staff peace of mind to be able to practice, and they're feeling like they're ready to tackle the change.

(Paula York, Accounting Manager, Weamco Inc., Sapulpa, OK)

**REAL
PROBLEMS
REAL
SOLUTIONS**

2 **We cut costly turnover by 60% for this group**

Last year, we hired over 200 seasonal workers for our distribution center. Candidates were asked three questions: Are you authorized to work in the U.S.? Can you stand for up to eight hours? Can you lift over 50 pounds? Answer "yes" to all three questions, you're hired on the spot.

No resumes needed. No drug screening. No background checks.

We're defying tradition by "open hiring," a business model developed by the Greyston Bakery in New York.

In 2018, we conducted more than 1,200 traditional interviews, hiring 322 people. But last year, 719 candidates answered those three questions, resulting in 208 hires.

Set up a carpool

Surprisingly, the turnover rate among this group dropped by 60% when compared to seasonal workers the previous year. However, these workers do need some guidance.

When they needed transportation, we helped them set up a carpool.

At first, it's hard for senior leaders to get their head wrapped around open hiring. It's something you really have to support. You need persistence to keep going.

When someone sets up a roadblock, you need to tear it down. Our company values it and sees it as the right thing to do. We are happy to be able to increase our social mobility within our own communities.

(Trish Patton, VP, Human Resources, North America, The Body Shop, New York City)

3 **How remote A/P showed commitment to vendors**

When the coronavirus pandemic first hit, our team was scrambling to figure out how to deal with A/P operations in such unprecedented times. Topping the list of priorities was taking care of vendors.

Luckily, our A/P staffers were motivated to prove that working remotely didn't mean letting go of vendors' needs.

One of the biggest ways our team excelled was making sure our vendors were in the loop on what our plan of

action was right from the start.

We talked with them about changes in payment timing and made sure they understood that credit cards would be the preferred method of payment.

Most importantly, we promptly answered or addressed any questions or concerns they had.

Walked the talk (literally)

For example, remote work meant we now had to pay many vendors electronically, but there were some vendors that still relied on more manual methods. So our team made

the extra effort. If a vendor needed a paper check, a staffer made a special trip into the office to process it.

This showed vendors we're dedicated and value them, which will help us maintain their loyalty. As we continue on through this new way of work, we know it'll be key to uphold the high standards that we've set with our vendors.

Our team will keep sharing ideas and working to improve. We're in this together. And that makes these crazy times a little easier.

(Melisa Garcia, Finance Manager, Acuren Inspection Inc., Danbury, CT)

Vendor portals a win for Accounts Payable but might not be all they're cracked up to be as a supplier

■ Lack of standardization, time commitment undercutting the experience

That very tool saving your A/P department tons of time in vendor setup and inquiries? It's adding hours to the to-do lists of your suppliers.

Of course that doesn't mean you want to toss your portal out the window.

But you probably want to be extra mindful of your suppliers' experience with it.

Train early and often

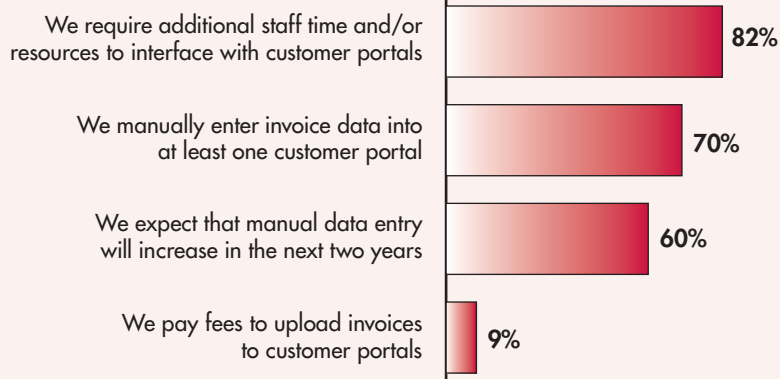
Supplier training makes a huge difference. You want to make that a priority and be sure to bring suppliers in early in the process.

Each vendor portal is going to work differently, so you don't want to assume that just because a vendor has used a portal before that it'll easily navigate yours.

And be sure to always provide a contact person in A/P should vendors have any issues using the portal.

WHERE THE PAIN POINTS ARE

Vendor Experiences with Customer Portals



Source: A "360 degree" survey of payables and receivables professionals by Nacha, The Credit Research Foundation and AP Now

If your own customers have supplier portals, your A/R team can likely sympathize. As you set up (or work to better) your own portal, solicit input from A/R staffers to uncover ways to improve the experience for your vendors based on what they've seen.

Sharpen your judgment...

THE DECISION

(please see case on Page 2)

Yes, the company won. While the employee provided a list of other workers who received severance pay, there was no consistent basis for who received the money or how much they received.

There was "convincing evidence" that some severance policy existed prior to the employee's termination; however, he was terminated under a different president, said the court.

The company argued that its policy, under the previous president, had never been formal or existed in writing and that it had been "discretionary." Furthermore, the employee was terminated under a different president.

Since no employment contract now existed granting severance, and there was no proof of a company policy, the court ruled in favor of the employer because the employee's case wasn't based on a contractual agreement.

Analysis: When severance is required

Severance pay isn't required by the Fair Labor Standards Act, but it can be required if it was promised in a worker's contract. In many states, timely payment of severance due is mandated by law. Every state has different requirements, so it's key to have as much lead time as possible to meet them.

For mass layoffs, the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act requires firms with 100 or more employees to pay severance, unless a 60-day notice is given.

Cite: *Ilijas v. Ripley Entertainment Inc., No. 18-cv-00136-JST, U.S. D.C., N.D. California, 8/14/19. Dramatized for effect.*

Experts give their solutions to difficult workplace problems

Finance professionals like you face new questions every day on how to deal with everything from accounting and tax regulations to management and employment law issues. In this section, experts answer those real-life questions.

Supply chain, demand challenges today

Q: With customers and suppliers facing financial challenges, what can we do to ensure we can meet demand and address vulnerabilities in the supply chain?

A: According to Plante Moran supply chain expert Kim Doyle, you should start by reviewing customer collections and vulnerabilities within the supply chain (tinyurl.com/restart-supply-chain).

Vulnerable suppliers can put you at risk, so you should be ready to pivot to an alternative source of supply, if necessary.

Stay in constant communication with your trade vendors, so you have a finger on the pulse. Then you can develop a plan for all potential scenarios that may arise – think about your best, worst and most-likely outcomes.

Once you've fully assessed the situation with vendors, customers and collections, you should begin to prioritize your action items and respond proactively to any anticipated deferment requests.

What are our obligations under 'Red Flags' rule?

Q: How can we determine if our business is considered a creditor with obligations under the Red Flags Rule?

A: The Red Flags Rule requires many businesses and organizations

to implement a written Identity Theft Prevention Program designed to detect the warning signs – or red flags – of identity

Develop a plan for all potential scenarios that may arise.

theft in their day-to-day operations, explains Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP attorney Nancy Perkins on the Lexology blog.

The Federal Trade Commission says you have obligations under the rule if your business regularly defers payment for or bills customers for goods and services; grants or arranges credit; or participates in the decision to extend, renew or set the terms of credit.

Specific activities include getting or using credit reports in connection with a credit transaction, giving information to a credit agency in connection with such a transaction and advancing funds to – or for – someone who must repay them, either with funds or pledged property.

If you have a question you'd like our experts to answer, email it to Jennifer Azara at jazara@cfodailynews.com

COMMUNICATION KEYS

■ 'Paradox mindset' helps handle conflicting demands

Staffers struggling to handle all the demands on them during these unprecedented times? Encourage them to adopt a "paradox mindset."

So instead of saying "Should I do A or B?" you want to say "How can I do both A and B at acceptable levels?"

Shifting from an either/or outlook to a both/and one helps folks manage conflicting demands with less stress.

Info: knowledge.insead.edu/leadership-organisations/overwhelmed-adopt-a-paradox-mindset-14026

■ The key to keeping Slack messages manageable

Slack is the biz communication tool of choice these days – which means Slack overload isn't far behind.

Keep things manageable by using highlight words.

By default, Slack notifies you anytime your name and username is mentioned. But you can also choose keywords you want called to your attention in messages, like budget, payroll or customers.

Info: okdork.com/slack-app-19-tips-advanced-tutorial/#3

■ Getting better feedback from your suggestion box

Whether physical or digital, your company suggestion box may not be pulling the most helpful ideas.

To steer folks in the right direction try setting weekly themes. So the first week seek out suggestions on improving quality, while the next week can focus on money-saving ideas.

Info: thebalancecareers.com/harness-the-power-of-an-employee-suggestion-program-1918931

Recent developments that can help your business stay ahead

PPP loan forgiveness just got easier on you

It may be less of an administrative hassle to apply for Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan forgiveness now. The SBA has just issued a simpler loan forgiveness application, requiring fewer calculations and less documentation.

You can use the new EZ 3-page application if your company didn't reduce employee salaries or hours.

Just like the longer form, you'll need to complete it and send it to your lender by Oct. 31, 2020.

Info: You can download the EZ application at sba.gov/document/sba-form-paycheck-protection-program-ez-loan-forgiveness-application-instructions-borrowers-6-16-2020

EEOC updates return-to-work guidance

As more states re-open, you have additional federal guidance for your legal obligations, courtesy of updated guidance from the EEOC.

One of the new questions covered: What should an employer do if an employee entering the worksite requests an alternative method of screening due to a medical condition?

It also addresses specific accommodations for workers who are:

- over 65
- caregivers, or
- pregnant.

Info: Access the guidance at tinyurl.com/EEOCCOVIDreopenguidance

How your peers are adjusting T&E policies

Your peers are issuing some travel bans of their own, making these changes to their biz travel policies during the coronavirus pandemic:

- 53% say no Airbnbs
- 43% axed serviced apartments, and
- 33% put the kibosh on staying with family or friends in high-outbreak areas.

Info: Stats from a recent Uniglobe Travel survey.

It's here! IRS releases revised Form 941

It's been in the works for months, but Payroll finally has a new quarterly return to use, starting with the return due July 31. The revised *Form 941, Employer's Quarterly Federal Tax Return*, includes new lines for:

- the credit for qualified sick leave and expanded family and medical leave wages
- deferrals of the employer share of Social Security tax that quarter, and
- credits received from filing Form 7200 for the quarter.

Info: Download the new form at irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f941.pdf

Lighter side: The fun facts of Summer

Summer may feel different this year, but there's a lot about this season we bet you might not know. Here are a few fun facts to share with your finance team:

- The Eiffel Tower is about six inches taller during the summer. The metal expands in the heat.
- Babies are moodier. Studies show babies born in the summer months are less "chill" than their colder weather counterparts.
- Americans eat an estimated 20 billion hot dogs from Memorial Day to Labor Day. No word on how many antacids they consume.

Info: rd.com/list/things-that-only-happen-in-summer

MEASURE UP

What U.S. workers would do to get back to work safely

Let employers take their temperature

89%

Share their COVID-19 diagnosis with their employer

85%

Share their lifestyle information (that could contribute to COVID-19 exposure) with their employer

69%

Source: A pulse survey of 1,000 workers by KPMG

Looks like many employees are willing to bend a little on their personal privacy if it means they can get back in the office and still keep their co-workers safe.

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C&CA subscriber

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