



# In the **Midst of COVID-19** without a Crisis Plan

A Question and Answer Session  
with Cheryl Carmel





OnSolve's Vice President of Information Security is Cheryl Carmel. Cheryl is responsible for developing, maintaining and continually improving the governance, risk management, compliance, security and privacy programs at OnSolve. Under Cheryl's guidance the security team manages and maintains compliance to ISO 27001:2013, AICPA SOC 2 Type 2 and Privacy Shield and is in the final stages of FedRAMP authorization.

Cheryl is a member of ISC2, where she holds her CISSP, and the International Association of Privacy Professionals, where she holds her CIPT (CIPP/IT). She participates in many industry events where she presents on key and current topics.

We spoke to Cheryl about security during COVID-19. Here is a transcript of that session, edited for clarity and conciseness.



**CHERYL CARMEL**  
V.P. OF INFORMATION SECURITY

**Q:**

**What is one of the initial first steps organizations should be taking in response to COVID-19?**

**A:**

**Create a task force.** This is one of the situations where we need a business continuity team that manages our standard continuity tests or exercises throughout the year. But it's almost like the standard "incident response team." Using COVID-19 as an example. Once the situation became more serious, we at OnSolve defined the individuals needed in our task force. We have Legal, Marketing, Facilities, Security and Human Resources. That task force then does several things — they review the current state of affairs in order to make strategic decisions of what to do within the company, and either present those to executives or if they're given the decision-making power completely, they act.

The task force is the team responsible for implementing a communications plan to ensure there is outreach to employees as well as customers on a regular basis. They would also handle the decision about when to return back to work, and what provisions need to be made for things that happen throughout the event.

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**Q:**

**Let's talk about organizations who do not currently have a pandemic crisis plan in place, and are operating from a reactive standpoint. What would your recommendations be with how they move forward?**

**A:**

**For any organization that doesn't have a pandemic plan, and is going by the seat of their pants, I recommend reaching out to professionals in the field.**

There are companies that can come in and help write your pandemic plan for you, with you, or at least give you pointers to get things going. So, if you're a company that has nothing, and doesn't have any way to mobilize a remote workforce, then you need to reach out to business continuity professionals to make sure that you can get the right advice. Because just going by what we think will work — maybe, probably — is not the best way to go.

If you have no plan, those consultants will develop an action plan. An example would be "make sure all of your employees have laptops." And if they don't have laptops, these professionals will help you find a way to let them take home their work desktops.

**Q:**

**Who internally should be involved from an organization when it comes to developing a plan like this?**

**A:**

**Well, first thing is you absolutely have to make sure you've got your C-level buying into the fact that you have to go through the planning, and make all of the action steps happen.**

Organizationally, you need somebody from Legal to make sure that you're taking care of all of the edicts that are coming down from the state and local and federal governments. Someone from Marketing to make sure you have a good message. Someone from Human Resources to help support employees. Next, you need to make sure you've got a solid communication plan in place so those individuals know what's happening. That applies to internal communications as well.

Your technology team needs to be involved because they're going to have to support both the remote workforce and any in-office workers you may have. Your facilities organization has to make sure that those office workers have the supplies they are going to need. And you have to work directly with facilities or building management to get the additional deep cleaning on a regular basis.

And again, whether they are an independent team, or within the security team or some other place within your organization, your business continuity team should be involved.



#### **C- LEVEL EXECUTIVES**

Crisis planning buy-in



#### **BUSINESS CONTINUITY TEAM**

Create and execute plans



#### **LEGAL TEAM**

Maintain regulations



#### **HUMAN RESOURCES**

Support employees



#### **MARKETING**

Control the message



#### **IT**

Helpdesk, support mobile workforce



#### **BUILDING MANAGEMENT**

Supply mobile workforce

## Q:

**How are you developing a plan for return to work? How will you determine when employees can resume in office-work and travel and making sure everything is ready?**

## A:

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) will give us guidance on that. And I know that the airlines are all following that same understanding there. I am looking at that the same way. Once everything is lifted, and there's a greater sense of calm, the task force would get together and feel out when they feel comfortable permitting their employees to return to work and regular travel.

They may come up with a tiering system where it's going to be only critical travel as deemed by either the task force or the C-levels. And then, they can gradually start adding things back to it. But being back to a full travel schedule I think is going to take time before people are feeling very comfortable with getting back on planes, trains and automobiles on our normal day-to-day basis.

Then, before anyone comes back to the office, we start with deep cleanings. It will be critical for building management to make sure that the building itself is thoroughly cleaned. Make sure there's no potential for additional spread of disease.

Another critical step is making sure that there's a direct understanding with all employees that if they have been exposed, they're going to have to stay home for an additional timeframe. And don't forget that employees, because of closing schools, may still have to be dealing with things going on with their families at that point. There must be an understanding of how that's going to take place, and what's going to have to happen to make sure that the entire family is taken care of.

Once everyone is back in the office, it is important not to overlook re-socializing. There needs to be a level of effort involved in getting people to re-socialize with each other. And let me add quickly, you may want to continue with some kind of physical distancing while you are in the office, for a period of time.

## About OnSolve

OnSolve delivers critical event management solutions designed to help enterprises, organizations and agencies of all sizes create the most successful outcomes when critical events occur. The OnSolve Platform for Critical Event Management™ combines leading risk intelligence, critical communications and incident management into one SaaS-based global portfolio. Our AI-powered platform is purpose-built to deliver fast, relevant and actionable intelligence, enable vital communications and allow response teams to react calmly and confidently.

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