Interviewer: --ask the first question. We are recording, so yay! Okay!

So, again, thank you for being with us today. If you could tell us briefly about the experience that [U2] had while trying to rapidly invent policies from HR during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participant: So, I can probably only speak on behalf of Housing, and the card office, and the campus store. As far as Housing goes, it was an immediate stress started on the Friday that I want to say the 13th or something like that.

Interviewer: It was. It was Friday, the 13th.

Participant: I was in a meeting and basically I kept all the staff members here that could actually change our website and do the things we needed. We were watching what [another university] was doing and we were in coordination with the [other university] to say, “What are you guys doing?”

Well, you guys were lucky because you were doing it right at the start of spring break where we’d already had spring break. So, we had students everywhere.

We did a survey and we said, “Where is everybody at?” So, we had it to where I was in this meeting and it was being decided, “What are we going to do? Are we going online or not?”

I was holding people up here Friday night. About 5:30 they called me and says, “Hey, do we need help or not?” We ended up staying till about 7:30- 8:00 that night to basically set things up, so that we could offer refunds in a moment’s time knowing that, “Oh crap! Where’s this going to go and

where’s the stress level going to go for all the employees we’re refunding

$3.7 million. Once we do that, how long are we going to be able to operate? What’s the university stance going to be? Are there going to be layoffs? Are there going to be—”

So, that’s how the conversation started happening. In the Housing area, we have a large number of custodians. Which the custodians on our campus and throughout the world are not the highest paid employees. Many of them that we have either have personal health problems or have family health problems and they have this job more for the benefits than they have for other things.

For them, we were putting them in a position of we still had students who are living here. We went online. A lot of students left, but students still

lived here and we couldn’t just accommodate down to one building because we wanted to keep separation.

For them, it was very high stress in that, “You’re asking me to go clean these places. You’re asking me to wipe this down and do this down.” At that point in time, we had to come together and say, “Why would we just have them be the ones that are in that situation?”

We redesigned and had all of our maintenance people go through because we didn’t know. Nobody knew what effects it was, if it was coming from touch, if it was coming from any of that.

The CDC was up and down on what was happening, and what wasn’t, and how it was. We’re just saying, “Okay, well we’re going to do anything and everything we can to make it as safe as possible.”

So, we built stands and put stands out with the wipes, so anybody walking by can grab wipes. We had all the hand sanitizers everywhere.

But then on top of that, we had crews that would go through multiple times a day and instead of just throwing that all on the janitorial staff/custodial staff we said, “Let’s take our part”. We had our

Maintenance Team, our Cabinetry Team, our different people like that,

“You go hit these buildings.”

We have 97 buildings, but well, 40 of those are family housing. So, we

didn’t need to go into them because they’re individual apartments. They’re

not like your larger buildings where you have a lot of people.

So, we just diversified a little bit. With that, we did that to try to help build—I don’t know—build rapport and not have somebody feeling like it was all on their shoulders. They’re feeling like, “I’m the lowest paid employee in this department and I’m the only one that’s at risk.”

Our maintenance, many people were scared. I’m 50 and some of our maintenance guys are well older than I am. They were nervous and it was because what we were hearing was those people that were dying were one, overweight or two, they were old.

So, that’s what the news was putting out there and that’s what was thrown out there. It was a matter of, “Well, I do maintenance for a living. When something goes down, I’ve got to go into these apartments and places and do those things.”

We quickly said, “Well, I understand you guys have those fears. We have so many unknowns. I don’t want you to have to do that.” If we had a situation that we had students that we had sick, we would move them to different locations.

We had what we call “isolation rooms” and we would put them in those locations. When they were moved and/or when they were released from there, somebody needed to go in. We had bought these sprayers and you go in. Electrostatic sprayers that clean from all different sides.

To be honest, for the first five months-six months, my stress level and my weight went like this—

(Demonstrates)

--because I was the one that was doing it because between me and my Director of Facilities, I was scared for employees, especially for those of age and different things—maybe have health problems.

We just jumped in and we said, “No, we will be the ones that will go in, and spray things down, and take care of those things.” There are many of times that if we had a water heater or something like that, we would be very strategic on who we’d send in there because they were stressed to the max on, “Hey, I’m being asked to do this. What do I do?”

Two, our staff here in the front, the rest of campus basically went null and void as far as campus comes. Everybody left. Everybody went home.

We were getting calls left and right. We had people here. I have people here that have worked here for 35 years and “I’m not working if I’m not at work” was their mentality.

They wanted to be here, but yet my maintenance staff had to be here because if we only have three people in a building or 500 people in a building and we lose water, we’ve got to fix it.

Interviewer: You can’t--

Participant: Our custodial people had to be--

Interviewer: You can’t--

Participant: --here.

Interviewer: You can’t fix it over Zoom. Participant: Yeah. There was no leaving. So, we-- Interviewer: Okay.

Participant: --we had multiple people hit a breakdown moment and I can’t tell you how long into it. It was probably April-ish of that first when we shut down and it was March 13th we shut down that we said, “We’re going online”. We lost a lot of students—that Monday/Tuesday kind of thing.

We had kind of some of our employees kind of a lot of people have family members that work up here. They were working from home and doing this.

I just decided that, “You know what? Right now’s the time to build morale and I’m not worried about the dime right this second because I don’t know where I’m going to get the dime anyway.”

I couldn’t lose everybody at once. But I could lose those three people and have them work from home.

Well, how do I have a maintenance guy work from home? How do I have custodial work from home?

I don’t. I have them take and—whether it was maintenance or somebody—and I said, “Hey, I want you just to take and study them. I’m not going to ask you for a report. I’m not going to ask you for any of that. I just want you to focus on what is something that could better you as a person which would then in return better you back at that work? I want you to take two weeks.”

We did that. That built rapport really, really well to try to do that.

Campus store/Card Office—basically we went online. We still had employees in the campus store. But a lot of our sales and everything were online because nobody was coming to campus.

We’d have two or three people there because when we went online we still had to ship. We still had to get the product. We still had to receive it. We still had to ship it out.

Card Office and morale was fine there except for we’ve went through two or three layoffs in our campus store over the last four or five years. The rumor mill really started really fast.

The worry when the morale as far as, “Hey, is it going to be me this

time?” just kind of dropped really fast. We just had to tell them, “Hey, that

isn’t what we’re looking at. We’re looking at ways to overcome this.”

But if something does happen, it’s going to be university wide. It’s not just

going to be a “you, you, you” kind of thing. It’s going to be a university wide thing because at the time we didn’t know, “Is the state still going to fund us?” You know what I mean because the rumors were going.

The Card Office, everybody seemed to be fine and was happy with things. We had a couple of people that the anxiety really hit. It was more worried about parents, elderly parents. It was more worried about different things like that and, “Will I have a job” kind of thing.

So, that answer was wrong, but I jumped around to a lot of different-- Interviewer: You answered my next two or three questions.

Participant: Okay.

Interviewer: So, that was fantastic. No, that’s exactly what we were wondering.

So, who else worked with you in thinking this through to make decisions about, “You’re going to take two weeks and do some professional

development.” “We’re going to close this, but we’re going to keep people in and let them work through some things”? Was it just you making these decisions? Was a jar involved? Were there policies around this? What did that look like?

Participant: So, we got an email from HR. I was on all the committees when it came to the COVID committees and all of that. That first summer I was opening up our building and housing some of the local people that the Health Department didn’t know what to do with because the scare was so large and big.

I was involved, yeah, on every step. So, I was hearing it from our Emergency Management what they thought. I was hearing it from HR

what they thought because HR was in on those conversations, things like that.

As far as the two week thing, I had heard rumors. I’m a “try to be around my employees” person. I enjoy being around people and I feel that it builds rapport with them.

So, I try to be present and I heard it more than once that, “Hey, well, my husband works over here and they’re working from home.” I’m like, “Yeah. So, help me understand how that can work.”

At that time, I just went to two or three of the

managers/supervisor/director levels and just said, “I need you to come back to me by tomorrow morning with a plan of what your people would do—every job—what your people would do if we said, “I want everybody to work from home for two weeks. But yet, I need a plan that I can also operate and we can also be here. We can be present, so that if a student is in need, or if we have a building, or a problem, that that’s what we do.

I don’t want a plan that this allows for people to take off and go to St. George to play because we still may have an emergency where we have a flood or something like that that we need them to jump back in. But just give me a plan.”

As we sat down, it was basically a real quick, easy. It wasn’t necessarily a written plan. It was we sat back down. They says, “Well, this is what I would like my people to do.”

In the Card Office, we utilized LinkedIn learning. We jumped in and bought accounts for some of those kind of things that we didn’t have. We said, “Hey, a lot of you, you work with Excel all the time. Some of you

aren’t experts in it. I need you to spend time. I can’t ask you to spend eight hours a day sitting there staring at a computer screen because you’re going to have a headache and your eyes are going to hurt.

But what I can ask you to do is at least give me two-to-three hours a day and maybe just focus on what you did learn. Learn from there.”

So, we went through and I guided with I had expectations of them getting back to me on what they wanted their individual people to do.

Interviewer: Well, that’s great. So, when you think about staff, okay? How do you think that the COVID experience was different for men and women staff members?

Participant: Don’t know that I ever thought of it that way. One of the things that—and I’ll think of it even in my own home and different things—the stress level of kids being at home was something that we worked around.

If we had somebody who had young kids or something like that, then they would be the ones that maybe they don’t come in till 10:30-11:00-1:00, something like that.

So, that of course, because they felt that that was more of their responsibility is make sure their kids were taken care of, or that they needed to be home early, or something like that. So, I know that that was a factor per se.

I don’t think this has to do with male versus female in this thing. But I had more people that were more anxious about it than others.

Interviewer: Ah!

Participant: To me, I was anxious about, “What’s going to happen when I get this

because I know I’m going to get it because I put myself out there.” To be honest, the first shot was worse for me than COVID was. I got sicker with that--

Interviewer: It was the second one?

Participant: --than COVID.

So, for me, I think it was some of the fear of the unknown.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant: On the male side of it, many of our employees that are male, their wives are stay-at-home moms. The stress of, “Am I going to have a job? If I don’t, what am I going to do if nobody’s hiring?”

Interviewer: Right, okay.

Participant: I never, ever gave any kind of message that we wouldn’t have a job. I stressed about that. I stressed about the income, but never once did I go

out and say, “Hey, we just had to pay back $3.7 million. We have no income coming in and we don’t know” because we’re a full auxiliary which means we don’t get state funds.

If somebody doesn’t pay rent, we don’t have money to operate. It’s a little bit different than some of the different groups.

So, I don’t know that I ever felt a complete separation between the two. I felt more anxiety with maybe this group. Like I mentioned before, “I have elderly parents that I live with”, or “I have children.” “I have young kids.” “I just had a baby.”

I will hit on one though. We had one gal here that as humans, we didn’t shut down life outside of work. I’m a Little League football coach and I was at Little League football.

I got a call from one of my other employees and said, “Hey, this

individual’s was just Life Flighted. They’re putting the ventilator in” and everything like that.

So, that hit everybody really hard. It kind of gave me a slap in the face because I’m strong. I can get through anything. I really don’t care. I’m tough. I’ll do it kind of personality.

The guy’s 51 years old and I’m 50. This is happening to him? He spent

weeks down at LDS Hospital. Luckily, he’s good today.

We had one employees that lost a dad down in California and a mom about four months later down in California. I thought I’d have more. You’re more flexible with this person, that person.

I may have had two employees that were that way, but I individualized every situation because that’s what I needed to do.

Interviewer: Yeah, great. Thank you. That’s very helpful. When you think about the changes that you put in place or were put in place by the university, right?

Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did some of them get reversed? Are some of them permanently implemented especially for the people in your units?

Participant: Some of the changes that were put in place that are permanent that came from campus are we look at situations differently when it comes to, “Is it possible to do my job from home, and/or telework, and/or maybe something different than we have?”

It’s really hard in our industry and the housing side of things because I have the custodial have to be here. I have a cabinetmaker. He can’t make a cabinet at his house.

I have maintenance people. They can’t fix that water leak from here. They

can’t repair that from home.

The front office here has felt, “Well, if these other people can’t telework,

it’s probably not fair for me to do it.” I’ve never given that guidance. I said, “If it meets inside the new policies of the university with teleworking and it makes sense for both parties, then let’s do it.”

Myself, I’m in meetings working with the three different organizations with inside the auxiliaries. I’m in meetings at least 30% of my days. I could telework, but I know that I have people in multiple different positions here that if they see that, their respect level for me will go down. I’ve chosen not to.

But we have been more flexible. For example, we have some individuals that have wanted to be more flexible with their time in maybe not working a full day. They just want to work three-quarter time.

If it makes sense for both parties and we’re not just accommodating an individual, but that job, we have to look at it as a university. This is one thing we’ve looked at with managers and supervisors.

“If that person left tomorrow, would we be willing to do this same thing?” That’s if yes, I don’t have a problem with that.

We’ve looked at things a little bit differently with that. Did that answer your question?

Interviewer: Yep, that’s great. That’s great.

Participant: What was the question again? Other things that may have changed that we

haven’t?

Interviewer: Yeah. Were policies put in place and they were reversed or were some permanently implemented?

Participant: Okay, so inside of our housing units for students, we immediately put policies in place for guests. No guests.

Those have all been reversed because students need that human interaction and they want people around. They do and so we reversed them.

There’s some modifications to some things and there’s some

modifications to some ways that we do things. But as far as staff, we’re a lot more lenient. I don’t know that we were ever lenient, but we’re a lot more cognizant of if I have a cold, should I really come to work and share

that with you because it seemed like we were catching things a lot quicker.

A lot of us, our immune system—whether it was from wearing masks, whatever theory there is out there. But we seem to catch things a little bit quicker.

I’ll say we’re more lenient with each other as far as I got a cold. Before it was like, “Come on. Man up. Come on. Let’s just get here” kind of attitude to where now it’s more, “Hey, I’m cool if you stay home because I don’t want it.” So, that’s something that has stuck around a little bit.

Interviewer: Great! Thank you. So, was there an evaluation about what staff thought about the changes that were put in place?

Participant: (Long pause)

I would probably say no because some of them that we were looking at as personal safety, as a university we didn’t want an opinion because we looked at it as, “This is a decision that the university and the committees made. Now departments go look at and get them in place.”

So, as far as that, it wasn’t. I still, in fact, we had a webinar Monday/Tuesday. No, it’s only Wednesday, so it must’ve been last week. We had a webinar about teleworking and trying to learn more.

I actually asked a couple of my managers that possibly have people that it would be very beneficial for them personally. I’ve asked them to maybe reevaluate the way that we manage. We go just watch that. See if we can learn anything from it. I, myself, I went and watched it too to see if I could learn from it, so—

Interviewer: Great! Okay. So, when you think about staff, this may not be an answerable question, okay? Other people have sort of struggled with this one, okay? What were the characteristics of employees who did well with the changes that were put in place versus employees or staff who didn’t do so well with these changes that were put in place?

Participant: Characteristics? (Long pause)

Instead of using the word “characteristics”, maybe I’ll use the

“commonality” word because those that resisted change, it’s very common that they resist change in no matter what we do. Even if it’s, “I’ll leave 10 minutes early today”, it’s common that they resist that.

So, I would say more anxious. Maybe that’s a characteristic that those that resisted the change were more anxious and it was a matter of they needed to know what’s coming at what time and when.

Without that, for the first six months we changed something almost every week as a university. I’d come back from committee meeting and I’d say, “Okay. I don’t agree with this, but I’ve been asked to do it. We’re going to do this and students can’t do this, this, or this”, whatever it may have been.

I’d have my more anxious employees really, really struggle with it because, “What’s going to happen tomorrow?” “What are they going to throw at us tomorrow?”

So, that would probably be a characteristic. It probably, no I can’t say that. I was going to say it was more job driven, but right?

I probably can’t say that because I had people who were worried about change in every position. If it’s a maintenance or it’s just custodial—some of my custodial really didn’t care. They’d come in, they’d do whatever and some of them were just as scared as scared.

During that time, I did something that I’ve since carried over. Housing were pretty big as a whole as far as employees and everything like that. We haven’t always had a weekly or a biweekly meeting for everybody. I felt that with all of this, we could have a 15-minute Zoom meeting.

When I say “I”, I meant we as a whole—as a department-felt that it would probably be good to have that. We implemented that and it was all the thing was about to try to build rapport and yet also have them understand that, “We’re good. We’re going to get through this together. We’re going to work together. None of us are alone. We’re a team. We’re going to get through it.”

Some of the individuals that were more anxious about the change about everything just trying to build it as a team, so that we could do that. We’ve kept that now. We just have it now for every two weeks.

Some of it’s fluff. Some of it’s just a matter of, “This is something that we appreciate that you’re doing today and let’s go over this.” But we’ve kept it because it was something that people came back and said, “Thanks so much for keeping us in the know, and letting us know some of the

meetings that you sit in, and what the university’s thoughts, and feelings are on this. It means something to me to know that you want to share with us.” We’ve kept that.

But characteristics, that’s a hard question. Interviewer: It is. It was hard for other people to. So no-- Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: --that’s okay. What you just described, we’ve heard that as well. Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. So no, that’s perfect.

Participant: Okay.

Interviewer: That’s great. Okay, so is there anything else that you would like to share with us about the COVID-19 experience and your working with your staff?

Participant: (Long pause)

I would 100% change things differently if I was to do it again. That is since COVID, I’ve reached out and I have a personal health coach now.

I’ve lost my 75 lbs. that I’ve gained and I’ve spent time for me. There

were days because I took it upon myself that every time we’d get a report that was COVID, that I was involved in helping that person get moved and doing that because I was scared for others to have to do it.

After, I felt that I was protecting. Others felt like I wasn’t trusting with some of those things. For me, myself, I couldn’t physically do it again. It took life out of me as far as there were many days that 16-18 hour days. That was exhausting.

But yet, for me, it was good to learn, “Hey, we’ll do that.” But some of

that didn’t come until some of the fear was figured out.

I don’t know how it was down there for you guys, but my wife’s a schoolteacher. They were hitting schoolteachers, police, medical on the first shots and what do you? I just lost the word what that shot’s called. What’s it called?

Vaccine and our Emergency Manager said, “Hey, I need you to come down here. If you’re willing, I need you to come down and do this because we realize that you’re the one that’s in there doing that out of fear for your own employees.”

So, I did. But I think that going back, I would change and I would try to. The hard thing is we didn’t know enough about it.

Interviewer: Right.

Participant: I think I don’t know. It’s hard because I’m one that’s willing. I would

rather put myself in danger than somebody else. That’s just me.

I would probably still do that. But the clerical things and some of the things that I was doing, I would push away because like I said, there were many employees it hit that after six-eight months into it they’re like, “Hey, do you not trust us?”

I look at it and think, “Okay. I felt like I was just being the Big Brother

and saving you. I didn’t realize that that’s how you were seeing it.”

Interviewer: Yeah.

Participant: But that would be something that I would look at. Since then, I’ve actually

looked at it in everything I do today as, “Okay. Is somebody else willing

to do that? Does that fall within their job and not something that I just will do because I just will do it? Is it something that we can have another individual take care of?”

So, it’s opened my eyes a little bit to understand that a leader doesn’t

mean a doer all the time.

Interviewer: Right. Right, yeah.

Participant: It wore on some of my really good employees. Some of our really, really good employees, it wore on them both from home and then from here.

I hope we don’t ever have to go through it again in our lifetime especially the way that America chose to do things. I think we could get through things a little bit differently.

But my wife’s a third grade teacher and there’s some kids that are in her class now that missed a lot of their kindergarten grade and they. They are behind and we see that in every grade.

Some of the ones she had last year struggled to read and it was just common things. It’s effecting the whole—everything—and we weren’t prepared for it. We didn’t know how to do things differently because, “We do it this way.”

So, what other questions do you have for me?

Interviewer: That’s it. That’s everything. We really appreciate your time. Sorry about

the little snafu’s there at the beginning.

Participant: Oh okay.

Interviewer: The information that you provided just is wonderful. Thank you so much. Participant: Yeah, no problem.

Interviewer: We will send you a copy of the consent form, so you’ve got that for your

records, okay? So, we’ll email that to you.

Researcher: But you should have that in your email. Participant: Who’s it coming from?

Researcher: From me, [Researcher].

Participant: Researcher?

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Participant: Yeah. Okay, yeah. I see it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Participant: So--

Interviewer: Perfect.

Participant: --that works. So, at the end of the day, we all have good people that work around us. Some of us worry about change and some of us have fear of different things. Some of us take too many things on.

So, that’s just how life is. But we all got through it and we kept the majority of our employees here. I feel that especially because of the experiences of people personally dealing with it—the loss of family members, the scare of the loss. It brought some of our team members together closer including myself. I put my vulnerable side out there a little bit more.

Interviewer: Okay. So yep, wonderful. Thank you so much.

Participant: That’s staff. Now if you want to go on about students, I can go on for another two or three hours because that was really tough because I talked to a ton of parents, and a lot of concerned people, and a lot of this, and spent hours, and hours worried about this student, and that student, and, “Why aren’t you guys moving people?”

When spring came and we made the decision that we weren’t moving, we were going to treat it like anything else. They were going to stay in position.

So, that’s multiple hours in going over what we did to help students and try to help a group of individuals that really had no fear when you look at 89-95% of them.

There was five percent of them that were scared to death and some of that was they had just got off the phone with mom. But the other, “Just let me be. I’ve had a cold before. I’ll get one again. Just let me be.”

But to protect everybody else around them, we had to make changes. But that would be a couple of hours, so I don’t want to waste your time.

Interviewer: No, that’s okay. That would be a different study, but thank you so much. Researcher: That would be really interesting!

Interviewer: Yes, it would.

Participant: Okay.

Interviewer: Great, thank you.

Researcher: Thank you.

Participant: Yeah, okay. Bye.

Interviewer: Bye.