

Guidance to Managers and Supervisors on Managing Remote Employees

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, many employees are now working out of the office and separated from each other for the first time. Fortunately, there are specific, research-based steps that supervisors and managers can take to improve the engagement and productivity of remote employees, even when there is little time to prepare. First, it's important to understand the common challenges, from isolation to distractions to lack of face-to-face supervision. Managers can support remote employees with 1) regular, structured check-ins; 2) multiple communication options (and established norms for each); 3) opportunities for social interactions; and 4) ongoing encouragement and emotional support.

The following are some specific recommendations for those of you managing employees who are now telecommuting due to Covid-19 situation:

1. **Set clear expectations:** define what needs to be done, along with deadlines. If possible, provide examples of what you are looking for. Focus on outcomes, not activity.
2. **Establish and agree on a communication strategy** to help your remote employees feel included and part of the team as well as to keep you informed of their progress and where they need help
 - Engage with your remote staff regularly – at least daily. Take advantage of technology to keep your team connected. Use one or more channels to communicate such as Skype for Business, collaboration tools such as OneDrive and Microsoft Teams (if available) to share documents and video conferencing. If employees are used to working in the office, a sense of loneliness and isolation can set in. Also, if remote employees don't have communication with you, they may begin to wonder how they are doing in meeting your expectations.
 - Give your remote employees as much access to you as possible. Respond to them quickly. Keep in mind that staff in the office have more opportunity to get information from you and make sure they are recognized by you. They can drop into your office, see you in the hall and chat with you in the breakroom. It is important to take measures to make sure your remote workers feel included.
 - Provide coaching and feedback to ensure remote employees stay on track in meeting their job expectations.
3. **Resource your team.** Make sure they have the technology they will need to get the work done.
4. **Encourage your remote workers to avoid multi-tasking,** which can help them be more productive. During this time, they will need to be informed of issues and changes to operations. That said, avoid extensive "reply all" email strings, which can stifle anyone's productivity if these do not include essential information the remote workers need to know.
5. **Be flexible** – in this current environment, there is a lot quickly changing. That said, work still needs to get done. This is the opportunity to rethink what productivity really means. Working the regular hours and shifts may not be possible for many employees. Instead, trust your team and give them the freedom and flexibility to get the work done on the schedule that helps them be the most productive.

The Harvard Business review is posting great information during this public health emergency, to help organizations navigate new challenges. Below is a link to additional information (some of which is captured in the info above).

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/a-guide-to-managing-your-newly-remote-workers>