MANAGER'S GUIDE TO LEADING REMOTE TEAMS

Remote work, telework, distributed teams.... there are many ways to describe workers that spend part of their workweek outside of the traditional office. While the concept is not new, it is new territory for many companies.

The good news is that remote workers are just *as* productive as those in the office. A 2-year Stanford study actually showed that productivity was higher among those that worked from home. This means there is no reason to not embrace a remote workforce. In fact, there are plenty of benefits.

Employee benefits

✓ Greater productivity

✓ Better work-life balance

✓ Flexible schedule

✓ Reduce or eliminate the daily commute

Employer benefits

✓ More productive staff

✓ Less employee turnover

✓ Recruit for top talent w/out geographical limitations

✓ Reduced office space & associated costs

Of course, it can be difficult to adjust to a remote working environment at first. Fortunately, your company can quickly and successfully make the transition by utilizing the following suggestions aimed at both sides of the workforce – staff members and those in management.

Tips for Remote Workers

Create a schedule

A schedule can help maintain a sense of normalcy, which improves productivity and reduces stress. Being productive can also boost overall morale, making it easier to deal with the isolation some feel when they work from home. An easy way to do this is to go to sleep, wake up, start work and eat lunch at the same time you always have. Creating a to-do list is also a great way to stay on track each day.

Create a workspace

Having a workspace at home will make it feel like you're truly "at work." You don't have to have a dedicated office; you just need an area that you can make your own. Any place that is comfortable, like the dining room table, kitchen island, patio or even just a corner of your living room, will work. Set yourself up with your computer, notepad and anything else you may use during the day.

Dress the part

While you can work in your pajamas, that can make it hard to get into the right mindset for work. This is especially true for those new to remote work. You can combat this by dressing like you normally do for work during business hours. This will also help you maintain a more normal work schedule, even if you're not leaving the house.

Communicate regularly

A schedule can help maintain a sense of normalcy, which improves productivity and reduces stress. Being productive can also boost overall morale, making it easier to deal with feeling isolated while working remotely. An easy way to do this is to go to sleep, wake up, start work and eat lunch at the same time you always have. Creating a to-do list is also a great way to stay on trvck each day.

Utilize video meetings

Video calls can help you feel more connected to your team, even if you're entirely remote. Turn your regular meetings into video conferences and consider some fun virtual outings as well. A virtual game night can really make your distributed workers feel like a true team.

Manage distractions

Distractions can definitely be a problem when you work from home. Limit them by setting official "office hours" and making sure everyone knows when you're unavailable. By being off limits during your office hours, you'll have an easier time separating work and home life.

Traits of successful remote workers

Self-motivated

Independent

Organized
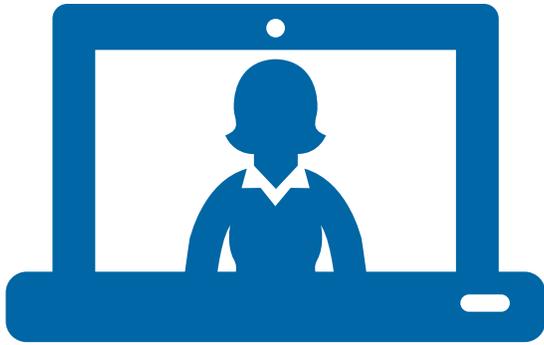
Focused

Strong communicator

Tips for Managers

Managers of remote teams face unique challenges compared to overseeing workers in the office. If you don't adjust your tactics, you risk creating a more stressful and less productive environment.

You can help your team manage their workload, stay productive and feel connected by adjusting.

Don't micromanage!

Resist the urge to micromanage. Unless someone has given you a reason to doubt them, trust that they are being as productive as possible.

Ask your team what challenges they face when working at home. This will provide insight into their unique situation so that you can help them overcome obstacles and stay on track.

Be careful of using language that may put your team members on the defensive. You'll inspire confidence and encourage productivity by avoiding phrases that may imply that they are falling behind, not being productive or otherwise not on track.

People are often reluctant to admit their struggles openly, so check in on your team members individually. This gives them the opportunity to speak more freely.

Use "can I help" language when inquiring about projects. So instead of asking "Where are you on Project A," ask "Is there anything I can do to help with Project A."

Encourage some fun team interactions remotely, such as a non-work related poll or a virtual lunch video chat.

Have resources handy and ready to share with your team. If you have IT assistance, HR help or even a medical hotline available, make sure everyone has access.

Identifying problems

While many workers thrive in a remote environment, others may find it a real challenge. Members of your team may be dealing with things you're unaware of, from technology issues to personal problems unrelated to working remotely.

For this reason, it's important to be mindful of clues that may suggest members of your team are struggling to stay on track, such as:

Inability to summarize their daily to-do list.

Inability to summarize their weekly goals.

Reduced output, unless known challenges exist.

Falling behind on projects, unless known obstacles exist.

Lack of communication or changes in communication style.

If you notice any of these signs, schedule a one-on-one to see if you can uncover the issue. Remember, your success as a leader will depend on your ability to help your team be successful. You'll be more effective if you approach the situation from a helpful, not accusatory, position.

The COVID-19 factor

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed many companies toward remote work, even if they weren't remote-friendly previously. This has required everyone, from top management to the rank and file, to be more flexible than ever. It has also created a lot of extra stress and anxiety. For this reason, be sure to modify your communications and expectations. Open communication is the key to understanding what your workforce is going through during this unprecedented situation.
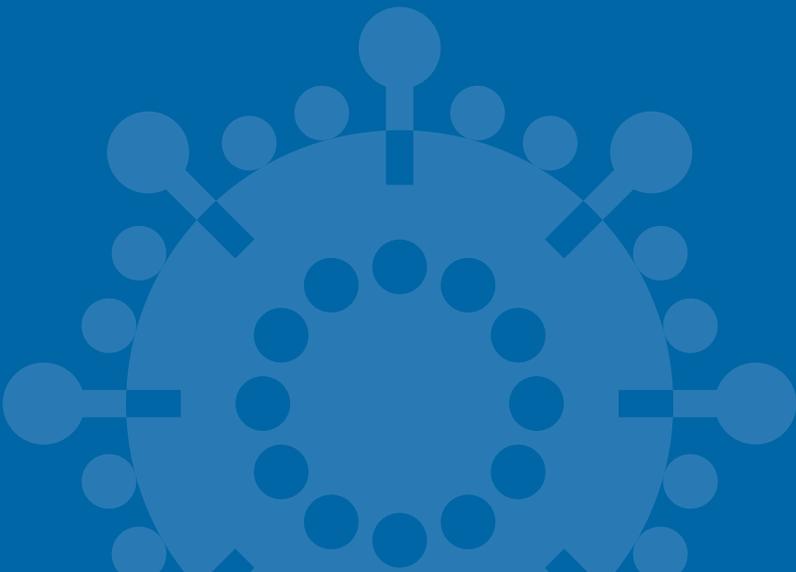
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