

Guidelines for Leaders - Working with your virtual team

Working with a virtual/distributed team may require you to work differently. Below are some guidelines for leaders with staff who are working from home.

1. Start from a point of trust

1. Lack of trust will only increase an employee's feeling of isolation.
2. Discuss accountabilities, clarify goals and expectations.
3. **Communicate proactively and provide frequent updates on progress.**

4. Establish Rules of Engagement

1. **Set the expectations for communication.**
 - For example, you may want to establish that you use video conferencing for one-on-one check-ins and meetings, instant messaging for urgent issues and email for non-urgent communication.
2. Share your availability with your team and have your team share theirs with you.
3. Keep your calendar up to date and visible. Skype for Business icons can also be used to show your availability.

7. Be OK with the distractions

1. Barking dogs and children are part of the package of having staff work from home.
2. Ensure that your team knows you are OK with these distractions and that it forms no part in whether or not the work is getting done. This will help you team be OK with this "new normal".

2. Set up regular check-ins

1. **Set up a check-in schedule (and follow through!)**
 - Check-in with staff at least once a week one-on-one or with the team depending on your team dynamic.
2. Regular and predictable check-ins let employees know they can consult with you, and that their concerns and questions will be heard.
3. Consider longer check-ins to build in time for social interaction.
4. If you must cancel, ensure you reschedule.
 - Interaction with the workplace is vital for employees and they may grow resentful if this is deemed unimportant by their Leader.

5. Provide encouragement & support

1. **Acknowledge stress, listen to anxieties and empathize with your employee's struggles.**
2. Check in with staff on how working remotely is working for them. Help remove obstacles where you can and provide encouragement.

8. Remember staff development & possible succession planning

1. Ensure staff can make progress on their goals, know what they are and remove obstacles where you can. Build in extra time into your one-on-ones to talk about career development.

3. Use various communications tools

1. Email is an "easy" form of communication, but remote workers benefit from more textured forms of technology, such as video conferencing.
 - Visual cues of face-to-face meetings help reduce feelings of isolation and can be helpful in dealing with complex or sensitive issues.
2. Use Skype for Business, Zoom or a phone call/video call for longer conversations.
3. Use instant messaging to address quick concerns for less formal and time-sensitive communication.

6. Build in time for social interaction

1. **What's fundamentally missing in remote work is the social interaction with colleagues.**
2. Bolster relationships by building in time for social interaction. Ask "How was your weekend?" at the start of each meeting and allow each team member time to respond.
3. Consider a virtual lunch or office party. This may sound artificial, but these events help reduce feelings of isolation and promote a sense of belonging and connection to the workplace.