

10 TIPS FOR SUCCESSFULLY MANAGING REMOTE WORKERS

Work from Home Guide 2021

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what are the best practices
in managing your team
working from home ?

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Introduction



Stay-at-home orders prompted by COVID-19 are creating a challenge for managers—including those in HR—at a time when many companies are implementing telework policies for the first time. Nearly three-fourths (71 percent) of employers are finding it difficult to adapt to telework as a way of doing business, according to recent research from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).

"If this is the first time that managers are in charge of managing remote employees, it can be scary to navigate and ensure employees are productive, engaged and thriving," said Paul Pellman, CEO of Kazoo, a computer software company in Austin, Texas. "The transition to remote communication removes the personal context that helps us interact with each other."

It's not just a matter of providing remote workers with a new video communication platform and assuming it will be business as usual, said Jane Sparrow. She is a business culture and remote work expert and the founder and director of The Culture Builders, a United Kingdom-based consultancy.

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Managers need to be aware of how remote work may create feelings of isolation among team members.

"If you're used to seeing your colleagues or customers every day, feelings of isolation can creep in remarkably quickly," Sparrow said in a news release. "This new remote working environment can also affect focus, a sense of team and creativity. It's not something that is often talked about, but if we are to help our teams stay healthy, happy and ultimately productive, we have to recognize and manage the high-stress environment that remote working can create for many people."

SHRM Online has collected the following 10 tips from Pellman, Sparrow and others to help managers who work with remote employees.



"Providing guidelines, setting boundaries and reviewing the basics are among the most important steps to take when setting out on your project," said Scott Bales, vice president of delivery and solution engineering at Replicon, a time management system provider based in the San Francisco Bay area. "There will be questions; be accessible and provide clarity on priorities, milestones, performance goals and more. Outline each team member's availability and ensure you can reach them when needed."

And just as in the workplace, managers should keep workers up-to-date on policy and staffing changes, company successes and tips for working at home, Pellman said.

They also should model behavior around the hours employees work, such as establishing expectations around responding to any after-hours work e-mail and texts.

"This helps employees maintain a healthy work/life balance," Pellman said, "and prevents them from burning out—which, without the physical separation between home and the office, can be more common when working from home."

"When it comes to working with remote teams, the key is to allow flexible hours to maintain consistency," said certified business leadership coach Angela Civitella. "Although a concrete plan is a must, you should be open to adjusting strategies as needed. Whether your employees choose to put in their hours in the morning or evening shouldn't matter, as long as the work gets completed and is of high quality."



"What works in the office may not [work] remotely," Sparrow pointed out. "Instead of lengthy meetings, have short virtual huddles. ... Apply this thinking to team resourcing, scheduling and action planning."



"Have your employees give you a work schedule, along with tasks they are expected to accomplish within a given time," Civitella suggested. "This will calm your fears and give your team the structure they need to fulfill their role. Remember, just because you can't see them working at their cubicle doesn't mean work isn't getting done. Trust the process."



It's crucial that managers communicate with their remote staff, Pellman said, because it keeps workers apprised of deadlines, available resources, work-related challenges and managers' expectations, including work schedules.

Also, consider which communication tool best fits the team's culture—e-mail, texts, phone calls, video chats, an intranet channel—and find that delicate balance between constantly pinging employees with texts and e-mail and radio silence. The frequency of communication may differ among employees.

The best method is to ask employees how they want to be managed while working remotely," Pellman said. "That way, managers can keep a pulse on what each employee needs to be productive while working from home."

And while it's important that managers track metrics that matter to their organization and check in with employees, "too much oversight can show employees signs of mistrust," he said. "If your employees are communicating clearly and meeting goals and deadlines, what's not to trust?"

"The most successful managers are good listeners, communicate trust and respect, inquire about workload and progress without micromanaging, and err on the side of over-communicating," said Justin Hale. He is a training designer and researcher at VitalSmarts, a leadership training company in Provo, Utah.

Surveys are an often-underutilized tool, according to Pellman. A monthly or quarterly employee net promoter score, for example, can be useful, along with pulse surveys for a deeper dive into employee sentiments. The net promoter score, according to HR Technologist, is an indicator of how likely an employee would be to promote his or her organization to other job seekers.

"Just remember," he added, "if you're asking for feedback from our employees, you need to do something about it."



7. Build connections and be available to your team.

Many workers feel isolated and disoriented in this new work reality. That's why it's important to build connections with employees, said Bales, the Replicon VP.

"Share positive feedback, open a fun chat channel, or try and 'grab coffee' together—whatever helps maintain a sense of normality [and] solidarity and reminds everyone they're not an island working alone," he suggested.

Sparrow suggests thinking about different ways of creating connections with remote workers. She started a video blog "to have an emotional and direct connection with every one of my people. [It] has had a huge positive impact."

Hale noted that good managers make themselves available to team members.

"They go above and beyond to maintain an open-door policy for remote employees, making themselves available across multiple time zones and through multiple means of technology," he said. "Remote employees can always count on their manager to respond to pressing concerns."

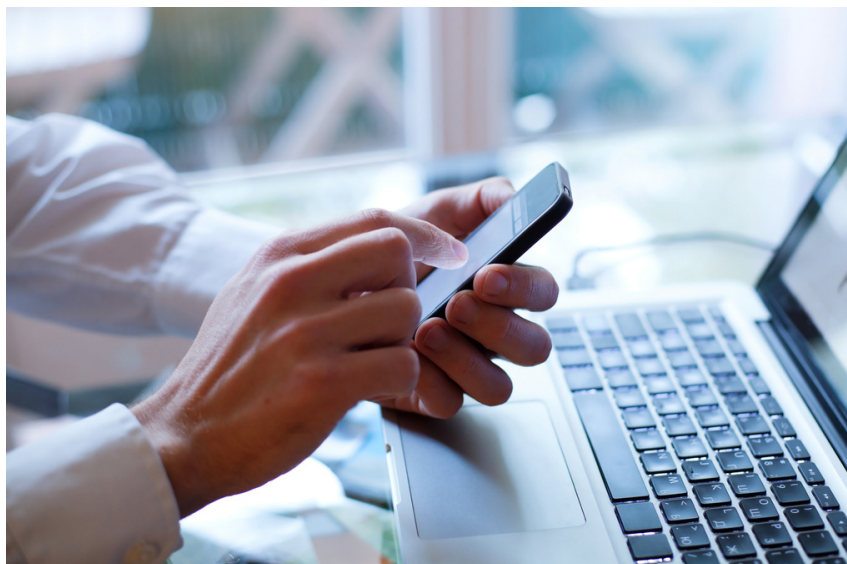
Providing a shared document that tracks work activities is one way managers can stay apprised of what their teams are doing. "It's a good exercise, even when teams are in the office," Pellman said, "and it will help managers refine their expectations and responsibilities of employees in this uncertain period."

Also, agree as a team on acceptable behavior for virtual collaboration, Sparrow said, such as how quickly to respond to messages from colleagues. Is it OK, for example, to send a quick message to say "I'll call you back" if you are focused deeply on something else when a co-worker reaches out?



"You shouldn't have to be looking over your team's shoulders while they're in the office, so you shouldn't have to do it when they're remote, either," Pellman said. "Regular one-on-one check-ins help managers avoid micromanaging, while still enabling them to keep a pulse on employees and provide them with an opportunity to ensure feedback goes both ways."

Trust that if they're communicating clearly and meeting goals and deadlines, your employees are being productive and doing their jobs effectively.



Managers should also look for opportunities to celebrate the same work milestones that would be celebrated in the office," Pellman advised. "Employees just might have to switch out their high-five for a virtual elbow bump for the time being."

Actualize Consulting in Reston, Va., is recognizing its employees with videos that celebrate workers' contributions, said Kerry Wekelo, the organization's chief operating officer. The videos, which will appear on the company website, replace the recognition that would have taken place at the company's annual retreat, which was canceled because of the pandemic.

"It feels a lot more personal than an e-mail," she said, "and it shows that if you get creative, connection does not have to be lost."



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