

MANAGING A REMOTE TEAM

Managing and leading remote staff and teams is an uncomfortable situation for many who supervise the work of others. While the best practices of managing and leading people still apply, the virtual environment has its own set of challenges. The tips below are intended for you to consider more deeply how you show up as a manager and leader.

GETTING STARTED



Acknowledge their Situation

- When beginning to work remotely, expect your team to have a variety of expressed and unexpressed emotions about their new work situation. Some will be looking forward to being able to wake up and get right to work. Others will be caught between work and other obligations at home. Still others will dread the isolation of the remote environment. Be prepared for any of the responses above and a myriad others. Listen to them with the intent to understand their unique situations.
- Ensure that they have the equipment, tools, and resources to do their job effectively, and inquire about the nature of their workspace.



Set Expectations about What and How

When people start to work from home it is not uncommon for them to experience a lot of fear and trepidation. They wonder if anyone knows or cares about their work. They ask themselves if all of the effort they put forth is getting noticed and if they are being tracked or watched. They worry that working from home may dim their career choices.

- Be explicit about their goals. What needs to be done? Why does it matter?
- At the same time, be clear about how you will work with them and what support you can offer?
- Ask for their understanding of the goals, and clarify any misconceptions.
- Align their goals to the larger goals of the team.
- If they get off-track, intervene immediately to help them correct their course.



Prioritize Your Work and Share Progress

- Help your staff prioritize their work. This goes beyond simply telling them what needs to be done. They need to know the urgency and importance of the tasks and assignments they have. Help them raise the most important to the top of their list and lessen or eliminate the low-value work.
- Check-in regularly (at least once a week) to discuss progress, give feedback, seek and offer support, and listen to their challenges.

STAY CONNECTED



Communicate and Connect Often

- Be deliberate about scheduling regular check-ins and maintaining connections with your own manager, your team as a whole, and with each team member one-on-one. The frequency of meetings is more important than their length. In a virtual environment, choose a 15-20 minute meeting every week over an hour meeting every month. Check in with your team to find the best time that works for them.
- Alternate your methods of communication. Think about the purpose of your meeting or interaction and choose the best method. Disseminating information to a bunch of people at once calls for an audio or video conference followed by an email. Feedback and topics that may be confusing or may require a subtle solution should be discussed one-on-one on the phone or via video.
- Use team meetings to reassure people and remind them of the bigger picture. At these times people need to feel an emotional connection to each other and to the work. Your team needs more reminders about their purpose and the vision than you think is necessary.
- Start your meetings with check-ins about work or home by asking people what they are focused on, what their biggest challenge is, an accomplishment, or a lesson learned.
- Connect about non-work concerns by scheduling virtual coffee or lunch get-togethers.



Be Responsive and Available

- If you are out of the office or need to be away, let your team know and provide guidance about who they can turn to when you are away.
- Be clear about how long it will take you to return a call or email.
- Set up specific time to meet with everyone. Don't assume that people will just reach out if they need you.

LEAD LIKE YOU MEAN IT



Model the Way

- Your team will model your behavior. They will repeat what you say and act like you act. Take stock of yourself and be intentional about leading.
- Adjust to the situation. Understand that each person will have different needs according to their unique situation.
- In challenging times like this, your team is looking at you for both direction and support. Be human.