



Guidance for Managing Employees Working from Home during the COVID-19 Pandemic

OVERVIEW

While businesses around the world work to maintain business continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic, the health and well-being of your employees should be a top priority. If your teams are working from home in an effort to limit exposure and spread of the virus among colleagues, the following guidance can help you keep your people informed, connected and engaged.

Remember that employees typically look to their immediate supervisor as their most trusted and sought-out source of information. In times of change and uncertainty, such as those we are experiencing now, it is more important than ever to stay connected with your team, *especially* if they are working remotely. Please take into consideration these best practices, which include tips you can share with your team.

FOR SUPERVISORS

Assess your employees' ability to be effective. Do your people have what they need to do their jobs remotely? Determine what they might be lacking and identify a plan to get it to them. As a manager, it is your job to be their champion. Be it work tools, information or emotional support, how you handle addressing their needs can go a long way in strengthening relationships with your team.

Set ground rules. Using company policies, custom guidelines you develop for your team or a combination of the two, clearly outline what is expected and what is not allowed while working from home. It also is important to remain flexible and open to feedback as the situation evolves — and to communicate any changes in your expectations.

Put regular team meetings on the calendar. Even if you do not have critical information to communicate, it is useful to bring people together — even virtually — to let them know they are top of mind for you. Team meetings create a needed forum for discussion, idea sharing and commiseration, and hearing and seeing familiar voices and faces can build camaraderie you risk losing during the transition. Even if schedules are busy, you should establish a regularly occurring touch-base for your team, as it is easier to cancel an unnecessary scheduled meeting than it is to rally everyone on an ad hoc basis when you have information to discuss. To maximize your time together, take a few minutes before each meeting to ensure meeting technology is working correctly.

Hold frequent 1:1 check-ins. Employees suddenly working from home may feel disconnected and lonely, which can lower engagement and productivity. Schedule regular calls with your individual team members. Whether you are talking business, providing COVID-19 updates or simply checking in to see how they are managing the transition on a personal level, your people will welcome knowing you are there for them. A phone call is good. Facetime or Skype is better.

Create learning moments with stories. Business information and updates on the impact of COVID-19 on your key metrics are necessary, but do not limit yourself to this type of information. Stories are valuable too. They humanize your organization and people as you work together to manage the situation. If something does not work well as your people shift to working from home, talk about it with your team.



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More specifically, talk about what you learned, the steps you are taking to correct the issue and the actions your people can take to avoid similar missteps.

Remind employees to communicate with you. Communication is a two-way street. Encourage your team to proactively reach out to you, even if just to check in and say hello. Communicate at the beginning of the work-from-home period that you need their commitment to staying connected just as much as they need yours.

Refresh your knowledge of company benefits. Employees may need to access company benefits for themselves or family members in the coming days, so brushing up on what is available may help you help them. Connect with your HR representative for a refresher on the benefits — and associated administrator contact information — your employees may find helpful, such as medical, EAP, leave and caregiver assistance information.

Make time. As we shift to dealing with COVID-19 in addition to our usual responsibilities, more time is required from all of us. If you are responsible for those who are now working from home and helping them navigate new ways of working, you should expect longer days. Be honest about this reality with your team, who also may need to anticipate the same for themselves. Although the situation is not ideal, it is reality, and they will appreciate your honesty as you manage through the situation together.

Trust your people. Adversity can elevate the character of your people, not to mention spark some useful ideas that might not have occurred to you. Dedicate time to soliciting their ideas for helping your team work through the situation. If you have a platform that can be used to crowdsource ideas about how to best work from home during this transition (email works just fine), activate and promote that solution. And think about how to celebrate and promote the great ideas your people surface.

Keep things light. People need information and resources to do their jobs, but sometimes they also just need interaction with one another to maintain a feeling of connection to the team and the company's purpose. Virtual lunch-and-learn meetings or brainstorms — via web conference, phone call or even email — can foster that connection while also producing useful solutions to business challenges. Speaking of challenges, friendly competitive engagements can keep the team dynamic alive and fun at the same time. Nike's recent "Living Room Sport Challenge" invited employees to plank and do other physical activities together virtually, creating an opportunity for outside-the-box engagement that aligns with the company's purpose.

Show empathy. Although COVID-19 is affecting all of us, it is doing so in different ways, some of which are more challenging than others. If school is cancelled, employees might have young children at home while attempting to work remotely, or a team member may be preoccupied by the health of an ailing parent. Because we do not always see the full picture of the adversity in our colleagues' lives, remember the value of patience and compassion, which can be less readily demonstrated when our coworkers are not in our immediate presence. Keep in mind that we all are doing our best and benefit from supporting one another as we navigate this together.

Mind your manners. As we rely more on electronic forms of communication in the absence of in-person interaction, be mindful of your tone. Do not be afraid to be a little warmer or less formal in your language to help build rapport, and remember to say please and thank you. Consider an end-of-week recognition email thread in which team members pile on to share shout-outs and thank one another for



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their teamwork and partnership during the week. This type of recognition can be contagious (the good type of contagious) and result in many feel-good moments that help the team bond even while apart.

FOR EMPLOYEES

Be prepared. Make sure you have the essentials for virtual connectivity, including your hardware configured, the right software installed and your passwords accessible. Talk with your family or roommates about your work-from-home arrangements and expectations so you can do your job with minimal disruption. Because COVID-19 is affecting all of us, multiple members of your household may be working from home at once so it may be necessary to establish a schedule or temporary floor plan to accommodate everyone within the home office.

Minimize distractions. Working from home carries temptations that can hinder efficiency, but with a few simple actions you can optimize your home office for productivity. Creating an ergonomically friendly work space, following your standard morning routine (including dressing as if you are going into the office), keeping the TV off and taking breaks to move around can make it easier to stay focused.

Maintain standard working hours. Challenging as it may be to maintain typical hours while working from home, it is important to do one's best. Being available to colleagues, customers and other business partners during the usual times will help minimize disruptions to the business. If working from home presents challenges for your availability, proactively let your contacts know times you might be unavailable and communicate the best times and ways to reach you.

Notify your supervisor of potential limitations. Whether your children are home from school, a repair person is coming, your power is out or some other obstacle is in your way, tell your supervisor about any challenges that might hinder your ability to do your job. Being transparent about your situation will help your supervisor make other arrangements to ensure work can be completed on schedule.

Use virtual collaboration tools. Channels enabling virtual access to your colleagues, as if you were sitting across from them at the office, can serve as a good substitute for being in close physical proximity to one another. Ensure you have the right software installed to enable these communications and use them as appropriate. Add colleagues' cell phone numbers to your phone for individual and group texting should your instant messenger platform go down or should you find yourself having to step away from your computer to run an errand or attend an appointment during the day.

Be patient with your colleagues. None of us will deal with the uncertainty or stress associated with COVID-19 the same. And no matter how well you think you know your colleagues, you may not be aware of the stresses they are dealing with at home. Be patient and compassionate when mistakes are made. If you are understanding and forgiving, your colleagues are likely to treat you the same when you find yourself in a similar situation.

Bring your animals to work. Working at home for several days in a row may be challenging for those not used to it, creating a need for some levity. If you have pets, seize the opportunity to introduce your furry colleagues at home to your colleagues from the office ... live on a video conference or in an emailed photo. A wagging tail or a squeaky purr can be a day-maker for fellow animal lovers.