

Managing Remotely

Urgent events that lead to work disruptions or that necessitate telework can feel overwhelming. But by prioritizing the safety of our community and moving to telework, we will, as an organization, have a template for an organized, flexible disaster response the next time there's a challenge to operational continuity.

Challenges

In order to help you prepare to manage remotely, let's first look at the challenges that face managers of remote workers.

By understanding your employees' perspective on remote work you will be better able to support them. Let's look at some challenges you and your employees might face:

Isolation

Regular human interaction can be easy to take for granted, until you don't have an office full of people to be around every day. Socializing impacts not only our psychology, but even our physical health.

Prolonged isolation can in extreme cases result in things like anxiety and depression. As a manager, be aware of this. Do what you can to engage your employees through unstructured virtual time.

Tips:

- Schedule a brief WebEx or call with your employees regularly – each day or every other day – for a virtual “coffee break” where you can chat in an unstructured way.
- Recommend your employees reach out to each other for occasional unstructured time to socialize throughout the day.

Lack of non-verbal communication

When you can't interact face-to-face, it can be difficult to determine the intent or information behind messages between you and your employees. It's harder to understand a message when it's only a chat, or even a conversation over the phone.

Remember to assume positive intent! If you're unsure of a message, take time to clarify or ask questions. Allow for your employees to ask questions by explicitly asking for their thoughts or input, and by thanking them when they clarify information or ask questions themselves.

Tips:

- If you're having a hard time figuring out the message in a chat or email, jump on the phone. If you're on the phone, consider jumping into a WebEx session and sharing your screen. Sometimes you need to add higher-quality communication in order to convey or understand information.
- Every employee has a different written communication style. Clarify your expectations and preferences for team communication (for example, if you'd like your employees to use chat to contact you by phone).
- Make sure your team has each other's contact information so they can reach out to each other easily.

Best Practices

Management skills that work in an office environment don't always translate exactly to remote management. Use these tips to be more conscious of the unique approaches you can take to tackle managing your team remotely.

Use video as much as you can

Research shows a majority of communication is nonverbal. Whether you're gauging their reaction to a change in plans, or just trying to judge their overall mood that day, video tells you way more than a call or email will.

Plan to have your regular one on one meetings with each team member be video conference calls via WebEx.

Remember that Safety and Care are two of our Service Priorities. If you sense your employee needs support or resources, make time to ask about it. Non-verbal clues you see on video are your opportunity to fix problems when they're small for your remote employees.

Have frequent one on ones

Since you don't have moments in the office to build rapport and talk about issues as they arise make up for it by ensuring you have regular and frequent one on one meetings with your employees.

Keep your availability up to date

It can be hard for your team to know when you're busy when they can't see you at your desk. Update your availability on chat (mark yourself as busy if you can't be disturbed) and keep your shared team calendar up-to-date so that everyone on the team knows when you (and each of them) are available.

Keep it light – when you can

Given that so much of communication is non-verbal, it's hard for words alone to convey how you feel about something. When you are remote, emails and chats might come across as confrontational even if they don't need to be.

Feel free to be more liberal with your use of emojis or images to keep things lighthearted. Some humor or recognition for great work can help keep your team positive even when you can't interact directly.

Recognize their work

Speaking of recognition, there are lots of ways to recognize employees virtually. An email calling out great work, or an ecard you send as a thank you, or even a quick note dropped in chat can help keep your employees engaged.