

Tips for Managing and Engaging your Team while Working Remotely

1 – Manage Expectations

The living environment has suddenly changed, anxiety over the coronavirus, and stress from social and movement restrictions have impacted our daily lives. This also impacts the workforce.

What are our expectations and are they realistic? What does that look like, and has it been made clear? Managers who establish clear, specific guidelines and work one-on-one to understand each team member's challenges will help minimize stress and keep the work moving forward.

2- Establish New Rules of Engagement

With hallway conversations, informal face-to-face lunch meetings and pop-in status reports on hold indefinitely, teams are exploring new ways to keep the lines of communication open. Tools such as Zoom and Google Meet make it easy to hold video conferences and to instant message one another, two of the most popular methods for maintaining contact. However, the timing of regular meetings and expectations for responsiveness that are taken for granted in the office may create challenges at home, especially for parents and caregivers.

Do regular meetings need to be rescheduled to accommodate the rhythms of home life? Do new routines require team members to be “offline” at a specific time each day? Do some team members need more frequent check-ins to stay connected? Taking time early on to learn how to engage remotely as individuals and as a team will help ensure that everyone can stay engaged and responsive.

3 – Get Creative About Maintaining Team Culture

Teams come in all shapes and sizes — small, large, socially active, high-functioning, centralized, decentralized — and each one has its own personality and culture. When

the team's work environment is turned on its head, that culture may be more challenging to sustain. The dramatic shift in how institutions are operating may also mean some members of the team have lighter workloads.

With so many tools for connecting, what are two or three elements of the team's culture that can be incorporated into a distance-working environment? If work is slow, are there long-term projects that can be dusted off and moved forward? Even the most resilient and flexible team members need a lift from time to time. How are we keeping up morale? Encouraging habits that support personal well-being and finding creative ways to connect — posting pet photos, hosting a virtual group lunch, initiating a virtual run/walk — will go a long way toward sustaining a positive outlook.

4 – Be There

These unprecedented times have and will continue to have a profound effect on our institutions and our workforce. Isolated from coworkers and the buzz of the workplace, some team members may become anxious about what the future holds, both personally and professionally. They may need more opportunities and a safe place to talk and share their worries.

Are we carving out sufficient time to listen? In cases where workloads have dropped off, are we taking time to coach team members to continue learning and preparing for what's next in their roles and careers? As team leaders, we not only oversee the work, but also help our teams find and grow their strengths. Offering that support now will help empower members of the team to continue learning and preparing for whatever the future holds.