

# Strategizing Flex Work

## Managing Remote Employees and Teams

One of the most difficult management situations is managing remotely. As the manager of a virtual team, managers must be able to build trust and communicate precisely while maintaining engagement and managing performance, all without the benefit of in-person interactions. Managers can learn simple tools and techniques to succeed as a manager of remote employees and teams.



## Challenges of Remote Management

Managers working with remote employees may face the following challenges:

- *Cannot observe day-to-day workflows* — What does your employee do on a day-to-day basis?
- *Time differences* — It's harder to share ideas and collaborate when you don't work at the same time.
- *Trust* — It's harder to build trust with remote employees, and misunderstandings can occur more frequently.
- *Cannot See Body Language* — Cannot read how an employee is receiving feedback or having trouble based on subtle clues (like you can with co-located employees).

**Where to Focus:** To best succeed in managing remotely, you should:

- **Establish Clear Expectations** — Setting clear expectations with employees and understanding their expectations help ensure roles, responsibilities and workflows are aligned so your employee knows what to expect from them and you know how best to support their needs.
  - Gartner [Presentation for Establishing Clear Expectations](#)
- **Focus on Performance Outcomes** — When focusing on managing performance remotely with employees, focus on performance outcomes since you cannot see how work gets done. To do this, identify and communicate clear goals, set effective metrics, and have regular performance conversations.
  - Gartner [Presentation for Focusing on Performance Outcomes](#)
- **Communicate Effectively** — Effective communication is essential for the success of a virtual team. Managers should focus on communicating effectively with their employees to ensure they have the information and resources they need while ensuring the team stays connected.
  - Gartner [Presentation for Communicating Effectively](#)

## Measuring Performance from your Chair

To ensure employee performance is measured fairly and effectively for a remote or hybrid workforce, measure performance with outcome-based parameters that reflect business contribution rather than relying on line-of-sight management.

Showing up for work and sitting in front of a computer is not performance, it's attendance. Performance management is (and always has been) best measured by pre-determined metrics to evaluate quality work, meeting goals and directives, timely deliverables and client feedback.

The blurring of personal and professional lives in remote work makes tracking remote employees based on the number of hours worked or punching of time sheets impractical and inaccurate.

Holding employees accountable for the outcomes they achieve gives them the flexibility to reach those outcomes creatively and in ways that work best for each employee.

# Five Tips for Managing Remote Work Individuals and Teams

## 1 **Build Skills:** ***Seek out and provide resources and tools on the WorkLife website and through Training and Development***

Focus on developing soft skills that address specific work challenges for both you and your employees working flexibly. Remember, a new way of work requires some collective new training.

## 2 **Normalize Self-Direction:** ***Trust your teams and focus on outputs over processes***

Assess how ready remote employees are for coaching conversations focused on development. This will help build an understanding of where employees are in their work and identify the best approach to coaching moving forward. *Questions to ask yourself:*

- To what degree has this employee mastered their current role?
- How quickly is this employee able to understand and put new concepts or skills into practice?
- Considering life factors both in and out of work, what is the employee's availability and appetite to take on more?
- Does this person have the time management skills if allowed the autonomy to do so?

## 3 **Enable New Relationships:** ***Encourage innovation and monitor signs of distress***

Identify opportunities for your virtual team members to collaborate with, or learn from, other members of your team or organization. Foster a sense of collaboration and inclusiveness, and encourage your team members to connect with the rest of the team and build personal, not just social connections.

- Foster a sense of team by establishing weekly team goals and sharing individual work-wins.
- Ensure inclusion during team meetings--aim for all in-person, or all virtual.
- Encourage team members to build professional and personal connections by sharing something professional or personal about themselves.
- Monitor mental health, struggling employees tend to disconnect when distressed.

## 4 **Accentuate the Positive:** ***Promote two-way communication and increase recognition***

Employees working fully remote are nearly twice as likely to receive corrective feedback than onsite employees. When delivering feedback to remote employees, discussions should be open, evidence-based and forward-looking. Use prompting questions to self-reflect and prepare for constructive feedback discussions.

- Encourage each employee to share a "weekly win" at each team meeting.

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## **Adapt Team Expectations:**

### ***Equip employees with collaboration tools and emphasize objectives***

Focus not only on individual performance but also on the team experience to achieve maximum potential. With employees working remotely on multiple teams, there's a greater need to prioritize a unified team experience.

Use the tips below to help set expectations with your direct reports and your teams. When setting expectations for remote work, it is important to set expectations with individual team members and the team as a whole to ensure both effective individual contributions and team collaboration.

#### **Individual Roles and Responsibilities**

- Highlight the individual's day-to-day responsibilities.
- Clearly communicate to the employee that you expect them to proactively address any issues that may arise.
- Clarify how the individual's role and responsibilities affect the organization's objectives.
- Identify what technology the employee will need access to, and ensure it is working properly. Highlight information about communication tools and channels.

#### **Team Attributes**

- Clearly define team members' roles and responsibilities and how they fit with one another.
- Establish your preferred methods and expectations of communication.
- Describe your management style.
- Establish protocol for tracking when employees are out of office, and make it accessible to all team members.

#### **High Performing Teams...**

- Understand and leverage individual and team strengths.
- Share individual priorities.
- Align to shared team goals.
- Ask for and provide one another ongoing feedback.
- Understand and take action on team engagement.
- Have ongoing meaningful and mindful conversations.

