



Guide to Managing Remote Teams

The novel coronavirus outbreak has necessitated what *Time* calls “the World’s Largest Work-From-Home-Experiment.” A sudden change in workflow and accountability practices can be hard on managers for whom this is a new arrangement. Remember two things: 1) You know more than you think. 2) You don’t have to know everything. This guide is intended to be a reference point for when you may be uncertain about how best to proceed. Our hope is to equip you with as many tools as possible for transitioning to a work-and-life-from-home situation and supporting remote teams at this incredibly delicate point in time.



Taking Control of Your Workday

Start with you!

Organize Yourself - *Control the way you spend time and energy*

- ï Prioritize Values: Identify what is important to you. Make choices based on these values.
- ï Personal Planning Skills: Set goals and make steady progress toward them.
- ï Commitment Skills: Say “yes” and invest in yourself. Turn your goals into reality.
- ï Time Use Skills: Spend your time effectively. Reduce time wasters.
- ï Pacing Skills: Control your tempo. Learn to make steady even progress.

Change the Scene - *Control your environment and change the way you relate to people around you*

- ï Contact Skills: Make friends and seek out supportive relationships.
- ï Listening Skills: Learn how to tune into the feelings of others.
- ï Assertiveness Skills: Say “no” when you want to say “no” yet do so respectfully. Express your own preferences and decisions without violating the rights of others.

Change Your Mindset - *Take control of your attitude and change your viewpoint.*

- ï Relabeling Skills: See the promise in every problem. Change the word “problem” to “opportunity.”

Balance Work & Personal Life - *Take control of your life to reflect your priorities.*

- ï Imagination Skills: Learn to visualize the incongruities of life. Develop your creativity and sense of humor to handle the challenges with greater ease.

Don't Confuse Efficiency with Effectiveness – *Invest your time in the most important tasks*

- ï Effectiveness Skills: Efficiency relates to doing a job right in as little time and with as little effort as possible. Effectiveness relates to doing the “right” job right. Being effective means knowing how to set priorities and being able to focus your efforts on what really needs your attention.

Make ‘You’ a Priority - *Increase your stamina to successfully withstand long-term pressure*

- ï Resiliency Skills: The care and attention you often direct at others also needs to be directed toward yourself. Think of taking time for yourself as comparable to changing the oil in an automobile. Over the long haul it is an important investment. Insisting on time to relax and pursue some of your own, personal interests is not selfish. Making time to do things you enjoy will keep you operating more effectively in the other areas of your life and help you maintain a positive attitude. The right attitude can make any task much easier, any problem more solvable.



Handling Distractions When Working Remotely

When working in a virtual work environment, it is common to be distracted by the television, phone, household chores or other remote workers/learners. It is important to understand what distracts you and how to handle these distractions to ensure that you remain productive.

When you need to work and you find that you are easily distracted by phone or emails, turn them off.

- i Dedicate a certain amount of time to focus on the task. Help yourself by turning off the house ringer and allowing your voicemail to answer the call. If you have a deadline and must turn off IM and email notifications, remember to inform your manager or co-workers who may need to reach you that you are not going to be available.

If you are easily distracted by household chores, you might feel the need to clean rather than work.

- i It might be helpful to do this prior to the start of your work day. Make sure that things are neat and tidy prior to settling down to work. It won't be distracting, because you won't see a visual reminder. Some spillover is expected (like laundry or dishes), but needs to be managed.

If eating becomes a form of distraction, slot lunch and snacks into your schedule.

- i Frequent eating may be a form of procrastination or a mechanism for dealing with boredom due to the lack of social interaction. With the refrigerator or kitchen a few steps away, it's easy to give into the urge. To avoid this type of distraction, remember to add lunch and breaks into your schedule, so that you are eating at regular intervals. Pack your lunch as you would if you were going to an office. If you can't help snacking, stock up on healthy snacks. If you are looking to take a break, take a quick walk instead; if you are still hungry, then have a snack.

If you give into some distraction, it's okay. Remember to strive for balance.

- i You'll want to give in to some distractions in the name of taking breaks. When taking lunch, some individuals check the news, websites, read a chapter or two in a novel, or watch a TV show they taped. People do take time off for lunch in the office, and the short pause has the effect of refreshing and recharging. It's also important to determine a realistic end to your workday. When working from home, it's easy to fall into the habit of responding to communication at all hours. Set boundaries for yourself to avoid burnout.



Managing Virtual Teams—Best Practices

Develop and follow a team plan: Your plan should spell out the team’s communication plan, how you will check-in on progress with completing work, the decision-making process, and conflict resolution strategy. Furthermore, you must properly distribute goals, roles and responsibilities and ensure a fair work distribution.

Remind everyone they are a team: Out of sight should not be out of mind. If the team members think they are all working independently, they will act independently. If they are reminded they are part of a team working on common objectives and deliverables, they will tend to feel better about their work and be more active in their collaboration with other team members.

Establish ground rules: Even though team members are remote, they still need to exhibit a common and acceptable set of behaviors. In fact, this is probably more important for virtual teams. Ground rules include things like setting the hours during which the team members are expected to be working, establishing break times, determining which meetings are mandatory, and defining expectations for communicating turnaround times.

Be extra diligent in workload management: Be precise and explicit in assigning work to virtual team members. You also need to ensure that work is completed on time. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to set and plan for appropriate follow-up during the course of the project.

Communicate regularly: People can also start to feel isolated if they do not receive regular communications. Regularly check in with members to see how they’re managing, provide necessary feedback, and keep them apprised of critical information and decisions.

Look for opportunities to socialize: With fewer organic opportunities for remote teams to interact, it’s even more important that managers look for ways that coworkers can bond. This might include virtual coffee breaks or team huddles.

Remain sensitive to and capitalize on cultural differences: Remain sensitive to the diversity of people, thought and opinion on your team. Capitalize on this knowledge for better solutions.

Maximize meetings: Set and follow an agenda, be prepared for the meeting and require others do the same, and ensure the right people attend. If necessary, allow extra time for preparation when using collaborative technology—video conferencing, shared desktops, conference phone systems.

Adjust and compromise on time differences: Remember that what’s convenient for you may not always be convenient to all team members, especially when you have employees adjusting to non-traditional work situations.



Tips for Supporting a Remote Workforce

- ï Strive to be comfortable supervising your employees without directly observing them. This is critical. If you are uncomfortable managing employees in non-traditional work situations, confer with managers you trust who have more experience in these types of arrangements.
- ï Managing telecommuting employees requires that you be an effective communicator, establish and enforce clear standards of accountability, and be willing to negotiate through minor obstacles.
- ï Focus on results, not processes.
- ï Manage by objectives and results. Outline tasks and outcomes of a project. Clarify logical relationships and chronological dependencies. Highlight critical outcomes.
- ï Be inclusive. Incorporate the opinions, guidance, or expertise of employees in a non-traditional work situation. Make sure you share important information with them in a timely manner.
- ï If you have difficulty trusting your subordinates, give your employees the benefit of the doubt. Consider that “freedom to fail” is the necessary counterpart to “freedom to succeed.”
- ï Be flexible and open to new ideas. Recognize that there may be multiple ways to achieve the same results. Ask for feedback from other managers and/or employees. Review statistics, best practices, and/or testimonials from other managers on the success of telecommuting situations.
- ï Be clear about expected levels of performance. Make sure your employees understand their job responsibilities thoroughly. As appropriate, provide training, mentoring, and/or job shadowing on skills needed to function in a non-traditional work situation. Training might include courses in communication, time management, teamwork, and customer service.
- ï Support your employees’ efforts to be accountable and work independently. When appropriate, consider having your employee prepare status reports on a regular basis that indicate job responsibilities and deadlines, changes, issues, and proposed remedies. Encourage employee initiative. Help employees develop their skills at managing themselves and their projects.
- ï Promote employee empowerment. Look for ways to capitalize on their creativity and enthusiasm.
- ï Consider how employee performance and morale may improve from a work situation that better reflects their personal needs and/or professional interests, yet meets the needs of the organization.
- ï Promote on-going professional development. Help employees identify their learning objectives and work with them to determine the support they need (e.g., more guidance from you on how to perform the skill, more frequent feedback during critical learning phases, formal training).



Communication Strategies for Remote Managers

The follow tips are designed to help lay the groundwork for effective communication and for bridging the virtual divide.

Prepare your mind

- | Empower yourself
 - Know your own communication style
 - Recognize that you are the only person *you* can change
 - Address your own communication blind spots and areas for development

- | Establish focus
 - Focus on the issue at hand
 - Do not judge the person's character
 - Remember the relationship that exists beyond the issue

- | Envision success
 - Think about what a positive outcome would look like
 - How is the relationship strengthened?

Plan and strategize

- | Pick a good time to talk
 - Is this a morning or afternoon person?
 - Note how busy their schedule is
 - Consider upcoming deadlines for either of you

- | Set ground rules (especially when dealing with groups)
 - Confidentiality
 - No interruptions
 - Agree to an "impasse break" if necessary

- | Plan for dealing with difficult behaviors
 - Provide timely follow-up
 - Address the behavior in question
 - Seek context—what might be causing the behavior
 - Be clear about expectations for change – what needs to stop /start; what supports can be put into place to help course correct



Tools to Let Others Know You're Listening

Actively Listen

- | The act of being present to ensure understanding of verbal/non-verbal communication.

Paraphrase

- | The act of repeating the meaning of another's message in your own words to ensure that it was understood correctly.

Use Mirroring or Reflecting

- | Using statements indicating the ability to hear and understand one's perspective.
 - o "I hear that you're uncertain"
 - o "I can see that this has been exhausting for you"
 - o "I hear you are wondering what to say to your employees"

Ask Open-Ended Questions

- | Asking questions that encourage the employee to talk
 - o Not "Anything else?" but "*Can you tell me more?*"
 - o Not "Is that hard for you?" but "*What is that like for you?*"
 - o Not "Are your employees struggling?" but "*What are challenges that lie ahead?*"

Tools for Considering a Different Perspective

Appreciative Inquiry

- | Encouraging an employee to look at a situation from a positive perspective and move towards a solution.
 - o "I hear what is wrong, but I'm wondering: What is working?"
 - o "How have you managed this in the past? What about that would be helpful now?"
 - o "What tools do you have to get you through this?"
 - o "What strengths do you bring to the table?"
 - o What would a solution looklike?"

Choosing Another Perspective

- | Acknowledging that the employee carries one perspective, naming that one perspective, and suggesting that the employee "try on" another perspective
 - o "What do you think the other person is thinking?"
 - o "That is one perspective. Could there be another way to think about it?"

Reality Testing

- | Asking questions to help the person test his/her own perspective
 - o "Is this true? What else is true?"
 - o "What is likely? What is *more* likely?"



Tools to Increase a Sense of Control

- | Help the employee identify what *is* within his/her control. While many factors cannot be influenced, focus on what can be influenced.
- | “What can you control?” “What can you do about it?”
- | “What do you need to accomplish today? Tomorrow? This week?”
- | “With whom can you speak to get more information?”
- | “Are there any other choices?”

Tools for Reaching Out to Those “Under the Radar” or “Turtling Down”

- | Taking a moment to reach out to these employees can be reassuring and calming.
- | Ask the employee directly how he/she is doing.
- | Pay attention to any changes in behavior, communication, or performance.
- | Encourage employees to reach out to the EAP when there is a concern for wellbeing.

Tools for Giving Information When There is No Information to Give

- | During change, people are hungry for information and open communication. When approached for information that you do not have, making the person feel heard can be almost as effective as providing them with information.
- | Mirror back what the employee is saying. “I hear you have questions about promotions”
- | Acknowledge this is important to the employee. “I know that this is important to you.”
- | If you can’t give them an answer, tell them what you *can* do. “I can tell you that they know it is important, and are working to come up with those answers.” Or “I don’t have any information right now, but I promise to pass the information on to you as soon as I hear.”

Tools to Increase Morale

- | Recognize effort and celebrate even small victories.
- | Proactively reach out to employees.
- | Be present. When speaking with a team or an employee, stay in the moment.
- | Model the behavior and attitude you hope to inspire. Remain calm and speak from a positive perspective.

Tools to Strengthen Trust

- | Trust is built and restored over time. Your availability, compassion, honesty, and consistency will help to strengthen and preserve trust over time.
- | Remain available, accessible, and responsive to employees’ concerns.
- | Continue to acknowledge and recognize the importance of employee needs and frustrations.
- | When you say you are going to do something, make sure that you do it.



Setting SMART Goals

SMART is an established tool you can use to help yourself and your team members plan and achieve your goals. SMART can be used both professionally and personally.

SMART stands for:

Specific. Clearly define the goal as much as possible with no ambiguous language.

- ï What do I want to accomplish? Why am I doing this? Who is involved? Where will it be done? Which constraints or requirements do I have?

Measurable. Establish criteria by which you track progress and measure the outcome.

- ï How much, how many, how will I know when my goal is accomplished?

Achievable. Set goals that stretch and grow your abilities, but aren't so difficult that you become discouraged.

- ï Is the goal reasonable enough to be accomplished? How so?

Relevant. Set goals that are consistent with other goals you've established and fit with your immediate and long-term plans.

- ï Is the goal worthwhile and will it meet your needs?

Timely. Your objective should include a deadline or time limit to help you establish a sense of urgency and prompt you to better prioritize your time.

- ï When do I hope or need to see results?



Setting SMART Goals

Instructions:

Identify your top three priorities from most important to least important. Establishing priorities will help you make better decisions and set smaller goals to accomplish what's important.

Take your top-priority goal and define three key smaller goals: a long-term goal to be met within the next two to three years; a mid-term goal to be met within the next year or two years; and a short-term goal to be met within the next three to six months. Break each goal down into smaller SMART goals until you end up with a to-do list of activities and tasks.

Top-Priority Goal:

Long-Term Goal (2 to 3 years)	Mid-Term Goal (1 to 2 years)	Short-Term Goal (3-6 months)

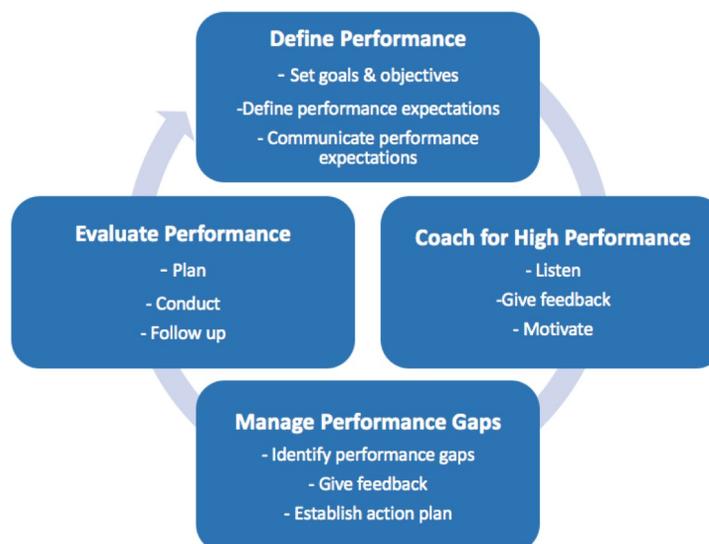
- | Is each goal SMART?
- | What resources/training/help do you need to achieve this goal?
- | Is this the right goal or will another goal take you toward your objective faster and more easily?



Performance Management: An Ongoing Process

Although the term performance management is often used to describe the annual performance evaluation, performance management actually refers to a number of practices, that when performed skillfully, ensure optimal performance.

Performance management works best when performed as a cycle of activities as illustrated below.



Define Performance

Defining performance includes setting goals and objectives, establishing performance expectations, and clearly communicating those expectations. Managers define performance in a number of ways, including writing and discussing goals, and assigning tasks and projects.

Although goals and objectives are often defined at the beginning of the year, managers can and should have regular discussions that make performance expectations clear.

Coach for High Performance

Managers can ensure that staff members meet and even exceed goals by having regular coaching discussions throughout the year. Coaching involves listening, giving appreciative and constructive feedback and continually motivating staff members.



Performance Evaluation

Performance evaluation refers to the formal, usually annual, step in which the manager reviews the staff member's performance against goals and objectives. This step, if done skillfully, should involve no surprises for the staff member.

If the manager has clearly defined performance expectations, given adequate coaching and feedback throughout the year, and addressed any performance gaps in a timely manner, the evaluation will be much easier for everyone.

Manage Performance Gaps

When performance does not meet expectations, managers must manage the gap in performance. These discussions should occur in a timely manner; under no circumstances should a manager wait for the performance evaluation to broach the subject.



Performance Management Tips

Have a written goal sheet or other document that details goals, action plans to achieve them, and performance expectations – in accordance with the performance management system.

- ï Address how the employee should be monitored (with performance goals), when and how communication will be established between manager, co-workers and customers/clients.

Communicate, communicate, and communicate.

- ï Communication between the manager and employee should be frequent and varied. Weekly or bi-weekly conference calls should take place as a formal way to discuss current projects, timelines, obstacles and achievements.
- ï Unscheduled calls ought to be made by both the manager and employee, just as a means of keeping in touch. This allows the relationship to be more spontaneous as it would be if they were seeing each other on a daily basis in the office. Video conferencing also enhances meetings.
- ï Include co-workers in the communication goals. It is important to establish and maintain a cohesive team environment with regular communication among all members. All co-workers and other employees should be able to readily contact the remote worker.

Reward performance.

- ï Many managers already utilize this technique regardless of where their workers reside. However, this mindset allows the manager and employee to focus on what matters most – business results versus face time.
- ï Address performance issues just as you would for a worker in the office. Don't jump to conclusions about why a deadline was missed. Discuss it with the employee and understand that sometimes they have issues that arise just like anyone else.

Recognize your employees.

- ï Whether by phone or webcam, make an effort to celebrate milestones like work anniversaries and birthdays; you might also schedule an impromptu check-in or happy hour to recognize employee's hard work.
- ï Working remotely doesn't mean working around the clock. Encourage employees to take down time when appropriate and "unplug" when the day is done.



Coaching for High Performance

Whether working remotely or onsite, all employees require measurable goals with timelines and expectations that can be assessed with regular feedback. Constructive feedback is not criticism. It helps staff members improve their performance and increase their contribution and value to the organization.

The BIA formula helps managers and supervisors to structure feedback that is meaningful and objective.

Behavior: Describe the specific behavior the individual has engaged in without ascribing intent.

Impact: What was the impact or result of this behavior?

Action: What action(s) must the individual do differently?

Identify the BEHAVIOR, not the person

Feedback is about describing an individual's behaviors, not about describing the individual personally. Stick to describing the particular behaviors that require changing. Be specific and objective. Where possible, describe the context or setting that the employee engaged in the behavior to enable the individual to recall and focus on the feedback provided. For example, "The standard is to process 100 items per day, you are processing an average of 60." Using this language is much clearer than "You need to work faster."

Identify the IMPACT

Ensure that the employee understands not only what the expectation is, but also why it's important.

Develop a plan for ACTION

Describe the specific behaviors that the individual needs to engage in (or stop engaging in) to obtain a different result.

NEXT STEPS

Dialogue to gain understanding

Ensure that the employee understands the expectations. Ask the employee to review the expectations in his or her own words and identify steps that he or she can take to reach the desired performance.

Offer suggestions and input

Provide the employee with suggestions that will enable him or her to be successful in closing the performance gap. Help him or her understand what successfully meeting defined expectation looks like.

Gain commitment

Determine a timeframe for follow-up and ensure that follow-up occurs. Managers often inadvertently signal that the improvement was not important when they don't follow-up. Be sure to acknowledge any improvement.



BEST PRACTICES FOR SUCCESSFUL COACHING OUTCOMES

Prioritize respect and dignity

Feedback should always be delivered respectfully. Remain self-aware to ensure that your words, tone and body language are all communicating the same message. If done effectively, the goal of any feedback session is to impart information that someone can comprehend, think about and act upon. Even when the individual may not “like” the information received, they should not feel put down or beat up. They should remain whole and feel like an important part of the team.

Balancing positive and constructive feedback

When possible, highlight things the employee does well.

Deliver timely feedback

Providing feedback as close to the event as possible allows change to happen more quickly, and avoids the issue of festering when the information is “sat on” for too long.

Make it a regular practice

Feedback should be provided on an on-going basis. This is the same whether the feedback is positive, negative or to enhance skills. It allows for open dialogue, and on a consistent basis. It fosters an open culture, and one where individuals don't feel they are 'spoken to' only when there is a crisis.



Managing Performance Gaps

When performance does not meet expectations, address it quickly. Don't wait for the time when formal performance evaluations are given to provide feedback. Waiting to give constructive feedback delays improvement. It can also create unnecessary resentment and impact the successful completion of projects. You can take the following steps to manage performance gaps:

Identify the performance gap

Describe the current level of performance and the expectation. Be specific and objective. For example, "The standard is to process 100 items per day, you are processing an average of 70." Using this language is much clearer than "You need to work faster."

Clarify and confirm

Discuss the performance expectation with the staff member to ensure that he or she not only understands what the expectation is, but also why it's important. Asking the staff member to restate the expectation in his or her own words helps to ensure understanding.

Give constructive feedback

Provide the staff member with constructive feedback that enables him or her to be successful in closing the gap. Help him or her visualize what it looks like to successfully meet the expectation.

Establish an action plan

Establish an action plan with SMART specifics to determine next steps. This plan should also include a timeframe for follow-up.

Ask for the employee's commitment

Be sure to get the employee's verbal commitment to improve. Commitment involves more than simply the employee shaking his or her head as you talk, or even saying, "I'll try" or "I understand." Instead, ask the employee to tell you what he or she will do differently. Follow through.

If you have communicated your expectations clearly, and you have given the staff member adequate coaching and feedback, you may need to take corrective action when standards are still not met. Consult with your manager and HR Department as appropriate.

If you have concerns about how an employee might react to performance feedback, it is also a good idea to consult with your manager and HR Department, and to involve the Employee Assistance Program when indicated.



Cultivating Emotional Resilience for Yourself and Your Workers

Emotional resilience refers to one's ability to adapt to stressful situations or crises. More resilient people are able to "roll with the punches" and adapt to adversity without lasting difficulties; less resilient people have a harder time with stress and life changes, both major and minor. It's been found that those who deal with minor stresses more easily can also manage major crises with greater ease, so resilience has its benefits for daily life as well as for the rare major catastrophe.

What Influences Emotional Resilience?

Emotional resilience is, to a degree, something you're born with. Some people, by nature, are less upset by changes and surprises. This can be observed in infancy and tends to be stable throughout one's lifetime. Emotional resilience is also related to some factors that aren't under your control, such as age, gender, and exposure to trauma. However, resilience can be developed with a little effort. If you know what to do, you can become more resilient, even if you are naturally more sensitive to life's difficulties.

What Are the Traits of Emotionally Resilient People?

Emotional Awareness: They understand what they're feeling and why.

Perseverance: Whether they're working toward outward goals or on inner coping strategies, they're action-oriented—they trust in the process and don't give up.

Internal Locus of Control: They believe that they, rather than outside forces, are in control of their own lives. They also seek to separate what they can control and what they can't—focusing their energies on the former.

Optimism: They see the positives or opportunities in most situations.

Support: They know the value of social support and are able to surround themselves with supportive people.

Sense of Humor: They're able to laugh at and through life's difficulties.

Perspective: They learn from mistakes (rather than deny them), see obstacles as challenges, and allow adversity to make them stronger. They can also find meaning in life's challenges rather than seeing themselves as victims.



Interventions to Facilitate Movement Toward Resiliency and Success

- | Foster supportive contact with your manager/employees
- | Seek out a mentor
- | Seek additional training
- | Consult a work/life coach
- | Discuss concerns with a personal friend
- | Consult with an Employee Assistance Program counselor
- | Purposefully Develop a Positive Attitude: "There is a basic law that like attracts like. Negative thinking definitely attracts negative results." ~Norman Vincent Peale