

HONEST ADVICE FOR EXCELLING WHEN MANAGING A REMOTE WORKFORCE

When facing a rapid transition into a virtual working world, there's always heightened anxiety around technology challenges, communication interruptions and productivity issues. And managing a team brings a whole other set of issues which can be overwhelming for anyone in the supervisory or leadership role.

Now is the time to hone your virtual management skills so you and your team will succeed in this new working environment. And keep in mind, that while you do hone these skills, you're setting yourself up to return to the office as a stronger manager than before. So, if this is your goal, then thoughtfully consider the following advice and keep an open mind to change. By doing so, you'll not only inspire your team to do their best, but you'll grow as a leader armed and ready for the new normal. And remember, these new skills are in demand and are highly marketable, and your success in employing them will garner positive attention moving forward.

- **Don't assume you've got it all figured out.** Be ready to make mistakes, admit your mistakes and learn from your mistakes. Everyone appreciates a transparent and humble supervisor.
- **This is not the time to be ego driven.** If you need help, if you feel confused, if you are struggling, it's okay to feel this way. Most importantly, don't avoid asking for help because you think this will make you look weak. Instead, ask for support or guidance from your supervisor or colleagues and your coach.
- **Establish a clear chain of command.** As emails buzz back and forth, it can be confusing who needs to hear what. Establish a clear chain of command so that your team knows who to contact for questions, projects and/or decisions. But always leave the 'virtual door' open so they can go to the top if they are needing your support. This is not the time to close the door or say "talk to your supervisor and leave me alone!"
- **Create a communication strategy.** Set intentions on when you will meet and for how long, as well as what will be covered. It's comforting for team members to know when to expect their regular meetings with you.
- **Find balance in your interactions.** Managing a remote workforce can be challenging for supervisors used to hands-on management, so finding a healthy balance between personal one-on-one check-ins and group meetings is key. Make time for both each week and then adjust the amount and frequency as needed moving forward.
- **Be clear on team goals.** This is not the time to be vague with expectations; rather it's important to set clear goals. Use the SMART/HARD goal guidelines to help you and your team understand the specifics expected. Remember, it's challenging to pick up on contextual clues from emails and phone conversations (not that employees should ever be forced to do that), so get in the habit of being specific and clear with expectations. This will benefit you in your future remote work and even improve the productivity when you return to the workplace.

- **Invite problems as well as solutions.** Don't be afraid to ask, "What could go wrong?" Empower your team to brainstorm proactive ways to head issues off at the pass or thoughtfully manage them when they occur. Also, openly asking this question in meetings invites the opportunity to work as a team toward solutions and empowers team members to use their strengths in times of crisis.
- **Focus on results and not time in seats.** Don't foster busyness. Instead, ask them to keep a log of when they are working and what they are doing so this can be reviewed (ONLY if there are problems). Otherwise, let them do their work when they are able and rested.
- **Set time for sharing concerns.** At the end of your weekly team meeting, invite team members to talk about what is going on with them and share resources that support one another. At the same time, let them know that you have a 'virtual open door' policy and they can come to you above and beyond established meetings whenever they need your guidance and support.
- **Trust your team.** You hired them for a reason, so let them do their work. Contacting them at all hours of the day and night screams lack of trust, micromanagement and leadership insecurity. Let them bring concerns to you. If they fail to do so, reach out to them and explore why. But learning to trust them will go a long way to increase retention, engagement and productivity.
- **Avoid micromanaging.** Just because you don't see them doesn't mean they are not working. Don't feel the need to constantly pepper them with questions, demand daily updates or set productivity demands that are too high. Instead, give them space to work at the pace and in the style that works best for them.
- **Find a way to share updates outside of meetings.** Platforms like GoogleDocs, SLACK, Jostle, Basecamp or other communication and project management applications are great ways to allow team members to share their work without requiring daily meetings.
- **Encourage team members to seek out emotional support.** And you should too when you need it. There are so many resources to support your well-being, like Encompass and the Work Life Consultant to help you navigate challenges and emotions when you feel you need support.