MANAGING REMOTE WORKERS & TEAMS

How Managers Can Support Remote Employees
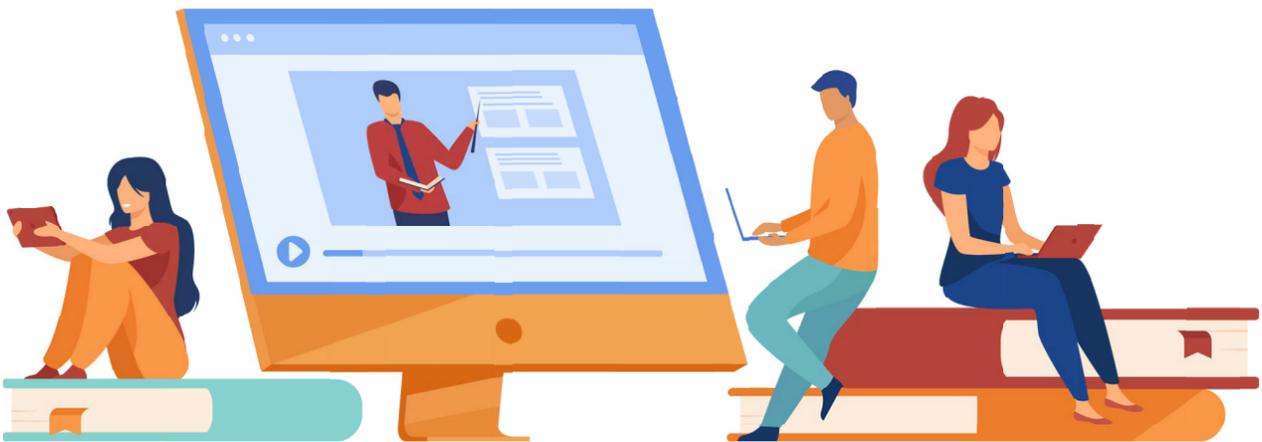
There are many unique pressures of working from home and managing a team remotely. It's important we recognise how it may affect ourselves as well as our teams in terms of engagement, motivation and productivity and wellbeing.

You will find below some tips and advice on how to care for yourself and support your teams whilst working from home, along with links to useful websites and services at SFH.

1. **Communicating and Engaging**
2. **Clarity of expectations and team working**
3. **Wellbeing and emotional support**

1. COMMUNICATING AND ENGAGING

Over-communicate!

This is probably the most important piece of advice. Working from home can be isolating; ensure you and your team have regular check-ins virtually. SFH are promoting the use of Microsoft teams to enable this go to: **https://teams.microsoft.com/_#/discover**
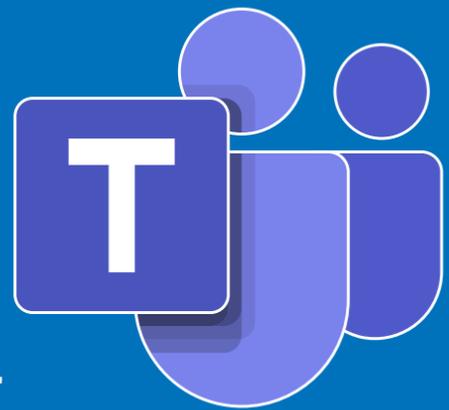
Establish structured check-ins:

Whilst for some (particularly introverts) working from home may be great, for others it can be isolating and de-motivating; Holding daily check-ins will be welcomed by some and others may feel this is intrusive and may even consider it feels like being 'checked up upon'. Think of how to striking a balance with your whole team

Many successful remote managers establish regular calls or check-in's with their remote employees. This could take the form of a series of one-on-one calls, if your employees work more independently from each other, or a team call, if their work is highly collaborative. The important feature is that the calls are regular and predictable, and that they are a forum in which employees know that they can consult with you, and that their concerns and questions will be heard.

Make sure regular check-ins are scheduled in advance with your team members: have some daily scheduled chat time with each of them (ask about their wellbeing) and regular time in the diary as a team.

TIP: A morning quick coffee call either as a team or individually can be a way to bring structure to the day, check in that people are clear on any objectives and daily updates, have what they need and to ask any questions. This also encourages teams to say hi and check in as they would in the workplace.

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And then establish "rules of engagement":

Remote work becomes more efficient and satisfying when managers set expectations for the frequency, means, and ideal timing of communication for their teams. For example, "We use video-conferencing for daily check-in meetings, but we use IM when something is urgent." Also, if you can, let your employees know the best way and time to reach you during the workday (e.g., "I tend to be more available late in the day for ad hoc phone or video conversations, but if there's an emergency earlier in the day, send me a text.") Finally, keep an eye on communication among team members (to the extent appropriate), to ensure that they are sharing information as needed.

We recommend that managers establish these "rules of engagement" with employees as soon as possible, ideally during the first online check-in meeting. While some choices about specific expectations may be better than others, the most important factor is that all employees share the same set of expectations for communication.

Regular communication is important but meetings should be structured and have an agenda, just as you would if working in the same office (see tip sheet on running a virtual meeting). Maintain positive relationships by encouraging your team to contact you/each other, only during the work hours which the team would normally work.

2. CLARITY OF EXPECTATIONS AND TEAM WORKING

Setting Clear Expectations

Remember, these are unprecedented times. Make sure that your team knows they are trusted and valued. Not being clear on what is expected, when and how people are doing leads quickly to demotivation, disengagement and stress.

Ensure that everyone has clear individual and/or team objectives and that they know how to meet your expectations with specific timelines.

TOP TIP: Don't forget that 'old' SMART tool. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. Never has there been a better time to bring this into use

Recognise and give feedback regularly of achieved expectations. A way to counter balance a fear of coming across as 'checking up' on people is to regularly recognise, feedback and praise achieved work. Don't let completed jobs drift into the ether.

Teamworking

Are people clear on roles and responsibilities? Some of the objectives set maybe needed to be accomplished cooperatively. Is everyone clear on who is doing what and when. Are people clear on what they need to share and having virtual task and finish meetings.

Encourage the team to communicate regularly with each other. You shouldn't be the only source of information and support. (Please see other factsheets on good teamworking behaviour).

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3. WELLBEING AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Maintain a positive work-life balance

Itis easy to work longer hours and forget to take breaks whilst at home. Ensure you take 30 mins lunch break and maybe go for a short walk. Encourage your team to do this. Set a calendar reminder to ensure you take breaks and have a structured working day. Creating routines helps us to maintain balance and structure.

Provide opportunities for remote social interaction:

One of the most essential steps a manager can take is to structure ways for employees to interact socially (that is, have informal conversations about non-work topics) while working remotely. This is true for all remote workers, but particularly so for workers who have been abruptly transitioned out of the office.

The easiest way to establish some basic social interaction is to leave some time at the beginning of team calls just for non-work items (e.g., "We're going to spend the first few minutes just catching up with each other. How was your weekend?"). Other options include virtual pizza parties (in which pizza is delivered to all team members at the time of a videoconference), or virtual office parties (in which party "care packages" can be sent in advance to be opened and enjoyed simultaneously). While these types of events may sound artificial or forced, experienced managers of remote workers (and the workers themselves) report that virtual events help reduce feelings of isolation, promoting a sense of belonging.

Offer encouragement and emotional support:

Especially in the context of an abrupt shift to remote work, it is important for managers to acknowledge stress, listen to employees' anxieties and concerns, and empathize with their struggles. If a newly remote employee is clearly struggling but not communicating stress or anxiety, ask them how they're doing. Even a general question such as "How is this remote work situation working out for you so far?" can elicit important information that you might not otherwise hear. Once you ask the question, be sure to listen carefully to the response, and briefly restate it back to the employee, to ensure that you understood correctly. Let the employee's stress or concerns (rather than your own) be the focus of this conversation.

Research on emotional intelligence and emotional contagion tells us that employees look to their managers for cues about how to react to sudden changes or crisis situations. If a manager communicates stress and helplessness, this will have what Daniel Goleman calls a "trickle-down" effect on employees. Effective leaders take a two-pronged approach, both acknowledging the stress and anxiety that employees may be feeling in difficult circumstances, but also providing affirmation of their confidence in their teams, using phrases such as "we've got this," or "this is tough, but I know we can handle it," or "let's look for ways to use our strengths during this time." With this support, employees are more likely to take up the challenge with a sense of purpose and focus.

A GUIDE TO MANAGING
REMOTE WORKERS & TEAMS

Support mechanisms

Make yourself and your team aware of the practical and emotional support available from SFH. Encourage your team to join SFH social media groups. This can help in feeling connected to the wider Organisation and reduce feelings of isolation.

SFH support:

The Employee Assistance Programme, VIVUP, can be contacted for independent, confidential, impartial support to staff. They can be contacted on 03303 800658. VIVUP can be contacted 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

https://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk/for-health-professionals/looking-after-your-wellbeing-during-covid-19/

Source: Taken and adapted from HBR by Barbara Z. Larson, Susan R. Vroman and Erin E. Makarius

Additional information

National Health and Wellbeing Resources:

https://people.nhs.uk/

sfh-tr@ODenquiries.net.uk

Other factsheet guides:

- Working from home tips
- Chairing virtual meetings
- Guide to self-compassion