

How to Manage Employees Remotely



We are entering a new era of remote working, where traditional office jobs are becoming more and more flexible around where the actual work needs to take place. However, with more companies allowing their staff to work remotely, unique challenges have arisen around recruitment, management and even letting staff go. Here are some ways to make managing a remote workforce run both smoothly and efficiently.

Have Regularly Scheduled Check-Ins

Whether it's daily or weekly, you need a regular one-on-one check-in with each staff member you manage, preferably a face to face video call. These check-ins are not just for work schedule updates, it's also valuable time for you to find out how they are working, if they have any blockers or issues working from home and identifying any personal struggles. Working remotely can be isolating, and it's important as a Manager you have that personal connection as often as possible with your team members to ensure they still feel valued.

Use The Technology Available

Make sure your team has the technology and tools they need. Appropriate hardware is vital including laptops, headsets and webcams for virtual meetings. It's your responsibility as a Manager to ensure they have the tools they need to perform their job.

Another key aspect is security; ensure that the tools and devices you supply your remote staff have up to date antivirus software and the appropriate email security and password management tools.

There are a plethora of communication tools available now, from real-time chat messages to video conferencing software, with many of these being free! Make sure your team has the right software for remote collaboration and communication.

Focus On Outcomes

Don't try to micromanage every part of a remote employee's workload. People work differently remotely, from the night owl still online at 10pm finishing up emails, to parents trying to juggle school pickup around meetings. By creating realistic expectations, focusing on priorities and measuring outcomes achieved, not time spent, you will have a happier and more productive workforce. Trust your team and give them the freedom and flexibility to get work done on the schedule that works for you both.

Weekly Team And Company-Wide Meetings

Keep staff up to date with how the team and the company are going by scheduling regular team and company-wide meetings, via video call if possible. You can keep them as short or long as you like, formal or informal, but it's important for staff to regularly interact with each other. Short company updates, celebrating birthdays, or even sharing personal news are all great agenda items to keep a team engaged and collaborating. With the new technology available, you could even have themed backgrounds for your meetings!

Three Types of Remote Workers And How To Manage Them

The Conscious Communicator

A conscious communicator is a natural when it comes to remote working, reaching out effortlessly through video calls, chat software, and any other way you have of keeping colleagues connected.

Make sure you schedule regular and specific check-ins to ensure they have the support and structure they need. You can also use their communication prowess to meet some of the social needs of the team, empowering them to organise a Friday evening virtual game night or a cyber-space lunch where everyone can chat about their day while they eat.

The Go-It-Alone

This type of staff member works best when given clear guidelines and expectations then left alone to execute. While this sounds like a potentially model employee, their view can get quite narrow without the natural collaboration an office can bring. Instead, encourage these employees to bring others on board for project brainstorming and feedback as often collaboration gives the best results. Make sure you schedule specific check-ins to cover both personal and work topics to ensure they have the support they need for remote working and encourage collaboration amongst their team members.

The Last-Minute Wonder

There is a lot to wonder about with the last-minute wonder; they tend not to communicate particularly well, don't engage with other team members and while the projects are delivered, they always seem last minute and rushed. These types of people struggle the most with remote working; they miss the accountability their office-mates bring and struggle with self-managing their time. They need the access to management that the office life brings and virtually replicating that as much as possible is the secret to helping these people succeed. Daily check-ins around work-in-progress and additional collaboration and project management tools can help a struggling last-minute wonder, as well as being very clear on steps of projects and what needs to be completed when.

Additional Tips for Handling Remote Employees

Onboarding New Staff Remotely

It can be daunting to start a new role when you are working remotely. No walk around the office to put roles and names to faces, no seat-mate to ask the important questions of and no welcome lunch can make for a cold start to a new role. Even getting answers to what seem like simple questions for new-starters can feel like a large obstacle to a worker based at home. For all new starters, assign them a "buddy", whom they can ask as many questions as they need. Make sure to have a lot of video conferences with all the team members in the first month. Regular catch-ups on roles within the team and even asking them to share some facts about themselves to help with the more personal side of the work-place socialisation can make a new starter feel more welcome.

Make sure all of your new-starter documentation is up to date and in an easily accessible format and ensure there is a clear plan for success for the first week, month and quarter. Anything you would do for an in-office new starter needs to be almost doubled for a remote team member. This will ensure they feel supported and part of the team as quickly as possible so they can integrate well and start working effectively.

How To Do A Performance Review Remotely

Performance reviews are an important aspect of work, allowing yourself and your employee to explore their strengths, improve their skills, and develop plans for future success. The best kind of performance review will also help you as a Manager, giving you ways to get the most out of your employees and increasing your managerial toolkit. However, the distance and communication styles of remote working don't always translate well to a flawless performance review. Some strategies that work well for in-person conversations are not as effective through video chat, so you need to ensure you are optimising the performance review for the tools you have available.

As remote staff can feel like they have less direct access to their Managers, consider running performance reviews quarterly instead of half-yearly or yearly to make sure your employees are getting what they need. You should still be having regular catch-ups and giving feedback throughout the year but the performance review is an important formal process that lets you dig into career and personal goals, set training opportunities and prioritise work to make sure the employee feels truly valued.

Go into the performance review with a clear plan for getting the outcomes needed. If you are doing regular performance reviews as part of your standard meetings, your staff member should not be blindsided by completely unexpected feedback. Ensure there is an action plan with clear follow-ups until the next performance review.

Letting Someone Go

There is no easy way to let someone go, but firing a remote worker can have its own special challenges. Whether the company is pivoting and letting go of a number of staff or there are performance issues for one particular staff member, it's still a difficult time for everyone. Communication with staff is key here; you don't want someone finding out that their team member no longer works at the company when a company chat message bounces back. Communicate early and often with the whole team or company about what is going on. Try to use video chat; it is more personal and less open to misinterpretation than an email or a chat message to the whole team. Without the reassurance of the office space, remote workers can feel disconnected from the company so it's important to ensure that when a person or a group of people are let go, you communicate quickly and effectively. Give the remaining team members time in your one on ones to address any concerns or worries they might be feeling about layoffs.

How We Can Help

There are many ways to manage remote staff. Technology has grown in leaps and bounds over the last year to give you the tools needed to ensure an engaged and high performing team. Making sure your team is composed of the correct people in the right role is key; it's hard to manage the wrong person for the job! Specialist recruiters have a unique knowledge of your particular market and the roles needed within it. At iPlace Recruitment, we offer a six month replacement guarantee for all permanent candidates placed in your business, which is double the industry standard of three months. This is particularly important when it comes to remote workers, adjusting to a new role while not having the usual face to face time. The additional three month guarantee gives them time to settle in and ensures that you have the right fit for your team.