

Are you ready to start managing remote employees?

Just because offices are shifting to remote/home locations does not change business as usual. Work still must get done, sales deals closed, and our owners and employees need to be cared for.

As a manager, this puts a new pressure on you. Whether you wanted to or not, and whether you're familiar with how to do it or not, you suddenly have to keep your team productive and engaged as they transition to remote work.

To help with this new normal take some time to review some challenges and pointers to keep your team members productive and engaged.

The Challenges of Managing Remote Employees

1. Loneliness and isolation

Without a doubt, this is one of the top three challenges all remote workers face.

Regular human interaction can be easy to take for granted, until you don't have an office full of people to be around every day.

Socializing and being around others is core to how humans feel involved. Not surprisingly then, it's a huge health factor that impacts not only our psychological but even our physical health.

Isolation and loneliness in humans are just as impactful. Prolonged isolation can in extreme cases result in things like anxiety and depression.

As their manager, be aware of this. Do what you can to engage them socially online with the rest of the team whenever possible.

2. Communication issues due to a lack of non-verbal cues

Communication is an obvious challenge with managing remote employees, but some of those communication-related challenges aren't so obvious. Yes, you lose some of those hallway conversations, and quick in-office chats, but it goes deeper than that.

When you don't have enough face-to-face communication, it can become difficult to sense intent in messages between you and your employee. It's harder to understand a message when it's only text, or you don't know them as well as other employees.

A good rule of thumb is that any prolonged conversation on text or e-mail becomes a phone call. It's saved many misunderstandings and quickly helps to move forward aligned and understanding one another.

3. Feeling left out

The feeling of being left out is more common among remote employees. When you work remotely, you miss out on so many opportunities to connect with your colleagues and managers.

More than just that, though, you also feel like your teammates don't hear you the same. You can often feel like leadership doesn't take notice of you the way they do when working in an office.

Managers have the power to counter this by taking steps like building trust and rapport with their remote workers and having dedicated, regular 1 on 1s with everyone.

Essential Tips for Managing Remote Employees

Remote management can feel like a totally different challenge than managing people you work side by side with. Things that work in an office don't always translate exactly to remote employees.

Use these tips to be more conscious of the unique approaches you should take to managing remote employees.

1. Make time for small talk.

When managing remote employees, it's easy to just talk about what needs to get done and jump off your call, end your chat, and get back to executing. And in some cases, that's exactly what you should do; if you're on a tight deadline, fighting a fire, or just having a quick standup meeting that makes sense.

However, if that's all you do, you're really missing out on a critical part of management. *You must build rapport with every member of your team.* Rapport is what will help you work through problems. Rapport does not come from doing and talking about work. Rapport comes from getting to know them as a person. *Demonstrate that you care.*

2. Use video as much as you can.

Research shows more than half of human communication is nonverbal. When you don't get to see someone in the office every day, having any type of visual clue to what someone is thinking is essential.

Whether you're gauging their reaction to a change in plans, or just trying to judge their overall mood that day, video tells you way more than an audio-only call, or especially chat will ever reveal.

Most importantly, trust your instincts when you see something might be wrong. Ask in a call or make time to ask about it. Those non-verbal clues you see on video are your opportunity to fix problems when they're small for your remote employees.

3. Have longer one on ones.

Since you don't have all those moments in the office to build rapport and talk about issues ad hoc, make up for it by setting aside more time for your one on ones with your remote employees.

The best way to handle this is to give remote employees a dedicated time on your calendar for one on ones. This ensures you can cover a variety of topics and really dive into issues that aren't covered because they're not in the office for ad hoc discussions.

4. NEVER cancel a one on one.

One of the fastest ways to build resentment on your team is canceling one on ones.

Remote employees miss out on a lot of things going on in the office. They also miss out on the kinds of information that would naturally spread across an office related to other parts of the company and brief announcements.

One on ones provide an opportunity to make up for that as well as handle all the little things that build up over the course of a few days. With so much to cover, you simply cannot afford to miss one for these team members.

Pick a time that always works for you for your remote 1 on 1s and make them sacred on your calendar. If you absolutely must, **reschedule it, but never cancel.**

Tips for Motivating Remote Employees

When you want to motivate or congratulate a team member, if they're on-site all you need to do is walk over to their desk and let them know how awesome they are.

However, for remote workers, it's a little more difficult– and way less effective– to express the same kind of praise or motivational message through a one-line message in chat, text or email.

While motivating your remote team members is more difficult, there are things you can do—outside of regular one on ones— to let them know what a good job they're doing and motivate them to do their best.

Here are a few tips for motivating your remote employees:

1. Use the power of gifs

Chat, text and e-mail rob us of important auditory and visual cues that help us draw meaning from communication with another person. Unfortunately, while you might have regular one on ones, your main form of communication for your remote team members is probably e-mail or text.

Fortunately, your friend and visual communication tool the gif is here to help, filled with virtually any emotion you'd want to communicate. The right emoji can turn a simple "good job" into an enthusiastic singing of their praises that makes them smile and feel good the rest of the day.

2. Get creative with group gatherings

It's hard, if not impossible, to replace group gatherings for remote employees. However, if you get creative, there are things you can do to help them feel more included. You could try a synchronous lunch where each person joins from their computer at the same time and you enjoy lunch together or even a virtual coffee break.

Ultimately, it's up to your creativity. Experiment with what you think fits your team's culture and engage your team for ideas and feedback on what they like and don't like.

3. Set up a work plan

One of the best ways to offer consistent encouragement and motivation for your remote team members is to set up a plan with them during your regular one on ones.

By having regular one on ones with your remote team members and regularly supporting and checking in on their plans, you will keep them motivated to move forward with their work.

Information, challenges and tips taken from [Get Lighthouse, Forbes Coaches Council, Highfive](#)