

Managing remote workers

A guide for managers working with remote teams during Covid-19



“The coronavirus outbreak has become the world’s largest work-from-home experiment. It’s no longer a privilege. It’s a necessity”

Time Magazine, Feb 2020

Introduction

The current Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has made remote working and working from home the new 'norm'. As a result, many of you are finding yourselves in the unique position of managing a completely remote team for the first time ever.

Not only are our employees having to adjust, but as a manager you too will be becoming accustomed to managing 'from a distance'.

This guide has been put together to provide you with some useful information, tips and ideas to help you and your team work together to be successful when faced with a challenging environment.

It's important to remember that, as a manager, you also need to look after yourself during this time.

WorkplaceWellness™



We offer the Employee Assistance Programme specifically to support employees.

You can access these services via:

- Confidential telephone helpline: 0800 1116 387
- Online self-help EAP portal: www.my-eap.com



The NHS has created the [Every Mind Matters site](https://www.nhs.uk/everymindmatters) to help people manage their mental health.



[Mind](https://www.mind.org.uk) has a host of suggestions to help during Covid-19

Not all remote workers are the same



In your team you may have :

- New starters
- People who are used to working from home for years and are suddenly finding that everyone else is disturbing their established routine
- People living on their own who may now be feeling isolated and without social contact
- People living in a busy household and won't have their own working space, or a 'quiet place'
- Individuals working in close proximity with their partners, which will create new dynamics.
- Some people trying to manage working with children (and excitable pets!)



Find out about the individual circumstances for everyone in your team. This will help you to be flexible and to find the best rhythm.

70% of remote workers feel 'left out' of the workplace. (State of the Digital Workplace Report, 2019)

37% of Brits want stories about heartfelt human kindness. (Censuswide Media, March 2020)

36% of remote workers view their manager as the most informative and accurate channel. (Remotely Interested report, 2019)

44% of remote workers struggle to relax and unwind after work. (Cardiff University)

An opportunity to live our values



We all have to **trust** teams to work in a new way and they will be looking to you, as their manager, to keep them informed and updated during this time.



As a **responsible** employer, we are all adapting to a new way of working to ensure our focus remains on supporting our customers and communities. Reminding teams of this will keep the motivated as they adjust to this 'new normal'.



Teamwork and **collaboration** has never been so important. This is an opportunity to try new ways of connecting your team and with colleagues.



As a **progressive** business, IT have worked hard to support systems and technology. Now is the ideal time to try using them and see how they could improve ways of working.

Have regular check ins

Talk to your team on a daily basis – this can be on the phone, via email, chat or whatever channel works best for you and your team. Try to make at least one of your catch-ups a video call so you can all see each other – it helps make you feel more in touch as a team. Remember this is new for all of us, and we're all finding our way.

Make sure you have regular one-to-ones with each person in your team, this will give them the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns that they might not be comfortable bringing up on team calls.



Check in – don't check up



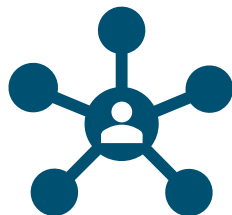
There's a big difference between checking in and checking up. The contact you have with your team shouldn't just be about work and what they're doing. Check they are okay, how they are adapting to the changes and if there is anything they need support with.

Even a simple question such as "How are you finding remote working?" could help an employee who might be struggling to speak up about their concerns or anxieties.



Some studies show that more than 10 days of quarantine will significantly increase stress and anxiety levels. (The Lancet, March 2020)

Establish the ‘rules of engagement’



Remote work becomes more efficient and satisfying when expectations are set for the frequency, means, and ideal timing of communication.

It can also help if you let your team know the best way and time to reach you during the workday.

E.g “later in the day is the best time to get in touch for ad hoc phone or video conversations, but if there’s an emergency earlier in the day, send me a text.”

You should also be clear on the different types of interactions and expectations for any catch-ups that you schedule.

Eg. “Our Monday morning video call will be a general check-in to find out how we all are, and your feelings about the week ahead. On Tuesday we’ll do out formal team meeting, which will include an agenda and actions.

It’s a good idea to agree and share some basic guidance and expectations for the more formal meetings, in the same was as you would for a face-to-face meeting.

Routine matters



Create routine and bring certainty to the day

When things feel uncertain, that has a negative impact on people’s ability to focus. Create certainties in the day by building in routine elements. This will keep people focused and productive.

This is not about micromanaging – this is about structure and support. It could be as simple as a 9.30am daily team conference call every, or a basic planner to help people structure their time.

Ramp up recognition



Keep people motivated and celebrate achievements

Boost morale. Make people feel their contribution is valued and seen. It can be hard to stay motivated without words of encouragement or the impromptu brainstorm we take for granted in an office environment.

Make a conscious effort to create those moments. You could round-up the day/week with what’s been achieved, and individual thanks.



Use Simply Recognise and encourage your team to celebrate work wins.

Keep communicating



Stay in contact with you team, even the ones who may seem like they're doing great.

One of the hardest things about working from home, especially if you're used to an office environment, is the sense of loneliness and isolation that can set in. That's especially true right now while we're on lockdown, so stay in touch with your team.

Not every contact has to be task related, it can be to ask for ideas, set a fun challenge for the day/week, or just to create a sense of office chatter that many people are missing right now. This type of approach will help maintain the team camaraderie and stop individuals feeling isolated.



You are human too! Don't hide any challenges you may be having with home working (such as balancing childcare) as it may open up the dialogue with someone who is unwilling to share.

Try new technology

As a manager, your job is to keep your team connected.

While email and text messages might be a short-term solution, tools like Microsoft Teams, and video calls are great for collaboration and communication. We've added some tips on how to use some of these tools at the end of this guide – or you can read them [here](#).

It's also always worth trying out the technology with one or two colleagues before one with the full team. Try accessing the technology to ensure it works, test the sound and picture and feel comfortable with how the software works.



Check with IT before trying something new to check that it's approved and in-line with our guidance.

Set goals



A clear set of goals and objectives can help employees who aren't used to remote working focus on their priorities.

Discuss these with your team to keep everyone accountable.

Make a working schedule that includes holidays, meetings and core working hours so you all know who is working and when.

Focus on outcomes – not activity



Instead of focusing on activity or hours worked, focus on the outcomes and what is being accomplished by individuals, and the team as a whole.

Be flexible



Understand that, especially in the current environment, your team has a lot going on.

That's not an excuse for not getting things done, but it is a reason to reconsider what productivity really means.

Regular work hours may not be an option for individuals who are trying to juggle home schooling with work.

Trust your team and give them the freedom and flexibility to get work done on a schedule that helps them be the most productive.



Why not agree core hours when everyone will be working (e.g. 10.00-12.00) and make these the times you schedule team calls.

Wellbeing



Support

Care for your people and they will pay it back in spades. During this time when people are feeling disconnected increase wellbeing support. Focus on being kind and reinforce a sense of community amongst you're team – we really are all in it together.



Have fun

Create some balance and break things up with fun! The media landscape is dominated by messages of fear and uncertainty. It's intense. Create a balance for your team. Break things up by creating moments of fun. It's good for everyone's sense of wellbeing.

Maybe it's a Friday team quiz, a themed video call or 'Through the Keyhole' showcasing people's homes? As long as it's fun, it doesn't matter.



Be an active listener and pay attention to behaviour

You have to try hard to listen when you're not physically located with your team. Make sure you create opportunities to talk, where your colleague does the talking and you do the listening in general.

Pay attention to what's going on. Has someone started turning the camera off on video calls? Are they working long or strange hours? Stopped picking up calls? If you notice anything out of the ordinary, give them a call and check they are ok.

Sitting comfortably

Setting up a comfortable area to work at is an important part of successful remote working. This guide will help you and your team replicate your work place desk, and ensure your equipment is set up in the right way to get you working as comfortably as possible . You can [find it here](#)

“Remote work is not a challenge to overcome. It’s a business advantage to achieve.”

**Fast company,
March 2020**

Support if it's needed

If you or someone in your team is anxious about Coronavirus and it is affecting your/their mental wellbeing, the Employee Assistance Programme is a free resource available to all employees.

Contact details:

Freephone - 0800 111 6387 From outside the UK:+44 845 330 5132(Calls will be charged but call-back can be requested)

Rehab Works Manager Helpline - 0800 1116 385 (for referring employees/general information)

Website:www.my-eap.com

South West Water/PWS & Pennon Organisation Code

SWWLwell Viridor – organisational code: VRM

Other useful resources include:

[Mind](#)

[Rethink](#)

[Samaritans](#)