

Success Series Guide to **MANAGING REMOTELY**

WHAT DOES MY TEAM NEED FROM ME RIGHT NOW?

Your team members need the same things they require in the office setting, along with a little extra consideration and coaching to address the new methods they're having to use to perform their work. Some things may not be done exactly the same way. Some processes may have to be completely redesigned. Recognizing this will help you give your team members the flexibility and adaptability needed as they build new ways to fulfill your mission.

⇒ **Establish a remote leadership team.**

Replace those in-person meetings with an established remote leadership team that has authority in the different areas of your team's mission. Explain their authority level and ensure that each member of this team knows everyone's areas of responsibility so they can avoid duplication of efforts or miscommunications that can result in conflict. Hold specific meetings with this group on a regular basis.

⇒ **Create a "final word" handbook to keep everyone up to date.**

In a time of crisis, rumors and misinformation can travel quickly. You can prevent those by creating a location where your team members can locate the latest information on everything from office openings and closings to the latest versions of documents that the team has been working on. And ensure that everything you create during this time has an "owner" whose responsibility is to update this information so it remains current.

⇒ **Set up formal and informal communications.**

Not everything is a meeting. Just like in the workplace, sometimes a simple conversation is all that's needed. Use those same leadership practices you employ in the office to determine what conversations need to be online meetings or emails and which ones can be a quick text, instant message, or a phone call.

⇒ **Create remote team guidelines.**

You have team guidelines in the office, ranging from who cleans out the refrigerator to who's in charge in fire drills. While the guidelines for a remote team deal with quite different matters, they are equally important. Allow your team members to meet and create a list of guidelines and responsibilities for this period. Getting their input helps ensure their buy-in.

⇒ **Survey employees to discover what's working and what's not.**

Put actions into place but don't assume these are working exactly the way you expect them to. Take the time to talk to your employees to see if the systems are working or if adjustments are needed. If your team members have found better ways to accomplish the same tasks, allow them to share those ideas. Not every great idea has to come from you.

- ⇒ **Adjust scheduling as needed, but ensure a block of time when the entire team is online.**
You'll probably want to be more lax in how your team members' schedules flow with such considerations as home-schooling and multiple family members using the same tech and connections. You also want to be sure that there are times when people know that they can reach each other. Scheduling specific office times when everyone is available can help avoid delays in projects and allow scheduling of full team meetings.
- ⇒ **Trust. Don't count keystrokes.**
There are programs out there that allow employers to track employee activity, right down to keystrokes. This is your opportunity to show trust by not using such tools. As employees learn to work in their new environment, build methods for accountability that are positive experiences, such as sharing victories, accomplished tasks, and other personal wins. These could be shared in meetings or via an online progress chart. These fulfill the need for accountability, but do not micromanage to the point of demotivating employees.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I COMMUNICATE? WHAT SHOULD I COMMUNICATE?

Communication looks different at a time like this, but the same rules apply. Create opportunities for formal and informal sharing of information. Create an open communication channel. Take your open-door policy online by setting hours when you are available. Ensure that any meeting you hold has a purpose and an agenda, and if there's no real need for it, don't hold it. Keep listening to your team to see if the communication practices you have in place are too much or too little.

- ⇒ **Ask the important questions: What have you accomplished? What are you working on? Where do you need help?**
These questions are intended to let your team members brag a bit, update you, and get help or answers on anything that they've encountered in their work. You don't have to ask these every time you talk to your employees, but these are the basics you want to track. They provide an understanding of where employees may need more assistance, as well as the answers you need for reports to higher levels of management.
- ⇒ **Embrace the webcam.**
The webcam is a challenge for many of us. We'd really rather not see our own faces staring back at us. However, as we've recognized, communication only in text or voice has more opportunities to be misunderstood. Practicing using the webcam regularly will make it more comfortable ... or at least a little less awkward!
- ⇒ **Schedule both regular meetings and informal gatherings.**
While regular meetings and reports are important, equally important are opportunities for informal gatherings. Online chats, post threads, and other non-work related gatherings can help to replace some of the socialization and companionship that was fulfilled in the office setting.
- ⇒ **Consider a virtual retreat.**
This is a good time to consider hosting a virtual retreat. Perhaps you could offer some special training or a fun online activity the team could do together. Maybe you just offer a session where everyone has a chance to share one challenge and one victory. Or possibly your team could play a game together. Find ways to connect and renew connections between your employees.

⇒ **Take a cue from your employees.**

Do they respond well to online meetings? Do you find that they seem more comfortable with one-on-one discussions via phone? These factors will determine which tools you use and how often. Be open to adjusting your schedule based upon their input and needs.

⇒ **Provide office hours.**

List specific times you will be “in your office” and available for phone calls, online chats, or whatever form of communication they are most comfortable with. You can even post a schedule where they can reserve spots ahead of time.

⇒ **Create teams.**

Create teams or accountability partners to help each other stay motivated and on track during this difficult time. Provide them with resources and an understanding of their authority level for any actions they might need to take.

⇒ **Don’t be all business.**

This is a time unlike one any of your employees have ever experienced. Being there to listen, sharing positive messages, and enjoying the lighter side of conversations will help to build stronger relationships with your employees and support them through this difficult time.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BEST TOOLS FOR FORMAL AND INFORMAL COMMUNICATIONS WITH MY TEAM?

Technology will be your friend in your virtual leadership role. You’ll want to check with your agency to pick platforms that are acceptable and confirm what kind of information can be shared on these platforms. Then you’ll need to narrow down this list to ensure there aren’t so many file locations that employees might miss vital information.

⇒ **Create a list of communication platforms.**

Consider providing a single chart that shows exactly where employees can find each kind of information—whether those be updates, documentation, meeting follow-up actions, motivating messages, or any other information you’re sharing during this period.

⇒ **Consider an informal messaging system.**

You might want to use chat on Webmail, GroupMe, Skype, or one of the other mobile apps that allow for instant communication. You can create different groups in these to allow faster communication with specific groups of employees. Of course, you can also use texting. It mainly depends on what your team is comfortable with and what your agency allows. Consider first what kind of information you want to share and then it will be easier to identify which systems will allow you to do that in the most user-friendly manner.

⇒ **Review the collaboration tools that are available to your department.**

If you have SharePoint and haven’t used it fully in the past, this could be a time to investigate its capabilities. If your department is allowed to use additional services such as Google Drive, Canvas, or other collaborative platforms, you can have your tech-savvy team members set up a system to house active project files.

⇒ **Present like you’re in person.**

No matter which tool you use, ensure that your meetings include visuals, handouts, discussion time, and all the features that make your traditional meetings effective. Every one of those features helps employees understand and retain the information you discuss.

HOW DO I TRACK PROGRESS TOWARD OUR GOALS?

Your team is still a unit with a mission and goals. With members of the workforce scattered in different locations, tracking progress on goals and projects takes on added importance in supporting your team's accountability. Here are a few actions that can help.

⇒ **Create documentation to show progress toward goals.**

With every person operating separately, it's easy to lose track of the big picture. Online documentation that shows what's been accomplished each week helps team members see that business is still moving forward and that their actions are making a difference.

⇒ **Consider short, fast goals.**

It's easier for remote employees to become disengaged with long-term projects because not everyone has the same level of self-motivation. To overcome this, consider incorporating some short term goals and celebrating their completion. These could be part of a long-term project or smaller independent tasks.

⇒ **Remember to assign authority and accountability.**

When you assign a leadership role to someone, you automatically assign the authority level also. But during this time, it is even more important to remember to assign accountability. In this way you can receive regular reports on current projects to ensure that the mission of the department is still being fulfilled.

⇒ **Create simple ways for team members to report their progress.**

It could be an email format with those three important questions: 1. What did you accomplish this week? 2. What are you going to work on next week? 3. What challenges do you need help with? Comments? Just make sure that your method of updates isn't overly time-consuming or complex. In that way, you get the results you need without the frustration that employees don't need.

WHAT DO I DO IF I RECOGNIZE THAT AN EMPLOYEE IS STRUGGLING?

Watch for the signs of frustration, distress, emotional upheaval, and the other conditions that may be a result of this situation. Notice if employees are having trouble adjusting to working outside the office. Ask employees to watch out for each other and offer assistance. This is a time when our teams can become not only work units, but support groups.

⇒ **Communicate.**

Ask questions to see if they're struggling. Offer assistance or just be available to listen as needed. And remember to keep up with all the available resources that have been set up to support mental health issues during this challenging period.

⇒ **Create a buddy system.**

Consider a buddy system of coworkers to keep each other engaged and connected as needed. For employees who are quarantined alone this can be even more important. These can include regular check-ins, motivational messages, or even projects for work or fun.

⇒ **Create systems.**

With the loss of the traditional workplace environment, some employees will find themselves at a loss of where to start, how to organize their days, and other activities that were automatic in the office. Help when needed by setting up systems and schedules for specific activities, check-in opportunities, and even informal chats to see where help is needed.

⇒ **Incorporate “good news” communication opportunities.**

Take time to communicate when there’s no work involved in the discussion. Share any good news and ask them to do the same. Maybe create a motivational phone video contest? A funny meme listing? Or a quarantine newsletter that invites input from your team members. This is a way to rediscover the positive side of life, even in a negative time.

HOW CAN I SHOW EMPATHY AND STILL BE A LEADER?

Even in this challenging situation, we still have to be responsible and accountable leaders. We have to manage people and functions just like we do in the office. But we also know that it’s not “business as usual.” How do we find the right mix of authority and empathy to lead our teams in these troubled times? Here are actions you’ll want to keep in mind.

⇒ **Take care of yourself and expect others to do the same.**

Model the behavior you want from employees by not sending emails or texts after hours unless necessary, by not expecting yourself to be at peak performance 24 hours a day, and by knowing that there will be times when you too need support. Take care of yourself physically and emotionally and encourage the same of all those who work with you.

⇒ **Identify where your team members are.**

For some team members, this is just a change of location. But for others, there are deeper, more emotional issues involved. Recognizing that your leadership style can’t be “one-size-fits-all” is more important now than ever before. Recognize which employees need extra support during this time and provide it—whether that is by asking what they need, assigning a partner, or providing resources that can help them.

⇒ **Provide a positive, consistent presence.**

While our current situation is not a positive one, it doesn’t mean our communications can’t be. Focus on what employees have control over and encourage them to build on those areas. Be available without micromanaging. Admit your fears and share how you are working to overcome them. Allow them to vent as needed, and then ensure that the conversation ends on a positive note.

Thank you for your leadership role in the State of Louisiana during this difficult time. It is because of you and your team that the State has been able to continue serving its citizens even in the face of this overwhelming challenge.

Stay home. Be safe. And stay connected for more information that will be coming your way from State Civil Service and your Talent Development Training Team.