

Managing remote teams

One challenge we all now share is keeping sight of the day to day when so much of the wider landscape is changing by the hour. Here are some practical tips and key questions for your teams over the next few weeks.

Managing for productivity

Talk about flexibility

If you can accommodate people moving their working hours around, now's the time. Encourage your team to think about how they draw a line between 'work' and 'life'. You can support by setting priorities, showing empathy, accommodating requests for changes to hours and reassuring your team that you trust them to do a great job – they don't need to 'prove' to you they are working!

Agree boundaries and best approaches

Ask your team how they'd like you to keep in touch, whether that's a daily call, Slack/WhatsApp messages each evening or a longer weekly chat. Facilitate a team discussion so that everyone is aware of each other's preferences. Make use of various signalling options like updating calendars or statuses, so teams can see at a glance whether people are available or not.

Pre-empt disruption

With children, partners, pets and more circulating at home while we're working, weird things will inevitably happen. Re-assure your team that you expect this, and it's ok if they need to work around it. Encourage people to share how they are managing their 'new colleagues'!

Managing communication

Get stakeholder management back on the table

Regular communication – in the kitchen, corridor, popping between desks – happens organically in the office, keeping projects moving and reducing misunderstandings. In the new world of WFH, listing the people who need to be kept in the loop for things you are working on, and quickly ticking each person off when something on your shared work changes, will generate the same results.

Mind 'the gap'

When working with your team, be conscious of 'the gap'. This is the bit between '*how are you*' and '*what do we need to do*', where unexplored issues surface and can be addressed. This often disappears under pressure and there are fewer opportunities for it to happen by chance when WFH.

All the feedback

Ever been in a meeting with your team, one of them knocks it out of the park and of course you congratulate them? You've probably been delivering little nuggets of feedback all the time, often without even realising. Now you're all WFH, consciously sharing feedback will reap rewards. Studies show high-performing teams share 6 good to every 1 constructive piece of feedback.

Managing wellbeing

Be human

It's tempting as a leader to try and be a pillar of strength for your team. It is important to keep positive. It's also ok to admit you're finding things tough too. Opening up about your vulnerabilities creates a safe space and builds trust, enabling your team to respond in kind. This will help you to help them with anything which is causing harm or reducing their ability to get things done.

Celebrate wins

Create your own positive news. Tough times bring out some of the greatest ideas and innovations, and can pull a team together like nothing else. Making space to celebrate some positives at the end of each day will help you and the team with your mental health too.

Managing work and life

Ask those with children at home what their ideal day would look like and start from there. Do a video call with the team where you share your home working space and one thing that gets you in the working groove each morning.

Lead by example and tell your team when you are working early or late, or taking time out, and update your calendar.

Be available and answer queries from your team quickly.

Revisit team and individual goals/objectives/priorities.

Hold team virtual coffee mornings or happy hours where work is not on the agenda.

Video calls>phone calls>instant messages>emails.

Encourage people in the team to check-in with each other on how they're doing.

More calls than emails or messages between you and the team and within the team.

Highlight mental health first aiders and how they can be contacted.

Questions for your team:

- How are you feeling about the shift to home working? Is there anything I can do to make it easier?
- How are you finding getting focussed at home? Would it help if we re-visited our objectives/priorities to make sure they're still relevant?
- Are there enough opportunities for us to connect as a team?
- Who are the main people that are involved with what you are working on? Can you split them into 'for info' or 'for input'? Have you agreed how you can keep them and your clients informed while we're out of the office?
- What are your favourite things you're working on at the moment? What is it about those you've enjoyed?
- What wins have you had in the last week? What wins are you aiming for in the week to come?