

## 6 principles for managing a remote workforce

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As Coronavirus spreads through our communities, organisations are rightly encouraging their people to work from home wherever possible.

Although it is easier to work remotely today than ever before, a rapid transition will likely to come with teething issues.

For many organisations, working from home has long been a case of out of sight, out of mind. Many organisations have resisted working from home, and many leaders may soon find themselves in unfamiliar territory.

Here are 6 things you can do to maintain performance in a remote workforce:

### 1. Regular, scheduled contact

Even the most autonomous among us need to stay connected to contribute to a team.

If you're a manager, that might look like checking in with each of your staff by phone or email every morning to clarify the goals for the day. Making the effort to regularly clarify mutual expectations will also help remind staff you have them in mind, and they are no less valued than when they were working in an office.

This might seem straightforward, but when urgent matters crop up, and they will over the coming months, routine contact is often the first thing we put off. In a virtual team, it takes effort and discipline to maintain regular contact with everyone, and it should not be de-prioritised.

### 2. Structure clear goals and lifelines

I'm coining the term lifelines here. They're like a deadline, but instead of waiting until the end of a project, report, or deliverable, they're pre-planned milestones where you check in with staff, peers, and stakeholders to confirm things are progressing on track. Structure clear goals and lifelines to check in early, and often, so everyone can agree on the next steps, including when the next lifeline will be. Think of these as mini SMART goals.

Not being in the same office removes a tremendous amount of opportunity for communication and clarification. Without regularly making sure everyone is on the same page, and meeting their commitments, the risk of things derailing is much greater.

### 3. Create a strong sense of value

As my colleague and Behavioural Economist Isaac Baker will tell you, losses loom larger than gains. We've already seen organisations telling their people that everyone needs to 'pitch in' to get through this period. This isn't a particularly hopeful or idealistic way to build a sense of value for the team. It's raw. It's real. Without everyone genuinely giving their best, it's likely your organisation will have an even tougher time



weathering the economic storm we look to be entering. Reiterating everyone's value in this time will be solidifying, and certainly helps keep the focus.

But that's not all. If we don't hold a strong sense of 'why' we're doing our work, we tend to be much less effective. If you have the sense that some of your staff don't value the team or the work as much as others, it's time you had a courageous conversation with them about what really motivates them, and how together you can work toward building more of that into their work lives. If you have found yourself questioning how much your employees valued the team or the work before, it will become a much bigger problem when they start working remotely.

#### **4. Maintain strong psychological safety**

In tough times, it's important people feel as though they can be honest about their concerns and challenges. How comfortable they are to be open about these things has a lot to do with trust. Namely, trust that their concerns will be taken seriously, not disadvantage them, and help or support will be offered where possible. We call this sense of trust in openness psychological safety. You can maintain a strong sense of psychological safety by sharing some of your own concerns. Invite others to do the same. Actively show support for those that do share their concerns. You don't have to do it openly in a team meeting or by 'replying all' to an email. Saying "some people have expressed concern that..." should suffice.

Be warned though, if you there is a low trust culture in your team, building strong psychological safety will be an uphill battle.

#### **5. Embrace flexibility, with boundaries**

As hard as these times are, this is an opportunity for you to ease in to the transition and for you and your staff to exercise some of the benefits of working from home together. This could mean your staff can spend more time with their kids while they don't have to commute, or tweak their schedule to make it to mixed netball on Wednesdays.

But working from home for many can be a blessing and a curse. Working from home also comes with a well stocked fridge and pantry, a constant reminder of chores to be done, and unchecked access to social media. It is undeniable that people differ in their ability to self manage and avoid distractions.

For those new to working from home, don't be afraid to ask how they're finding the transition. How much flexibility they can be afforded will differ based on the needs of your team and whether they're meeting expectations. If they're struggling with focus, there are plenty of strategies that can put in place to keep things on track and reduce distractions. The first step is awareness.

#### **6. Share stories and foster a sense of connectivity**

As a leader, part of your job is to keep your people connected to the bigger picture. While your office and broader community constantly revisit how best to mitigate the impact of Coronavirus, it will be important that your people have a trusted voice that can translate what the situation means for them.

But don't forget that Coronavirus shouldn't be the focus of all communications. Internal changes, outcomes of important meetings, promotions, retirements, success stories, and so on, are all important elements that help keep people feeling connected even from far away.



Of course, this was important when you were in the same office, except now you will have to work harder for it, and can't rely on verbal updates or your team passing the news around. It's on you to keep everyone up to date.

### **Connect with us...**

If you would like to discuss remote work and your organisation, you can reach Jason Wessel [here](#).

Alternatively, [contact us](#) today and one of our consultants will be in touch ASAP.