

Keeping employees productive from a distance

There are a number of things you can do to make it easier, especially for those employees where remote working just isn't a good fit, or they now have to use unfamiliar online tools to manage their work. You'll need to spend more time helping them adjust and remain productive.

Set clear expectations

Outline what you want employees to do from home and 'how this will work'. Still encourage face-to-face contact. This can be achieved through video conferencing apps to keep the human aspect intact and replicate the 'chat around the coffee machine or water cooler'. One of the fears for some employees not used to remote working is social isolation. Make clear your plans on regular face time (and one-on-one calls).

- Set up a shareable daily work log your remote workers can use to report their progress on ongoing projects (Google Drive offers some good options).
- Utilize a project management system to exchange messages, assign tasks and monitor projects rather than relying solely on email.
- Determine key indicators for success for each remote worker and share these indicators with your employees (these might be daily, weekly or monthly goals).
- Conduct regular reviews with remote workers to assess their performance.
- Help employees set aside work time (switch off the email, tell the family to not interrupt) so they're not forever distracted.

Give them the right tools

It makes sense to set up (and maybe pay for) your employees with internet access and the right desk and chair to maintain any health and safety regulations. Also provide the right software tools to be productive:

- Use Miro to create virtual whiteboards so you can still collaborate and brainstorm together. Another option is Mural (there are lots of others).
- Try Trello, Basecamp or Asana to allocate tasks to each employee and track progress.
- Allocate one person inside your business to sort out any tech issues
- Enable online video calling with Skype for Business or Zoom.
- Run webinars with GoToMeeting or Webex.
- Create a single area for all documents such as Box, Google Drive, Dropbox or Microsoft OneDrive.

Also, help employees how to manage with multiple people at home (they may be competing for the kitchen table for laptop space or needing to look after children).

Take time to connect

Set aside a few moments each day for each employee (or delegate to managers if not practical yourself) to inquire about families, personal interests, recent challenges and successes.

- If you can create support pods of 5-10 people who have a 10-minute catch up first thing and regular times to report or touch base.
- Consider pairing up remote workers to complete complex tasks. You'll improve efficiency while helping them remain part of the team.
- Run a number of training sessions online for anyone unsure how to use the technology.

Finally consider hosting a virtual movie night with Kast or Netflix Party or suggest online exercise apps such as Strava, Peloton, or Aptive.

Replicate the work environment

- Be able to see if employees are 'in' the office and have instant chat with Slack or Microsoft Teams.
- Let employees know who their first point of contact is so you're not swamped with simple queries or alternatively employees who don't feel like they can ask for help and are drowning.
- Keep regular social events on the calendar. You may not be able to catch up on Friday afternoons for drinks in person, but you can still organize regular catch-ups online.
- Create a virtual area where people can chat and swap stories (within reason) like Google Hangouts or grab a virtual coffee and donut.
- Encourage screen sharing to work together on projects.

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