

# TIP SHEET: MANAGING A TEAM REMOTELY DURING COVID-19

No matter the industry or size of business, almost everyone's approach to work has changed in some fashion, due to coronavirus (COVID-19) shelter-in-place requirements, quarantines and social distancing guidelines. Here are some tips to help you lead your employees while social distancing.

## ADJUST YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Under these difficult circumstances, it is simply not possible for your team members to approach their work as 'business as usual.' This reality makes it important to modify your overall expectations.

Continue to clarify and then re-clarify team goals and roles. Look for flexibility in your workflow and ways to adapt processes. Seek regular input from team members as they adjust to accomplish tasks in isolation. Focus on your team's final product, rather than how they complete it.

## LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Everyone – including you – is anxious, uncertain or worried to some extent about the COVID's continued impact. However, it is true that both fear and confidence are contagious. Whenever possible, demonstrate to your team that you are hopeful and can provide assurance. Modeling positivity will help your team members feel more secure.

While working remotely or from home, both you and your employees will be impacted by uncontrollable situations such as internet instability, dropped phone connections, child care responsibilities or other interruptions. If you expect the unexpected, you'll be prepared to offer the patience and understanding team members need when issues arise.

## BE TRANSPARENT

Recurring updates, ideally via a video conference platform if available, are vital for your entire team. Whether there is plenty of news or very little, sharing what information you can shows transparency and keeps members from feeling out of the loop. You can also use this time to ask participants to offer 'working remotely' best practices or challenges, to proactively address issues.

## COMMUNICATE OFTEN

Be intentional about brief but regular individual communication with every team member. Utilize instant messaging services and/or daily emails to stay in contact. Schedule regular check-ins every few days or weekly. These interactions can help keep your employees engaged and motivated.

## PARTNER UP

Despite your best efforts, it can be difficult to help or meet everyone's needs. Consider implementing a 'buddy system,' where team members are assigned a colleague to act as an additional layer of support – both work-related and emotionally. Encourage team members to

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use these partnerships to share and get feedback about their work efforts, attempt to address issues that arise, and generally to connect and socialize. Using a buddy system can help preserve your time for strategy and issues with greater impact.

## **SUPPORT CONTINUED LEARNING**

Give everyone the option to submit cross-training or continuing education topics they would like to discuss during team updates. Then have an appropriate team member develop and deliver a 5-minute 'lesson' each week. Your team can continue learning new skills, tools and processes while working remotely.

## **MONITOR, MONITOR, MONITOR**

Your team members need to know that your chief concern is their wellbeing. Periodically monitor their engagement by asking each individual during your 'check-ins' what worries they may have and encourage them to share concerns at any time.

## **READ BETWEEN THE LINES**

Watch for subtle clues that may indicate a team member is struggling and needs support. Keep an eye out for:

- Changes in tone, whether written or verbal
- Vocal inflections
- The rate at which a person speaks
- The frequency (or lack thereof) in communication.

If a team member shares concerns or you notice any of changes in a team member's demeanor, be sure to discuss what forms of additional support are available.

*Source: Harvard Business Review, 8 Ways to Manage Your Team While Social Distancing*