

Let's Talk: Tips for managing work at home employees

Presenter – Angela Bell, Communications Manager

Hi, I'm Angee Bell. Let's talk about managing remote employees. Did you know that 3.9 million U.S. employees or 2.9% of the U.S. workforce work from home?¹ That's quite a lot of employees and some of them could be your employees. It can be really challenging when you first start managing a remote team or remote employees. And it's really important to keep a few key points in mind so that you can stay connected with your work at home employees.

Establish a relationship

When you first start out it's important to set clear expectations with your employee. This is gonna help them understand their day-to-day and their week-to-week, it's gonna help them prioritize their work and understand the goals of their role. Additionally, it's good to have a conversation with them so that you can better know their daily life habits as well as their work habits and their career goals. For example, do they have children? Do they have kids they gotta pick up from school? Do they have pets that have special needs or need to be walked a few times a day? Do they have a workout routine? You also want to check in with their career goals. Are they building a development plan? Do they have a five-year plan yet? Getting to know your employee and having these conversations is really going to help you understand where they're coming from.

Communication routine

It's important to establish checkpoints with your employee. This could be one on one's, scheduled maybe weekly perhaps bi-weekly. Whatever works for you, so long as you're checking in with your employee on a regular basis. You also want to make sure that remote workers are included in any on-site events. Maybe there's food brought in to celebrate a team success or a special leader is coming to give a presentation. You want to make sure you extend those invitations to the work at home employees so they have the option to come in and also be a part of that. It's also good to make sure you're sharing any company news. Maybe there's something that would be communicated within the office that a work at home employee may not have the opportunity to see. Perhaps there is a bulletin board and something is pinned up on the bulletin board. Or maybe there's an interoffice memo that's printed out and passed around. It's good to make sure that that work at home employee is getting that communication as well.

Tone and words

You're going to find when you're communicating with work at home employees often it's going to be over the phone and you lose the advantage of body language. Body language really tells a lot about what a person is saying. It helps to exemplify an expression. So you want to make that sure that the tone you're using is correct for the message that you're sending. Additionally, when you're emailing or instant messaging someone, it's important to find the right balance in your message. You don't want to type in all capitals that often can be portrayed as yelling. You also want to avoid sarcasm or jokes as they're often easily misunderstood. It's important to find a right balance and professional email style.

Technology needs

Remote employees will typically have special technology needs. So you want to make sure that they have the right equipment to do their job. This may consist of a headset, so they can have hands-free conversations. If they're required to print things they will probably need to have a printer. As well as if they're printing anything confidential they'll need a locking file cabinet. Additionally, if they have a laptop you're going to want to provide a docking station. They may need a mouse, keyboard. It's also good to have a monitor or maybe even two monitors to have a dual monitor situation. Webcams also can be a really cool tool to help you connect and communicate with your employees. It could be nice to see a face and communicate when you're having your one on one meetings. Additionally, your employees might have special needs around software. This could be instant messaging tools. Maybe they need online connection tools. They'll also possibly have needs for specialty programs or software. It can be kind of challenging when you're trying to install those programs online, over the network. So it's good to have their computers set up and ready to go with the right programs before they start working from home.

Employee engagement

A common theme among work at home employees is that they start to feel disconnected from the rest of the team and the rest of the company. As a manager, it's important to find ways to help them feel connected and engaged. Your company may have an employee engagement team they could join and help with those activities or a culture team. Perhaps there's an internal newsletter that your employee could join. That way they'll also stay connected with people in other departments. Additionally, it's a great idea to connect them directly with other employees on your team so they can work on different projects. This is really going to help grow that team morale, that team spirit and help them bond with their teammates. It'll also help them feel connected and more like part of the team.

Team on-site meetings

It can be a really good idea to have team on-site meetings perhaps once a year, maybe even twice a year if you're able to. This is where you all meet in person, perhaps at a corporate location, maybe a restaurant, maybe even a park and have a spring picnic. You could also have a holiday party. It's a good idea to have a couple of team builders in mind to help build that teamwork and collaboration within the team. This is really going to allow the team to interact on a social level and build relationships, which is going to go a long way for your work at home employees. Additionally, this is a great opportunity to reinforce the team's mission and goals and celebrate successes.

Recognition

It can be easy to forget to recognize the accomplishments that your work at home employees are doing. They also may not feel that their work is visible since they're not in the office. It's easy to recognize an employee if you see them walking down the hall and remember something that they did that was a really good job, pat them on the back and say, "good job." However, when you don't have that line of sight, it can be a lot harder to remember to recognize those employees. Find different ways that your company may offer. They might have a recognition program. Perhaps they have e-thank you notes that you can send your work at home employees. This is really going to help the employee feel more connected and improve their professional development by highlighting their work.

Plan for success

A remote employee is just as important as your employees in the office. Keeping communication lines open, providing opportunities, giving them the right tools to do their job and recognizing their work will go a long way in helping your employees feel connected and engaged.

¹ [The 2017 state of telecommuting in the U.S. employee workforce](#). Flexjobs. Accessed August 2018.

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