

# Tips for Managers: Managing Remote Employees

## Our Employees' Health, Safety and Wellbeing are our #1 Priority

- Please complete the attached **Work from Home Safety Assessment** with your employees as soon as reasonably possible.

## CREATE A POSITIVE REMOTE WORK CULTURE

### Be Flexible

Be mindful of the fact that your employees might be managing multiple priorities at home. Some employees will have children at home, others will have a spouse or roommate who is also working from home, and some employees could be very isolated in their home environment. As a manager, you need to be flexible with your expectations with reference to employee productivity, the hours your employees will be working, and any additional stressors they may be facing.

### Be Patient

With a large number of GNWT employees working from home, be prepared for a transition period. As a manager, you need to be patient as things are not going to run as smoothly as you may be used to. Your employees may be working odd hours, or may have varying access to resources at home, such as limited internet access or internet speeds, limited or no access to VPN, different programs or applications on their home devices, etc.

### Continue to Check In Normally with your Employees

It is important that, though work may not be progressing at the same pace as usual, you maintain regular contact with your employees.

- It is important to keep your employees' wellbeing and mental health at top of mind, even when they are working remotely. Ask them how they are doing, coping with the situation, handling multiple priorities.
- Have longer one-on-ones so that you have time to continue to build rapport with your employees.

## CHALLENGES OF REMOTE WORK

### Loneliness and Isolation

Prolonged isolation can impact employees' mental health, in extreme cases leading to things like anxiety and depression. As a manager, you need to be aware of this. Do what you can to engage with your employees whenever possible. Also, encourage employees to connect with friends and family on their down time (by phone or video call), or to get out of the house for a walk and some fresh air (as long as such advice does not contradict the recommendations of the NWT Chief Public Health Officer).

### Communication Issues

Be aware that with an absence of body language and facial cues, and even oral cues (like tone of voice), employees are more likely to assume negative intent when you say something that could be perceived as "threatening" (such as when you offer a critique, feedback, ask a question, etc.), and the same goes for you.

Without any of the non-verbal cues to discern intent from what we see and hear, communication issues can easily arise. Try to resolve long email back-and-forths with a phone call.

### Work-Life Balance

It might be extremely difficult for employees to separate work and life when they are working remotely. With no commute to separate work time and personal time and no requirement for professional attire when working remotely, employees may struggle to separate their work from their home lives.

## STRATEGIES AND TOOLS FOR MANAGING REMOTE EMPLOYEES

The following list of strategies and tools is a general list and is, by no means, exhaustive. Make sure to take into account the nature of your work and the realities that your team faces when implementing any of the suggested strategies or tools.

### Use Phone Calls (or video calls and screen sharing, where secure means are available)

- Video conferencing allows employees to be more present, especially during team meetings
- Using video calls for 1:1 meetings helps you to engage better with your remote employees. It becomes easier to check on their mental health and wellbeing when you are having discussions face to face
- Some conferencing platforms allow screen sharing (ex. Zoom and GoToMeeting)

### Be Responsive and Available

- Try to avoid lags in communication when answering questions from your employees
- Set out clear expectations with employees around communication, and priorities while employees are working from home

### Check in Frequently and Regularly

- Daily stand-ups: Set up a morning check-in with your employees so you can see how they are coping and set priorities and you gear up for the day ahead
- Weekly/bi-weekly one-on-one meetings: Make sure to schedule times to check in to each of your direct reports individually

### Be Strategic in your Communications

- Set guidelines with your employees about daily needs: Some people work better with a shopping list of questions and thoughts while others like a trickle
- Having appropriate communication with employees on urgent tasks will ensure all employees are working with the same priorities.

### Stay Focused on Goals Not Activity

- It is important to manage expectations and stay focused on goals when embracing a remote workforce
- Don't worry as much about what is being done. Instead, concentrate on what is being accomplished

### Keep Employee Recognition Top-of-Mind

- Make sure you are actively recognizing the efforts your employees are putting in while working remotely
- Train your employees to give recognition to others they are working with

### Ask for Feedback

- Ask your employees how they are coping with working remotely, and what you can do to help
- Some employees might require more coaching as they adapt to working remotely, where others might find that frequent check-ins disrupt their flow