



Managers Guide: Managing wellbeing for remote workers

Many organisations are adopting a hybrid or remote working approach

Discover how you can better support your teams to combat loneliness and isolation.

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Almost half (48%) of UK employed adults who don't normally work from home say their employer has introduced flexible working arrangements on a permanent basis since the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a leader, it is your responsibility to motivate, inspire and engage your team. With people working remotely, this can present challenges for both you and your team.

Use this guide to learn more about the changes to working and how you can nurture and maintain a focus on positive ways of working and the wellbeing of your colleagues.



Remote vs Hybrid Working

Despite their subtle differences, remote and hybrid working approaches require the same amount of effort and organisation to achieve effective collaboration and teamwork.

Whilst hybrid working offers employees flexibility with a regular combination of time in the workplace and time working from home, full remote working means that employees carry out all their work from their own home, so will very rarely visit the workplace or see their colleagues in person.

Working from home can bring many benefits, with increased flexibility to balance work and life outside of work, time and money saved without the daily commute to work, etc... It also brings challenges for the employee as boundaries between work and home life become blurred; or negative wellbeing such as feelings of isolation, loneliness, anxiety, stress and depression can be intensified.

Managing a remote team with a focus on wellbeing is a challenge that requires very careful consideration.

Remote managing challenges

As more people accept the offer of spending more time away from the workplace, there is an increase of challenges when it comes to managing teams:

- Lacking the right communication tools
- Respecting everyone's time
- No clear roles and tasks
- Work-life balance issues
- Difficult tracking employee performance
- Making everyone feel valued and included
- Loneliness and isolation
- Disengagement
- Difficult to share information, skills and ideas
- Lack of personal team interaction

It's important that we acknowledge and accept these challenges, stopping to take time to consider how you can overcome them as a team. Consider some of the issues you might be facing as a remote manager and/or employee right now...



3 C's of remote leadership



CLARITY

Transitioning to a remote environment requires clarification of boundaries and guidelines. As a minimum, leaders should assist employees in defining their availability, when they will work, how they can be contacted and how they will address challenges that come with remote working. Change is a great time to set new and measurable metrics of success. Setting team goals will ensure the team is focused on what is being accomplished. Leaders should take time to re-clarify goals and roles so that each person understands team objectives, their individual role and how they contribute to the desired outcomes.

Communication is essential for a remote working team. Perhaps the most successful leaders are those who reach out often, are good listeners, communicate with trust and respect, check in about workload and progress, while avoiding overcommunication. Avoid micromanagement by allowing employees to take ownership of their own behaviours and habits. It is key that leaders recognise their own flaws and patterns, ensuring they communicate across the team fairly. It is recommended you have a visual representation of the team so that you can ask yourself when you last checked in with each person. Ensure you have regular touch points with everybody.



COMMUNICATION



CONNECTION

Remote leaders should place an emphasis on connection. Perhaps one of the biggest negatives of working away from the workplace is that employees are more likely to feel lonely and disconnected, thus lowering productivity and engagement. Leaders who have the benefit of teams working together before COVID-19 will have a personal foundation to build connections upon. According to Google research, the most effective way to establish connection is to take a few minutes before video calls to ask genuine, open-ended questions. It's important that people maintain those informal, light-hearted and fun connections with colleagues.



Virtual leadership styles

Experts say remote work will continue even after the pandemic restrictions are lifted. From our recent research, 80% of people would like to see some form of remote working permanently introduced in their jobs.

There are a number of different virtual leadership styles you could adopt to help guide your workforce:



Participative Leadership

Known as the democratic style, these leaders encourage their team to participate in goal setting, decision making, planning, and other business activities. Participative leaders lead by example and encourage creative solutions, earning the trust of their teams, establishing morale, and minimising excessive and harmful competition. They are known for their commitment to teamwork and drive to achieve results.



Transformative Leadership

Leading with a sense of purpose, these leaders set the vision for organisations with a focus on positive change. Transformative leaders inspire others to action by leading by example. They use their charisma to set a positive tone, encourage buy-in and create a culture of trust and innovation.



Situational Leadership

A situational leadership approach suggests that no single leadership style is ideal for every situation. It focuses on adaptability, recognising that each situation requires a different leadership style. The ability to adjust to different personalities is core to this leadership style. Common traits include flexibility, self-awareness, and sociability. Situational leaders adjust to the evolving needs of people and processes.



Servant Leadership

This leader inspires the progress, development, and well-being of the people they lead, promoting mutual respect, honesty, and teamwork. Servant leaders drive decision-making using collaborative methods. Typical servant leader traits include good listening, commitment to employee growth, empathy, caring, and self-awareness. Active listening helps them build healthy team relationships.

Top 10 tips for managing remote teams

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Set Expectations Early and Clearly - Being clear with employees will keep them focussed working on the same goals. You should set clear expectations for: work hours, availability, communicating, meetings, key projects, and deadlines, and responding to emails.

Give help when needed - Being out of sight makes it harder to address employee needs. Unexpected problems arise in every team, and it is important to read when a team member might be needing support with a work or personal issue. Understand the clues they might be giving you and give them a helping hand.

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Show the big picture but be flexible - Remind your team about the big picture and how their work fits into it. Review short-term goals regularly and adjust as needed. If some members can't carry out all their usual work, consider other skills they can lend to others to meet team goals.

Trust your team - Be clear about mutual expectations and trust your team to get on without micromanaging. Focus on results rather than activity, trusting your team to do a good job on the task at hand will make them feel empowered.

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Nurture interaction - It's essential that people still feel connected. You should find a rhythm of 1-2-1 meetings, team meetings and virtual huddles, making time for social conversations is key for employee wellbeing. It doesn't need to be long, but regularity is vital, this will increase rapport and reduce feelings of isolation.

Listen closely and read between the lines - Not being in the same room means you don't have extra information from body language or tone to get the sense of what people are thinking or feeling, particularly in more difficult conversations. Focus on what's not being said and ask questions to clarify your interpretation

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Tailor your feedback and communications - People can be more sensitive if they're feeling isolated or anxious, so take this into account when talking or writing. Communicate regularly, not just when things go wrong, whether it is information, praise, or criticism.

Delivery above activity - In the context of remote work, the workplace and the home are no longer easy to separate. Therefore, it is essential to focus on what is delivered, and the quality of the work being produced, instead of the amount of time an individual spends sitting at their desk.

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Include Physical Meetings - Working remotely does not mean that people can never physically meet. It may be that once a quarter people gather in person, this strengthens team relationships, is less costly for the business and gives people a change of routine which can be good for their mental health.

Correctly equipped - Ensure team members have the correct work environment to work from home including an appropriate chair, desk, screen monitor etc. This includes any coaching they might need to use online systems or work remotely. Keep your calendar visible and maintain a virtual open door.

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People will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget
how you made them feel.”

-Maya Angelou

Hybrid/Remote Working

Things for us all to remember



Take regular breaks away from your desk to help replace the water cooler/coffee machine chats you would have in the workplace.

#OurTip: Introduce mindfulness into your day by getting out for a walk to boost both your mental & physical wellbeing and always take a lunch break!



Try and use video calls rather than phone calls so you can see the people you're talking to to spot any signs of a colleague experiencing mental health issues.

#OurTip: ask open questions and use this as a chance to develop your listening skills.



Protect and respect time in diaries to focus on work or take a break. Avoid the temptation, which comes with virtual meetings, is to just find and book a free slot in someone's calendar.

#OurTip: book focus times and lunch breaks into your calendar to ensure that you don't find yourself on a call or meeting at this time



Combine physical meetings with socialising, whether that's having a 1:1 meeting outside of the workplace or organising a social event with the team, away from work.

#OurTip: Take fun seriously! Make sure work is enjoyable and taking time as a team to do something away from work will drive motivation and results.