The Director of Page Personnel Hong Kong on the best ways to manage a team from anywhere in the world

How to manage a team remotely

No matter how high-tech your setup is, managing a remote team is no easy feat. As companies worldwide continue to provide work from home (WFH) measures due to COVID-19-related lockdowns and quarantines, they should bear in mind that there are practical ways to minimize these issues. Ultimately, being aware of them and implementing solid processes will allow you to get the best out of your team – wherever they may be.

Here are the key considerations when managing a remote team:

Set clear expectations from the start

Don't assume that you are all on the same page. No matter how well your team works – both in the physical workplace, offsite or at home – it's incredibly important to set out expectations clearly from the start so that everyone is working towards the same objective. It's equally important to revisit these expectations on a regular basis to address any doubts around what each member needs to be focusing on. If anything, over-communicating (without overdoing it) is necessary.

Your expectations should also include how often your team should be meeting. This could include a daily morning virtual call, for example, to planning and afternoons to discuss goals. Without having this in place, your team will get sidetracked and lose accountability with no day-to-day structure.

Be transparent

Some of your team members might not like working offsite or from home. Reach out or check in on them a bit more regularly to help them settle in better and offer some tips that have helped you. These small gestures can make the biggest difference.

On the other hand, team members who don't mind working from home may find that they are struggling due to not knowing when the lockdown period will end, or they aren't used to such a long WFH scenario. Again, provide reassurance by sharing that even as their manager, you are in the same boat. Be honest and communicate that no one expects the WFH environment to work perfectly. Tech issues, family priorities and other factors are bound to impact their usual work structure.

Don't hesitate to check on progress

In a physical work setting, it's easy to get a sense of how your team is performing, as they have the opportunity to provide you with updates at any given time during the day. But even with virtual calls, some updates can be missed and the frequency of your meetings may not be enough to give you a real idea of everyone's performance. Remember that this is not about micro-managing, but ensuring the dialogue is open and that you have a transparent view of your team's activities and outcomes.

Drive inclusion

Don't underestimate the power of inclusion in times like these, and its role when maintaining an efficient team. While it may be hard to pinpoint what exactly contributes to inclusion, everyone knows what it's like when it's missing.

Whether or not your team has a great dynamic, feeling like you're part of a team will have its challenges while we're all separated and communicating virtually. Find opportunities to be more inclusive in your team calls, emails and chats by including all team members in your communications. Be a good moderator by considering each personality in your team and paying attention to when someone needs to feel more included. It is important to maintain team morale and present the team with values and expectations articulately. By providing team members with a sense of belonging, people identify with the purpose of their role better even when they are working remotely.

Celebrate wins and team updates

Telling your team members they've done a good job virtually may be more difficult versus when we do it in passing at the office. Use regular virtual video calls to celebrate each team member's efforts and achievements, and collate these acknowledgements in an email so everyone has a record of it. Sending out email updates to call out any significant calendar dates such as birthdays or work anniversaries for example, is a great way to acknowledge events that you would have otherwise celebrated together, face-to-face as a team.

Respect your team's time

Just because we're all working from home doesn't mean managers get 24/7 access to team members. If there's an urgent request, inform your team in the most effective way (usually a text message that they'll see immediately) rather than assuming that your email will be read at 9 p.m.

Some of your team may even need to adjust their WFH hours or finish at a certain time due to other commitments, just as they did when working from the office. Be considerate of this. Ensure you've communicated this from the start and check which team members are on board should additional hours be required. If they do step up and go above and beyond, ensure they are adequately praised and recognized.