

## Managing at a Distance – The New World of Work



The COVID pandemic led to a seismic shift in the way organizations managed their workforce. Early on in the pandemic, many people felt isolated as companies pivoted to a work-from-home workday. Some employees adapted naturally to this change, while others struggled without daily in-person interaction.

Years later, it's clear that hybrid or remote work is here to stay. According to a new [survey](#) by LinkedIn Corp., more than half (58 percent) of Canadian employees say they prefer to work in a hybrid environment (33 percent) or fully remotely (25 percent). Yet the pivot to remote work changed the way employees expected to be managed. They wanted their managers to be present and hands-on without being overly intrusive.

In the early stages of the pandemic, a [Harvard survey](#) found that 40% of leaders were unprepared to manage remote employees, and 41% struggled to keep their remote team members engaged. Only 40% of employees working from home reported feeling supported by their superiors.

Given that the switch to remote work has changed the way people interact and expect to be managed, what is the best way to manage remote teams?

***Here are 6 best practices to be sure your employees stay productive and engaged:***

### **Establish Clear Communication Channels**

Set clear expectations as to when and how often to communicate. Keep the team aligned through weekly or daily check-ins. Remember – everyone is different and some employees might need more support. Use the right tools and establish the rules of

engagement to ensure everyone knows the right platform to use for a particular need. Clarify expectations. Be sure every team member is aware of their specific goals, deadlines and responsibilities.

### **Build Trust**

It sounds simple, but the best way to build trust is to set expectations then let employees go ahead and do their job. Trust that they'll do their job without having to micromanage them. Set expectations and define what success will look like for each role. Encourage team members to make decisions on their own to foster a sense of independence. A leader who is present (but not overly so) is able to generate better organizational outcomes and foster greater employee engagement in a virtual environment.

### **Monitor and Measure Performance**

Use KPI's to track progress and provide regular formal and informal feedback. Be sure employees know where they stand and how they can improve. Everyone on the team needs to understand what needs to be done, when it needs to be done and by whom. Focus on the outcomes and set accountabilities so employees feel they have a sense of ownership in overall company success.

### **Promote Work-Life Balance**

Be flexible with employee needs to encourage well-being. If someone needs to leave at 3:30 to pick up their kids, then provide that option as long as the work gets done. Encourage employees to structure their workday around their most productive times while ensuring they are still able to meet deadlines. Promote employee breaks throughout the day whether they be virtual or personal. Who hasn't experienced a virtual company social event meant to build camaraderie?

Set up an internal informal "buddy" system so employees can reach out to fellow co-workers even if they work in a different department. Organize the occasional out of the office social event as well to promote employee interaction. The key is to encourage people to reach out and interact whether with a live or "virtual" human!

### **Be Present During Virtual Meetings**

When possible, keep your camera on at all times. Don't sit back and multi-task. Participate in meetings and let your voice be known. This is especially important for professionals early on in their careers. If it's a hybrid meeting, don't ignore the virtual callers. Be sure to include them in the meeting and encourage interaction.

### **Focus on Data Privacy and Cybersecurity**

With more employees working remotely, companies will need to implement stronger cybersecurity measures. Investments will be needed in secure remote-access systems, encrypted communications channels and employee training to prevent data breaches. This is particularly important in the accounting and finance industries that incorporate large amounts of sensitive data into their daily practices.

When it comes to managing and leading remote teams, your support and trust will go a long way to helping employees feel connected to their team and to the company. As remote and hybrid teams become more common, leadership will need to evolve to focus more on results than physical presence. The future of remote work will be shaped by a combination of technological innovation, flexibility in work arrangements and a focus on employee well-being. Hybrid work is expected to dominate, with companies finding a balance between the benefits of remote work and the need for in-person interaction.