Managing Remote Employees During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new challenges to supervisors and managers as they lead their employees. Due to CDC guidelines for social distancing, some employees are being required to work remotely and many managers are managing remotely. While many organizations have had established policies and procedures for telecommuting employee, others are developing them out of need in this unusual time. This may likely be a new experience for everyone so try to stay patient and calm. One thing remains constant – managers and leaders want their employees and their teams to be successful. Listed below are suggestions that can contribute to success, but always remember to follow your workplace policies and procedures.

1. Technology

- Learn the technology
- If virtual meetings and instant messaging systems are in place, plan for your technology department to assist you and employees. The device employees are using may be new, so providing training and support will be paramount for success and limiting anxiety.
- Several technology companies are offering free access to a variety of services and applications at this time. If you identify an application or web service that may be helpful, consult your supervisors and technology department to determine if it is approved for use. Keep in mind, new devices, technology and programs will make employees less productive while they are learning.
- Remind employees to change their voicemail and provide instructions so they know how to access voicemail when outside of the office.

2. Expectations

- Set realistic expectations for you and your employees and communicate those expectations directly.
- Establish protocols including productivity measures, required work time and hours, leave time requests and required communications and frequency.
- Determine how standing and ad hoc meetings will be communicated, held and facilitated.
- Be flexible, if possible, and be patient. Everyone is experiencing the same challenges and many things are new. Transition and change can be hard and cause heightened anxiety. Employees are also learning how to manage the distractions at home. Allowing some flexibility will promote loyalty and minimize stress and anxiety.
- Consider project-based productivity or allowing employees to establish work hours that include times of the day they will be more productive.

3. Communicating with your employees

- Initially, daily contact with each member of your team will demonstrate support. Acknowledge that you realize this is an adjustment for everyone. Discuss daily goals and ask how they are adjusting. If they are unfamiliar with virtual meetings, provide reminders about video conferencing etiquette, such as muting themselves, minimizing interruptions and background noise, and dressing appropriately.

- Set clear boundaries, expectations and deadlines, which may be different than in-office expectations.
- Schedule team meetings that allow time for collaboration, social contact and support. Allowing time for casual conversation at the start of a regularly scheduled meeting is also supportive.
- Ask employees periodically if they need additional support; this will vary between employees. Encourage them to be honest about their challenges of working remotely and offer to help problem-solve.
- Remind employees of the company benefits that are available for support. Your EAP, Personal Assistance Services (PAS) has counselors available 24/7/365 to provide confidential and free support, provide immediate crisis support and schedule services. Additionally, performance management specialists are available to provide management consultations to assist you as you lead through challenging situations.
- Provide employees with a list of important numbers they may need to have readily available. This includes PAS, IT help desk/support, benefits department and human resources contact information, insurance, and 401K, to name a few.

4. Self-care

- Balancing the needs of the company, organizational viability and your employees' needs is not an easy task. The added challenges may likely increase your stress level. Self-care is more important than ever. Good balance will strengthen your leadership abilities and model good habits for your employees and your family.
- Eat healthy, get plenty of sleep and take breaks during the day.
- Maintin routines whenever possible.
- Practice good boundaries with employees and leadership. Arrange with a co-worker to be available on your behalf when you need a break.
- Create a work schedule with set hours you are available. Even if you are accustomed to working more than a standard work week, set a steady pace, because it is uncertain how long you will need to keep the pace. Consistent self-care will help you maintain balance until things return to "normal."
- Be realistic with the expectations you set for yourself – you can adjust as you move forward.
- Confide in a friend or PAS, as needed. Talking with someone who listens non-judgmentally and provides support will help you manage overwhelming feelings.

As a leader, it is important that you remain calm, patient and productive. The pandemic can be stressful since many layers of our lives are impacted: work, home, family and friends. Emotions including fear, sadness, anger and worry can all affect productivity and well-being. Staying well and focused will allow you to be successful and help your team succeed and provide a resilient outcome regardless of these unusual circumstances.

Resources

Inc
https://www.inc.com/jason-aten/7-tips-for-working-fsuccessfully-managing-remote-teams.html

https://www.inc.com/jason-aten/these-5-tech-companies-are-providing-free-remote-working-tools-during-coronavirus-outbreak.html

Boston Globe
https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/03/13/business/working-home-11-tips-help-you-through/

Consult with a professional PAS counselor 24/7/365
by calling (800) 356-0845
Additional resources are available on the PAS website
www.paseap.com