Managing Virtual Teams Effectively

Top Five Tips

As organizations across the United States and abroad move their non-essential workforce out of the office and into work from home situations to help 'flatten the curve' of the coronavirus spread, it's important to leverage best practices to manage your virtual team to maintain effectiveness and drive engagement.

#1. Ensure Your Team Has The Right Resources, Tools and Technology to Effectively Work From Home

Empower your team with both the hardware and software required to stay connected to one another and complete their work in a timely and efficient manner.

- Hardware
    - Internet access – home Wi-Fi, mobile hotspots or another portable Wi-Fi device
    - Laptop/Computer
    - Mouse
    - Phone line/Cell phone
    - Docking station, computer monitor, keyboard
- Communication Software
    - Meetings – teleconference and/or video conference technology
    - Communication – email and instant messenger
    - File sharing capabilities such as SharePoint or Microsoft Teams

#2. Set Expectations, Goals and Boundaries

As your teams begin to work from home, ensure that you are setting clear expectations, boundaries and goals.

- Set expectations for daily and weekly work hours.
- Provide guidelines around email and phone call response times.
- Clarify team members roles and responsibilities while remote.
- Establish clear milestones/goals and interim deadlines, and hold people accountable.
- Set boundaries to help reinforce work/life balance (e.g., be available on instant messenger from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., no virtual meetings after 5 p.m., etc.)
- Establish expectations for virtual meetings such as:
    - For tele/video conference calls, dial-in a few minutes in advance. Give yourself some time in case you have trouble signing on or connecting to the conference.
    - Call in from a computer, whenever possible, to view shared materials.
    - Mute your microphone as soon as you call in and when you are done speaking.
    - Identify yourself each time you speak if you are part of a large, interactive virtual discussion.
    - Be present – do not work on other things while attending.
    - Follow a virtual discussion with an email to those who were involved to clarify decisions made and document "to dos" identified during the call.

#3. Overcommunicate and Leverage Technology to Engage and Feel Connected

Keeping communication channels open while team members are in an isolated work-from-home environment is one of the most important things you can do. Leverage all avenues of communication, such as emails, instant messenger, text

messages, and most importantly, pick up the phone and talk to your team both as a group and individually. Schedule time on your calendars to stay connected. Meeting ideas include:

- Weekly supervisor 1-on-1 updates
- Weekly team meetings
- Virtual daily huddles
- Peer-to-peer scheduled forums for communication and working sessions
- Informal check-ins to connect with people on a personal level. This can be at the beginning of a regularly scheduled check-in or through scheduled rounding or "water cooler" time.

Be thoughtful about your agenda creation and planning to make meeting time productive and valuable. If possible, schedule meetings via video conferencing. Seeing the faces of those you work with builds a stronger connection, helps you to read body language and ensures people are paying attention and not multi-tasking.

#4. Utilize Data and Reporting to Manage Success

Use data related to volumes, productivity and key performance indicator (KPI) trending to manage your team's workload and outcomes. Understand their productivity while they are working from home and have an open dialogue about barriers to achieving productivity. Monitor and understand shifts and trends in KPI's to identify any risks or barriers early that need mitigation.

#5. Reward and Recognize the Team and Solicit Feedback

Working remotely requires more of a concerted effort to make sure you are both providing feedback to and soliciting feedback from your team members in a safe and transparent environment. It also increases the need to build in ways to reward and recognize individuals for a job well done. Consider ideas such as:

- Make feedback a standing agenda item at the top of your agendas. Start with feedback/recognition or you will always run out of time and be tempted to bump it to the following week. Use this time to solicit feedback for how you can better support your direct reports. In addition, provide direct reports with any constructive feedback for improvement or recognize success.
- Have a recognition section at the top of your team meeting agenda as a forum for peers to recognize each other in addition to your feedback.
- Consider a weekly or monthly recognition spotlight to highlight work that individuals are doing to go above and beyond.