

## Challenges in Remote Employee Management (May 2020)

A number of business executives that we have talked with over the past year have mentioned the rise of remote working as a top or notable trend. Part of our discussion on this topic sometimes touched on determining which employees are, and aren't, suited for remote work.

Within the past couple of months due to COVID-19, many employees—ready or not—are suddenly working remotely, and managers are working quickly to figure out strategies for providing extra cushioning and coaching for those who may need it most so they can maximize productivity.

But where to start? Our research has uncovered some of the following strategies:

- **Get issues or concerns about remote working on the table.** Ask employees what they need from you in order to be successful and talk about concerns on both sides.
- **Set expectations.** Agree on what work needs to be accomplished, and when it needs to be completed. This can help eliminate confusion.
- **Track work progress.** A tracking tool could be something as simple as a shared department Google Document or similar service where employees log the work they have completed in a day. This shows work progress, but it can also make employees feel more fulfilled if they see they are being productive.
- **Communicate often.** While many managers have regular team meetings, it's OK to check in more often with employees who may need more direction. Communication is a key factor for workers who may lose focus or struggle with decreased production out of the office. Using live meeting platforms for check-ins can be helpful as you try to replace in-office communication.
- **Choose a tool—and encourage team group chat.** Instant messaging software like Slack is useful for less formal, day-to-day conversations with team members and can enhance engagement levels.
- **Look ahead and behind early and often.** Some employees may need more help developing their work “docket.” When this is the case, review what has been completed, and talk specifically about what's on the horizon. If necessary, reiterate the to-do list via email, so the employee has it in writing. Use this list as a shared guide when checking in with this team member.

A chief operations officer for a managed services provider in Ohio described an employee in their purchasing department who is struggling with task management while working remotely. This trait was mild when working in the office but exacerbated when the employee began working at home. The manager discovered a need to spend additional time with this employee developing a task list, and tracking task completion, in order to help the employee and the company be successful.

Remote working has brought about a “new normal” to many companies. The transition has been taxing in many ways. However, if some of the challenges are conquered, workers may be even stronger upon returning to the office.

### **Classroom Implications:**

Consider asking students what they would like to see in their ideal remote work setup. Do they think they would be more productive in an office or a remote environment? How would they keep track of their work progress? How would they want to communicate with their managers?

It’s possible that they are also adapting to their own version of working from home, as the coronavirus has also led to the closure of many school buildings. Ask them how they’ve found learning from home different than at school, and have them envision whether or not these same challenges would be present in the work environment.

Links for further learning:

[https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/work-flexibility/2020/tips-for-managing-remote-workforce-during-coronavirus?trk=e-ml-mktg-lts-20200402-covidresources-cust&mcid=6649357697751875584&cid=7010d000001KxJzAAK&src=e-ml&veh=LHS\\_EMLP\\_20200402\\_CovidResources\\_CUST\\_global\\_en](https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/work-flexibility/2020/tips-for-managing-remote-workforce-during-coronavirus?trk=e-ml-mktg-lts-20200402-covidresources-cust&mcid=6649357697751875584&cid=7010d000001KxJzAAK&src=e-ml&veh=LHS_EMLP_20200402_CovidResources_CUST_global_en)

<https://getlighthouse.com/blog/10-tips-manage-remote-employees/>

<https://www.vox.com/recode/2019/10/9/20885699/remote-work-from-anywhere-change-coworking-office-real-estate>

[https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-cities-airports-transportation-remote-work-52f3fc23-167f-45a9-ae29-a59345919551.html?utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=organic&fbclid=IwAR21rCePLsRlyluPdY2dgg1YBIUNGwrx5nksQjDXbsE2ksdhZkHtmm25VEg](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-cities-airports-transportation-remote-work-52f3fc23-167f-45a9-ae29-a59345919551.html?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=organic&fbclid=IwAR21rCePLsRlyluPdY2dgg1YBIUNGwrx5nksQjDXbsE2ksdhZkHtmm25VEg)

<https://www.npr.org/2020/03/09/812898220/laundry-between-emails-working-from-home-goes-viral-in-the-time-of-coronavirus>