Supporting Young Staff Working From Home

The recent Coronavirus outbreak has resulted in many staff working from home. Businesses are having to adjust in unprecedented times of disruption. How can employers manage staff effectively?

Some employers may always have had remote workers on their team, but with the added disruption of COVID-19, how do you make sure you are still managing staff effectively when many more employees are working from home? These insights for managers helming teams working from home may help.

Get The Right Tools

Make sure that you and your team have all the tools you need to do your job. This might be access to certain drives, log-ins and passwords but you also need to think about the working environment available to your remote workers. Do they have monitors? Have they got suitably quiet spaces in which to work? Can anything be done to make their home environments more comfortable and productive? For many home office challenges there can be inventive fixes – cables to connect the laptop to the TV, or the use of ironing boards as desks (after all, those ironing boards have adjustable heights and make the perfect sit-stand desk).

Plan!

Staff can quickly become insular when we are working from home. Schedule in regular catch ups and team conversations and try your best to stick to them. Plan meetings, plan fun activities and plan short catch ups. Encourage staff to plan their day too. Be really clear with them that you expect to see their lunch break, home time and coffee breaks in their diaries. This helps you to manage your time, staff time and gives a sense of structure and routine too.

Communication Strategy

Think about the right number of weekly check ins that work for the team and the projects you have on board. Review with each staff member their preferred way of communicating: are they early birds, do they plan their day the night before, what do they need you to do to get the best out of them? Do they need all of the information up front or do they prefer to have you drip feed tasks after each one is complete. Having open conversations with staff will help them think about how they like to communicate and the needs that others have too.

Practice What You Want To Say

Before you call or speak to your team write down the notes of what you want to say. What news do you have to share, what actions are outstanding and when you will follow up? Start your calls lightly and encourage small talk. It's a tough time and that kindness is needed, so having notes on what you want to say means you'll cover what you need to. Those notes also mean you're less likely to over-talk and complicate briefs and communications.

Set Clear Expectations

In times of unprecedented social and commercial disruptions, having clear expectations helps alleviate uncertainty. People have different expectations of working well and working quickly and there are extra considerations of how employees' home and working life are continuing to change rapidly. It is worth re-iterating how long you think staff should take to do things. Follow up requests and meetings with a clear and concise email, too.

Be Clear on Working Hours

Work and home life boundaries have been blurring over the last few years. Self-isolation blurs those boundaries further, and setting clear boundaries is going to be important to encourage good practice and good mental health.

Be Honest

Honesty promotes trust. No-one expects their line managers to have all the answers right now, so be honest about uncertainty. For example, if you can tell staff you're having a number of management meetings in the next week and expect to be able to feed back on key issues after the issues raised in those meetings have been addressed, employees will stop worrying every time you do (or don't) call them.

Encourage Fun

An offline office has a tangible water cooler for those water cooler moments of team bonding. If you were in the office you might have talked about the Tiger King documentary or Race Across the World, or discussed big weekend plans over coffee. You do not have to share parts of your personal life, but think about setting up weekly coffee mornings online. The team can set aside 30 minutes per week to talk about all manner of things NOT related to work. You could also set up a team WhatsApp group and think about sending jokes, riddles or quizzes or positive messages. Encourage your team to call in and check on each other too to boost morale, promote positive attitudes and to keep a sense of teamwork and community.

Self-Care For Managers

Things might be tough and changing rapidly for you too. Look after yourself, because being a leader through times of change is a real challenge. Be kind to yourself as a manager to take some of the pressure off. This mean having to put in new processes, but in the long term it will mean you have a clear view of what is happening. The organisation's employees will feel more comfortable with where they are too.

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