

Managing Remote Staff

Having staff work from home may require an adjustment in your mindset. Productivity must be measured by work output, availability, and timeliness of responses to inquiries. Here are some tips for getting the best out of managing remote staff:

- ▶ **Emphasize key telecommuting skills.** Encourage your team to manage time efficiently. While flexibility (especially for those who are caring for small children too) may be necessary, it's important that people be available for meetings when scheduled and respond to emails promptly. Set guidelines for when it's okay to act independently and when they should consult with a manager.
- ▶ **Set clear expectations and reasonable deadlines.** Clearly explain both day-to-day tasks and larger organizational goals. Set appropriate deadlines for completion of work.
- ▶ **Stay connected.** Working remotely may lead to feeling isolated or out of the loop. Holding periodic conference calls or virtual meetings will help ensure that everyone is up-to-date on projects. It will also help your team develop or maintain personal connections.
- ▶ **Communicate.** Email is often the primary way remote workers communicate, so it's important to be prompt in your responses to questions and updates. Remember to "close the loop."
- ▶ **Be aware of time zones.** If you have geographically dispersed staff in multiple locations, hold meetings when it is reasonable for everyone. If you must conduct meetings in what would be early morning or late evening for one or more individuals, try to rotate the schedule so the same person isn't always working outside of normal business hours.
- ▶ **Be respectful.** Be patient with occasional hiccups in availability due to issues outside the telecommuter's control, such as a power or Internet outage or an illness.
- ▶ **Provide regular feedback.** Remote workers can't see the sort of non-verbal cues that might indicate how you're feeling about their performance. It's important to say, "You did a great job on that project," or "I thought you handled that situation really well" when an individual's work merits praise. Stay on schedule with performance reviews and status meetings.
- ▶ **Don't hold on too tight.** Working remotely requires trust. Success should be measured by how well each person is meeting performance expectations and hitting target dates for completion of projects. Avoid micromanaging, as this could undermine the individual's effectiveness and perhaps even decrease productivity.

The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can offer more suggestions on how to successfully manage remote staff. Help is available 24/7/365.

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