# How to Manage a Remote Workforce

## *Adapting to changing business conditions*

With recent events regarding COVID-19, many companies have implemented mandatory Work-From-Home. This can cause insecurity and uncertainty across all levels of the organization especially when the workforce has not had experience being managed remotely.  Organizations may be very unsure about the ability of its workforce to deliver against the same value going forward.

Managing accountabilities from a virtual position is considerably harder and has to be managed differently. Especially when the workforce is already challenged with additional underlying issues or bad habits. You will need to compensate for the new world of communication. Here are some tips to help you through this difficult time.

# Effective and Frequent Communication

## Create a Communications Plan

Managing a productive team remotely begins with a strategy for communication. First, arrange for the appropriate number of weekly formal "touch-points." Second, set guidelines about daily needs. An understanding of what is urgent will further mitigate inefficiency, allowing ultimate productivity

## Over-Communicate

Working remotely, it can be easy to lose communication with your department, supervisors and direct reports. Ensure there are open lines of communication at different points throughout the day. Time permitting, create either longer or more frequent one-on-ones with team members and direct reports. Being remote, you lose the spontaneity of inter-office communication

## Utilize Collaborative Technology

Use existing technology innovations to build and sustain community. Host virtual meetings with tools such as Google hangouts, Skype, Zoom and GoToMeeting to connect with your department.

Use video as much as possible so you can look your co-workers or clients in the eye and develop a personal connection that is stronger than just over the phone. Text and emails can't convey tone and can lead to miscommunication.

# Re-Architect How You Conduct Meetings Virtually

## Prework, Prework, Prework!

Prework has become even more important when managing a remote workforce. Brainstorming and free-flowing chat are more difficult virtually. Although there are many online collaboration, brainstorming and whiteboarding tools (Google Docs, Mural, Miro, AWWapp etc.) that can help in virtual meetings, coming into strategic planning or operational planning sessions with a majority of the work done already by the team allows for a more productive session vs. doing it on the fly.

## Allocate More Time for Virtual Sessions

You'll likely need 30-50% more time allocated than face to face. (i.e. If you met with your team member for 60 minutes, then you will need to put aside 90 minutes to have the same effectiveness). the ability to discern non-verbal cues become more difficult to read virtually, and group dynamics change. Even if everyone is on video chat, these limitations can be difficult to get used to and may require some additional time allocated to accomplish all that is needed in the meeting/workshop. Being prepared for that is critical in creating the agenda and sequencing certain parts of the workshop.

## Re-Frame the Facilitator Role

When on-the-fly brainstorming is needed, it could be useful for someone to write on a physical whiteboard or sticky note and point the camera towards them. Then, a separate person could take notes for the meeting and another person could facilitate. You might have to get creative with how meetings are architected.

## Remember to Take Breaks

It's important for longer workshops or meetings take more breaks that you typically schedule. Sometimes people forget to put breaks into their agenda when having virtual meetings, but it is just as important for people to take a bio break and clear their head in order to bring their best selves back to the session

# Establish and Re-Establish Ground Rules and Operating Principles

Setting ground rules and operating principles will augment corporate culture, help employees instill more Work-From-Home discipline and make sure everyone is on the same page. Reiterate the company mission, values, desired outcomes and roles often to motivate the team to continue working toward the same goal.

## Set Daily and Weekly Objectives

Have all employees at all levels set daily and weekly objectives to optimize productivity, focus and discipline. Setting both attainable and stretch goals every day and every week will make sure employees stay on task and work towards a goal. It creates accountability across the workforce by explicitly stating what each person will be getting done and by when.

## Create Visibility

Share calendars with your team to create visibility into your tasks, calls and meetings. Employees can no longer stop by your desk or office to see if you are busy, so if there is time in your day dedicated to working on a task or you are in a phone call, make sure its in your calendar and visible to others. Your "open door" policy can go out the window when your team doesn't know when the door is "open".

# Set Clear Work-From-Home Guidelines

## Set Expectations for Work Quality and Deadlines

Show examples of what you expect to be done and the timeframe for when it needs to be done, provide clear, concise and direct feedback on deliverables and work being done. The more prepared and informed employees are, the better they can serve your organization. Set up Work-From-Home guidelines, such as emails must be responded to within 24 hours, use text for urgent matters, and no calls between certain hours to make sure teammates are not working around the clock

## Establish Clear Work Hours

When you are not in an office it can be easy to get in the habit of working around the clock. Leadership in the organization should set an example of setting and sticking to work hours. Schedule breaks and a time to "leave the office" as if you are in a traditional office.

## Send Later

It can also be easy to start expecting others to respond to you at all hours of the day. Try to only send emails within traditional business hours, and if you need to write it down to get it off your mind, schedule the email to send first thing in the morning with the "send later" function. If it is urgent, pick up the phone and call the person.

# Be Intentional in Maintaining Corporate Culture

## Engage the Workforce Socially, Even When Physical Meetups Aren't Possible

Isolation can be detrimental to motivation and productivity so try to engage your workforce socially with the rest of the team, even when physical meetups are not a possibility. Connected cultures often are more productive and motivated to complete tasks. A workforce that is used to having colleagues in the office can find it difficult to transition to remote working.

At TPG, we have set up a weekly "social hour" on Fridays where employees can connect virtually to maintain culture and team relationships

## Share Good News and Success Stories Publicly with the Team

Set up group calls frequently to connect multiple people together at the same time. When there are multiple people on the line, share good news, success stories and anecdotes to keep employee morale high and keep everyone engaged with the team.

# Ensure Technology is Working Properly

## Secure and Strong WiFi Connection

Strong WiFi is essential when working remotely and connecting with employees. Having a strong WiFi connection makes communicating in virtual meetings easier. There is nothing more frustrating than hearing choppy  audio, or seeing a video freeze. A strong WiFi connection can help mitigate this.

More importantly through is that your Wifi connection is secure. Insecure connections make you vulnerable to cyber hacks.

## Reliable Headphones with a Microphone

If employees can't hear each other on the phone or can't access files, they won't be productive or informed on what is happening. Invest in decent audio technology so that you team can hear everything you have to say.

## Frequent Check-Ins From Your IT Department

Have your IT department connect with employees frequently to make sure their laptops and other technology are tested and working properly.

# Let us help.

## The Poirier Group is a boutique management consulting firm focused on helping organizations achieve performance excellence.

Our team has expertise and experience implementing effective communications plans, setting strategic goals and analyzing and improving IT infrastructure for organizations across North America.  Through periods of transition and during uncertain times, let us be the guiding force that helps navigate your organization through to the other side.

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