

Managing Staff Remotely

There are some unique challenges associated with managing staff in remote locations, whether your people are working from home or are based offshore. What steps can you take to maintain high levels of engagement and performance with staff who are working remotely?

Management Style

The basic systems for monitoring employee contribution do not change whether the person works remotely or in the office. They need a comprehensive and clear understanding of the role they are required to perform and the targets they need to meet. You should set short-term goals and provide regular feedback and positive reinforcement. Refer to our article on performance appraisals for more information about communicating expectations and setting goals.

Remote staff also need to be clear about the limits on their authority when representing the company. All company policies, procedures, authority limits, roles and responsibilities should be clearly documented to minimise any confusion. Once the ground rules have been established, remote employees should then be allowed discretion to get on with the job and trusted to deliver results.

Trust

A high degree of trust is needed between the manager and the employee and where this is lacking, it is likely that working outside the office is going to be problematic on both sides. It's important that you get to know your remote staff well so that you feel absolutely confident in their integrity and professionalism. This process begins with careful selection, induction and training processes. After that, it's essential to maintain regular contact on a planned basis.

Communication

With remote staff, it's important to implement a regular schedule of planned communications, so that this communication becomes an integral part of the way the company operates, rather than an uncommon event. Technology provides many options for communication these days. Try not to use email exclusively. It's good for remote staff to hear the voices of others in the company or engage in face to face communication over the web. Staff working in remote locations respond very positively to being involved in communication and decision-making, particularly when they realise that you've gone to extra trouble to allow them to participate. Make sure they receive all communications that go to your local staff. Go the extra mile to acknowledge special successes and to offer support when they are experiencing difficulties.

Keep it Personal

Two of the top drivers of employee engagement are feeling a sense of belonging to the organisation and feeling that the company cares about the well-being of its people. You need to take an interest in remote staff at a personal level, for example, sending flowers to mark a family milestone. It's also important to provide opportunities for communication on a personal or social level and not always purely business.