Working From Home for Managers

For managers, being a steward of our PeopleFirst Experience may mean leading a fully remote or blended team. Managers need to be cognizant of the needs of their people not only in the office, but while working from home as well. Our Blended Teams training program focuses on four key themes: Trust, Connection & Culture, Structure, and Accountability. This guide compliments these themes and provides you with some best practices to lead our evolving workforce. The key is communication. You need to be able to stay in contact, promote frequent communication within your team, and be ready to resolve conflict when necessary.

There are two ways to consume this content. Click the link to read the full article or video, or if you want the Cliffs Notes version, we've provided a snapshot summary of each resource. Be sure to leverage the PeopleFirst Experience site to stay informed!

SNAPSHOT: TOP 15 TIPS TO SUCCESSFULLY MANAGE REMOTE EMPLOYEES

Article: Forbes (4 minute read)

1. **Set Clear Expectations** – doing something "quickly" means different things to different people. Be specific.

2. **Treat Remote as Local** – give remote people as much access to you as possible, respond as quickly as possible.

3. **Engage Regularly** – engage daily through varied communication channels (phone, messaging, video conference, etc.). Consistency will help remote workers feel included.

4. **Schedule Video-Based Coaching** – schedule time and look at one another when you're speaking. Not checking in and providing feedback can cause remote employees to question how they're performing.

5. **Trust Your Team** – some companies are reluctant to embrace a remote workforce due to uncertainty that the work will not get done at the same level as if they were in the office. To combat this belief, consider work from home guidelines that are appropriate for your team, such as email responses within 24 hours or using instant messaging apps for urgent matters.

6. **Make it Feel Inclusive** – make remote staff feel included by using virtual meetings and create team partnerships that promote collaboration.

7. **Filter for Mission, Values, Outcomes, and Role -** remote workers can feel frozen out of regular office human interaction, so be sure to over communicate and align them with the mission, values, outcomes, and how their role ties to it all.

8. **Have Reliable Tools First** – and use them! See the **Work from Home Toolkit** for everything you need to help your team collaborate and work effectively.

9. **Stay Focused on Goals, Not Activity** – Don't worry as much about what is being done. Instead concentrate on what is being accomplished. It's all about accomplishment, not activity.

10. **Be Intentional** – make each team meeting count with opportunities for everyone to engage and contribute.

11. **Create a Communication Strategy** – arrange the appropriate amount of weekly formal "check-ins", and set guidelines about daily needs. An understanding of what is urgent mitigates inefficiency, allowing productivity.

12. **Avoid Multi-Tasking** – video conferencing helps with this because you are visible.

13. **Connect Their Goals with Yours** – take a personal interest in your team's learning and life goals.

14. **Use Technology to Build Community** – Use tools like Workplace and Teams to engage your team. Celebrate special days, company milestones, or community recognition. Again, be intentional.

15. **Establish Close Bonds, Help, and Support Frequently** – empathize and appreciate your team members' lives by discussing family, commonalities, and shared beliefs.

SNAPSHOT: HOW TO HANDLE CONFLICT ON REMOTE TEAMS

Article: Help Scout (6 minute read)

Normalize conflict – conflict is emotionally charged because it is rooted in unresolved feelings, unmet needs and the fear of the unknown.

Unique remote communication challenges – loss of in-person signals and loss of context. Consider the pros and cons of remote communication channels:
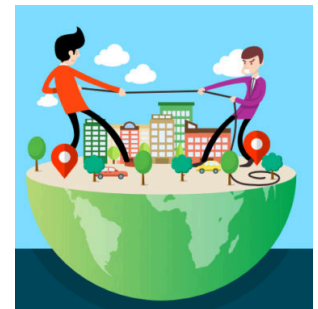
Communication Channel	Pros and Cons
Email	• Pro – great for announcements or summaries. • Cons – provides no in-person signals, delays in replies, and long chain of back and forth can waste time and cause confusion.
Instant Messaging	• Pro – works well for real-time conversations. • Cons – no in-person signals, time zone differences, long chain of back and forth.
Phone	• Pros – real time, personal interaction and able to pick up on verbal cues. • Cons – loss of body language, facial expression, potential for poor reception or noisy background.
Video Conferencing	• Pros – real time, ability to see body language and verbal cues. • Drawbacks – potential for poor internet connection, unnatural lags between speakers, background noise.

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How to Handle Conflicts on Remote Teams (continued...)

Step	Action
Name the thing	• What is triggering you? • Common triggers: competence, inclusion, autonomy, status, reliability, and integrity.
Be curious	• Turn your attention to the other person • Create a safe space by asking question to seek understanding. Examples: "I read your email and I think I may have misunderstood it – can we talk through your takeaways?" or "During the meeting you seemed frustrated. Is everything okay?"
Say Your Side	Try the Nonviolent Communication Method (NVC) • Observation – state a clear observation of what the person did that you didn't like. • Feelings – state how you feel about what they have done. • Needs – make clear what needs of yours was not met. • Request – end with a clear request of what you would like the person to do.

SNAPSHOT: LEADING AT A DISTANCE

Video: LinkedIn Learning (36 minutes)
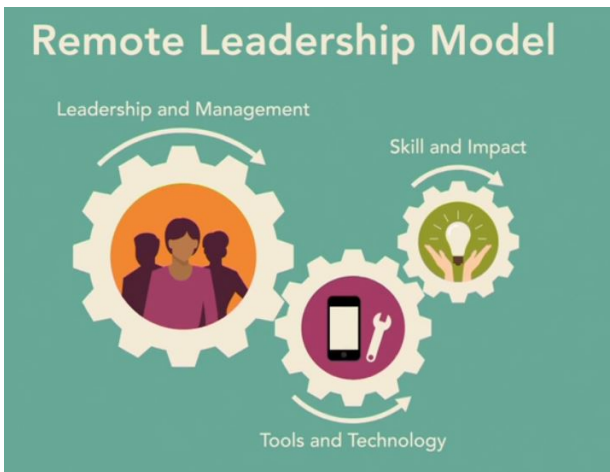
What it Means to Lead at a Distance– leading at a distance is different. We aren't going to run into people in the hallway or in the breakroom. With remote teams we must be more intentional and build processes and systems to make sure that we are connected to our team members. Interpersonal dynamics change when you're leading remotely. It is your job to role model the changes, to work to build the relationships, to build trust, to have more effective communication, and to help your team adapt as well.

Remote Leadership Model – this model has three gears, and when working correctly, will propel us to greater success. The largest is leadership and management, and it hasn't changed. What *has* changed is your location. Now we must use technology and tools to do things we never had to think about before that just came naturally. NFP has provided a host of tools to help you lead in a remote environment. See Working from Home Toolkit. The third gear, while the smallest, is where the rubber meets the road – the skill and impact gear. When you apply your leadership skills and embrace our tools, you will get the results that you need. Call to action: identify one tool that you are uncomfortable with and make a commitment to learn and master it.

Understanding what success looks like at a distance – there are three types of outcomes: organizational, team, and personal. Organizational – where is the organization going and how is your team helping to get there? Team – are your people clear on what's expected of them? Personal – how effective is your team at reaching their individual outcomes? Understanding each of these outcomes will help you define success and set clear expectations.

Remote goal setting – it's not about setting the goals; it's about getting the goals. Think about two kinds of goals: Results goals are what you typically think of goals as being (sales numbers, quality scores, etc.) - It's a specific result that you're after. Process goals define how you will achieve result goals. Process goals help in three ways: 1) your team has a better chance of reaching the outcomes you want; 2) allows you to stay in sync and know you're on the right track, and 3) allows a little less worry in your life.

5 tips to remote coaching and feedback – make it a two-way conversation; use your webcam; make it more frequent and consistent; deliver it formally and informally; assume positive intent.

The remote employee perspective: The Golden Suggestion – treat others the way they want to be treated. As a leader, it is your job to understand those that you lead, to understand their perspective. Here are some ideas: use style tools (DISC, Myers-Briggs, etc.); look for clues in their behavior and how they communicate with you and others; be willing to flex the way you communicate, the way you coach to meet the style and perspective of those you are leading. Lastly, ask what works for them.

SNAPSHOT: 5 WAYS TO PROMOTE ACCOUNTABILITY
Article: Gallup (4 minute read)

1. **Define what people are accountable for** – employees need clearly defined expectations to achieve goals. Managers need to demonstrate accountability through your own availability and time spent defining what your team is responsible for; whether long term or short term responsibilities.
2. **Set and cascade goals throughout the organization/department** – help your employees set goals that align with their role and responsibilities. Most, if not all, goals should have metrics defined to help your team know if they're delivering on the goals. See Performance at NFP - Goal Setting Training for Managers for more on how NFP approaches goal setting.
3. **Provide updates on progress** – feedback can come from many places (customers, surveys, project updates, etc.); however, the most effective feedback comes from frequent conversations between managers and employees. NFP also provides tools to help facilitate these conversations ranging in formality from Smartsheet to the Chat feature in Teams.
4. **Align development, learning and growth** – Gallup analytics show that millennials rank the opportunity to learn and grow in a job #1 above all other job considerations – and it's high on the ranks for other generations as well. Managers who focus on employee development help them address the roadblocks that prevent their ability to deliver on goals while learning and growing in the role.
5. **Recognize and celebrate progress** – praise for good work is the most motivating of all forms of feedback. Identify, celebrate and learn from successes.

SNAPSHOT: BUILDING TRUST AS A MANAGER
Article: SHRM (3 minute read)

The words "I don't trust you" may not be said out loud, but you may be facing a lack of trust if employees are:
- Withholding information and using selective communication
- Persistently questioning goals, strategies, actions, and decisions
- Protecting their self-interest at the expense of the team
- Acting inconsistently with our values
- Exhibiting low or diminishing commitment and engagement

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We evaluate ourselves by our intentions. Others – not knowing those intentions – evaluate us on their perceptions of our behavior and performance. Here are six actions you can take to demonstrate your good intentions:

Follow through – mistrust arises when managers don't do what they say they will do. A habit of not following through tells people that you can't be trusted. If you can't meet a promised deadline, tell your employees in advance. If you promise to run interference for your team, make sure your sense of urgency matches theirs and report the results.

Communicate – create opportunities to communicate. Talk straight and talk often. Your team knows there is information you can't share, but they want to know what you can talk about – and they want to conclude that you are telling them the truth rather than spinning the message for your sole benefit or for that of the company. And, a reputation for listening and caring about what others say builds trust.

Get better – your team improves when you improve. They will trust your directions more and question you less in uncertain times when they conclude that you know what you're doing.

Be consistent – people value and trust consistency in action and response. When consistency is present – especially when combined with open communication – people tell you what you need to hear rather than what you want to hear. They are more confident and are not looking to see how you're going to react to every piece of bad news.

Be clear about your values – the most difficult challenges are rarely a choice between a clear right and wrong. More often, it's a choice between competing values that forces us into decisions between the better of two acceptable options or the lesser of two poor ones. The clearer you are on your values, the more trust you will build.

Have their backs – your team knows you can't control every decision, but you will earn their respect and trust when they know that you will stand up for them even when doing so is inconvenient or difficult.

SOURCES

- **Top 15 Tips to Effectively Manage Remote Employees (Article)**

- **How to Handle Conflict on Remote Teams (Article)**

- **Leading at a Distance (Free Online Course with 30-day Trial or $39.99)**

- **5 Ways to Promote Accountability (Article)**

- **Building Trust as a Manager (Article)**

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Questions?

Contact the Talent Development team at learning@nfp.com.