

Remote Management:

Staying Connected



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What is Remote Management?

Remote worker – team member that works in different locations or at different times from direct supervisor (Gerke & Berens, 2003).

Telework – a formal work arrangement in which agency management directs or permits employees to perform their usual job duties away from the central workplace (SHRD, 2010, p. 1).

Telework Agreement – a written agreement between agency management and the employee detailing the terms and conditions of an employee’s work away from the central workplace (SHRD, 2010, p. 1).

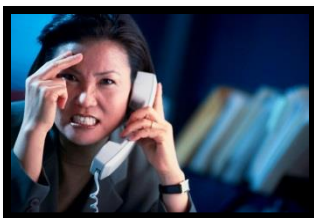
Remote Management Benefits

What benefits does remote management bring to the organization, employees, and supervisor?



Additional Benefits to Remote Management

- Regional sales and service support for local customers
- Attract and retain specialized and highly skilled employees
- Employee reluctance to relocate (aging parents, community commitments, children in school, etc.)
- Work-life balance and cost savings
- Improved morale, job satisfaction, and job performance
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions
- Reduced usage on public infrastructure such as roads and highways



Remote Management Challenges

What challenges does remote management bring to the organization, employees, and supervisor?

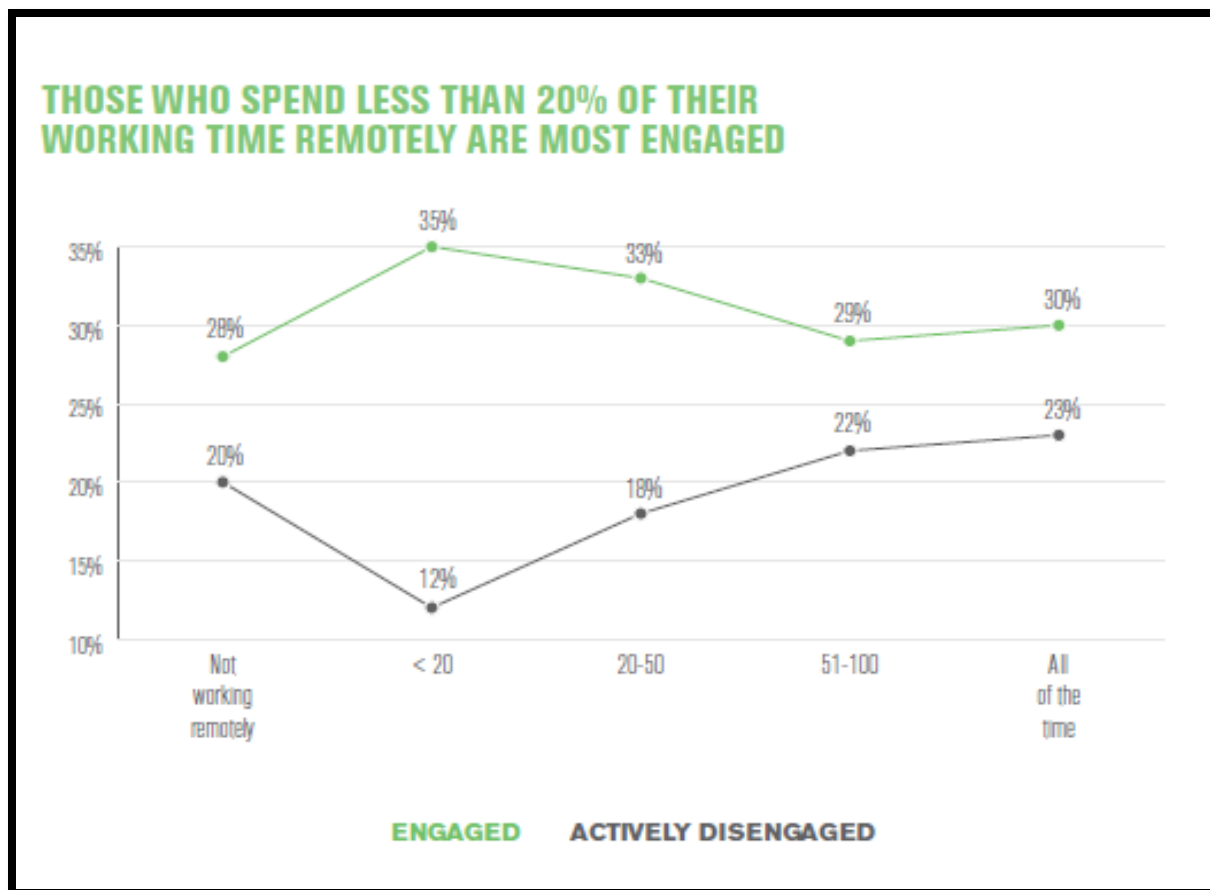
Additional Challenges to Remote Management

- Measuring performance since unable to see behavior
- Ensuring everyone gets same information
- Building trust
- Balancing workload
- Getting to know at personal level
- Additional travel
- Understanding geographic issues of remote site
- Spotting talent
- Communicating with non-verbal cues (over 50% of communication is non-verbal)
- Feeling isolated due to limited social interaction
- Locating supervisor when need them
- Building trust with the team
- Knowing one another’s skills and talents
- Resolving conflict

Remote Work Research

According to Gallup Inc.'s State of the American Workplace 2013 report, 39% of employees spend some amount of time working remotely or in a location away from their team members. Gallup also found that remote workers log more hours than on-site workers by *four* hours. Though they are logging more time, remote workers are *more engaged* than their counterparts; remote workers 32% vs. on-site 28% engaged.

Though they may be more engaged, there is a point of diminishing returns. Those that spend **20%** of *their time working remotely are most engaged at 35%* and lowest active disengagement (12%). These workers have the ideal balance of both worlds – time to collaborate and build camaraderie with team members at office and the freedom that comes with working remotely. Finally, it is worth noting that “fully remote workers” are as engaged as team members “*not working remotely*”.



Gallup, Inc. (2013). State of the American Workplace: Employee Engagement Insights for U.S. Business Leaders. Washington, D.C.: Gallup, Inc.

Technology for Remote Management

There are a variety of remote management technological resources. Some of these are one-way forms and others are two-way. One-way communication, email being an example, is when a message is sent without real-time feedback. In this case, feedback comes in the form of a delayed response. Two-way communication involves real-time feedback, such as phone calls or face-to-face communication. It is important to gauge several factors in deciding whether to use one-way or two-way communication.

- Complexity of message
- Sensitivity of message
- Need for documentation
- Urgency of message

Email – the most *commonly used* communication tool is email due to its convenience and speed. Good for creating documentation trail, non-sensitive or non-confidential information, or when several people need same information. Be sure to include a clear and to the point subject line. Some organizations help prioritize with subject line codes: FYI (for your information when you have time), ACT (action item), HOT (urgent), NRR (no response required). Also, be mindful of whom gets a copy and when. Don't use email when phone conversations are more appropriate. Finally, determine expectations for email upfront. For example, "email to be checked twice a day".

Instant Messaging – used for short and quick messages or questions, and to determine if it is a good time to talk on the phone. Greet the person first, such as "Hi" like you would in a normal organizational setting. If you have to write several messages back and forth, it might be more effective to talk by phone.

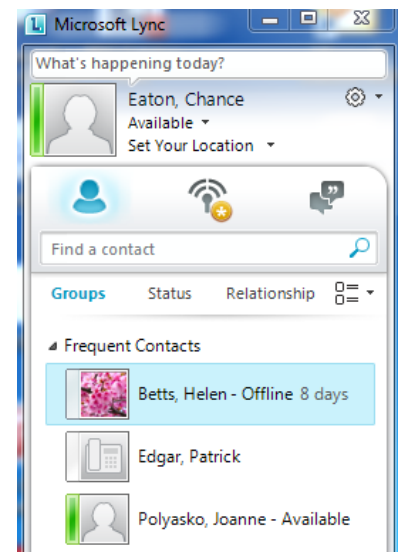
Voice Mail – used for short messages. Be sure to identify yourself, leave phone number at beginning and end of message, think through message before making the call, state purpose clearly, and speak slowly.

Snail Mail – valuable for sending personalized notes.

Phone Call – used to replace the face-to-face when not convenient to meet physically, for sensitive information, and when the dialogue and feedback is important.

Face-to-face – used for very important messages, relationship and trust building, and maintaining a team presence.

Online collaboration tools – used for sharing and collaborating of information over the internet. There are a variety of tools available which can be used for video conferencing, screen sharing, and instant messaging.



Attributes of Successful Remote Managers



Passion – effective remote managers create teams that are in synch, collaborative and sharing ideas with one another. The *energy* of the team has to start with the Remote Manager. Effective remote managers can't be annoyed every time an instant message appears on their screen, or remembering to check in with their team members.

Availability – effective remote managers have to give extra effort when it comes to availability. Since you aren't in a situation where the supervisor or lead is just down the hall for a quick visit, you have to be highly *available for your team*. That said, there can still be guidelines around times that aren't reasonable.

Communication – effective remote managers maintain strong communication skills. They practice active listening, take on the other's perspective, create time to communicate, and ultimately develop an alliance around the work they do. They are comfortable with differences, and even expect them, but see these opportunities as collaborative moments.

Patience – since you may be working with various people in remote areas, effective remote managers have to be patient around the process. For instance, setting up a conference call may take a considerable amount of time in a remote situation. There may be scheduling, setting up the conference call reservation, sending out notices for the time, communicating with members if there are any issues prior to the call, managing the systems before and after the call, etc. These smaller tasks surrounding the actual call add up but are necessary. So it is important that you can be *patient with the process*.

Reliability – since trust can be more challenging to build in remote teams, demonstrating integrity by doing what you say you will do is critical. There are *fewer opportunities to develop trust in the remote team*, so you need to really make it count in situations that require your reliability and integrity.

Connection – an effective remote manager creates an environment that is connected to the work group and/or organization. The manager keeps their team up to date with changes, plugged in, referred to by others as team member, and allows team members to feel as if they are there.

Alignment – effective remote managers align their team with the mission of the organization. This begins with the hiring process to see that their values and interest lie in the mission of the organization. This continues with the ongoing communication. Good managers continue to invigorate their team with the higher purpose and vision of the work, and how each person plays an integral role in meeting that vision and mission of the work.

Clear Expectations – critical that both the manager and team member *understand what is expected in work performance and conduct*. Expectations may also include what technologies will be required, what equipment will the organization be providing and not providing, who provides technical assistance in case of equipment disruption, what are phone and email expectations, how is remote arrangement terminated, what is expected in case of emergency, etc. Successful remote managers are good at clearly describing these expectations.

Accountability – effective remote managers create an environment of accountability. This begins with the expectations clearly laid out at the job level, project level, and the day to day level. The remote worker always knows what is expected of them. The remote worker is also continually evaluated on their performance. Since it is more challenging to observe the remote worker's performance and behavior, the effective managers will set up smart methods of evaluating their work. This may include creating appraisals which include methods to measure their performance, communicating with clients or colleagues, and if possible, occasional shadowing.

Building Trust with Remote Teams

Virtual cup of coffee: both team members meet virtually with no agenda more than to visit. Though it is virtual and may appear artificial, the act of meeting for pure social engagement mimics normal office contact.

Remember special days: since isolation is a common challenge to remote work, recognizing birthdays, anniversaries, etc. is more important than in normal office settings. It is a statement that you matter and you are recognized.

When face-to-face, focus on relationship building: when you do have the opportunities to meet face-to-face, make sure to schedule time for relationship building. Most remote work conversation tends to be highly work related since “water cooler” moments don’t exist. Pure relationship building is critical to building trust and long term relationships. This may include a coffee or a meal where work is not on the agenda.

Track who connected with: it is important to connect with *each* team member on an ongoing basis. If you have a large team, you can create

a simple checklist of who you have contacted and when.

Send certificate: occasionally send a certificate for sandwich, juice, or coffee to your remote team. This mimics typical breaks taken in the traditional workplace.

Stay connected and arrange regular times to communicate: since distance is the issue, and fewer opportunities for informal dialogue, it is critical to have regular scheduled meetings, either by phone or online vehicles like Skype. Building trust is the most challenging dynamic to remote teams, so it is important to be aware of the connections and communication you have with your team.

Update on company and department information: since many updates take place informally in the workplace, it is important that your remote team regularly be updated on the organization’s status.

Adapted from Gerke & Berens, 2003

Possible Coaching Questions with Remote Teams

Reflection – share with me what’s happened over the past period of time.

Goals – what would you like to get better at this month?

Realization – what is something you are better at now than you were a month ago?

High Point – what was the highpoint of this month?

Low point – what was the low point of this month?

Assistance – is there anything I, or someone else on our team, can do to help you succeed?

Strategy – (1) are you seeing anything that would help us be more efficient, (2) or be helpful to know at a higher strategic level?

Remote Management vs. Good ol' Fashion Management



Work engagement is “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Baker, 2002, p. 74). Kahn (1990) defined engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p.694). Disengagement, according to Kahn (1990) was the “uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). “It is about putting ourselves – our real selves – into the work. This begins but does not end with effort. Our real selves show up when we say what we think and feel in the service of doing the work the best way that we know how” (Kahn, 2010, p. 21).

According to Little and Little (2006), engagement is attractive because a statistical relationship has been found with meaningful organizational outcome metrics, whereas similar results have not been found with more traditional organizational constructs such as job satisfaction. Another reason work engagement has become attractive to organizations is because items used in engagement surveys measure aspects of the workplace which are controlled by immediate managers (Little & Little, 2006). When the Gallup Organization surveyed over one million employees and asked the questions: what do the most talented employees need from their workplace (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999) they found that the most talented employees needed great managers.

Items to the Gallup® Q-12 Survey

- ___ 1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
- ___ 2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
- ___ 3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
- ___ 4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
- ___ 5. Does my supervisor or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
- ___ 6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
- ___ 7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
- ___ 8. Does the mission of my company make me feel like my work is important?
- ___ 9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
- ___ 10. Do I have a best friend at work?
- ___ 11. In the last six months, have I talked to someone about my progress?
- ___ 12. At work, have I had opportunities to learn and grow?

Buckingham, M. & Coffman, C. (1999). *First Break All the Rules*. New York: Simon & Schuster.



Recommendations for Tele-Work by the State of Montana

Telework is normally offered to seasoned employees who have earned the trust and confidence of their supervisors. Managers may have interested employees complete a self-assessment to ensure their position and work style are conducive to teleworking.

1. Develop well-constructed telework policies.
2. Formalize written telework agreements between supervisor and employee
3. Establish specific outcome-based performance objectives.
4. Communicate regularly ensuring success of a telework agreement.

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