

Top Tips for Leading Remote Teams

Managing employees in different geographical locations is an increasingly common challenge for many team managers. Having team members working across different sites requires you to apply different techniques than you would with a traditional localised team. These tips will help to ensure that you are providing your remote team members with the support they need to function as an effective member of your team.



Create a team plan

Creating and sharing a **plan for your team** will help to prevent any misunderstandings which may arise across different sites. By having a plan which clearly sets out things like **communication levels** and **responsibilities**, you can prevent potential issues from arising later. Employees will be aware of when they will be in contact with each other and what each team member has responsibility for. This can help them plan effectively and can also be useful when reacting to developing situations.

Be visible

When leading a remote team, you tend to have less regular face-to-face time with team members. This can sometimes be an obstacle to establishing close working relationships, therefore it is important to **schedule regular meetings** with all team members and spend as much time as possible in each location as circumstances allow. Observing employees in **their normal working environment** can also help you to gain a better understanding of their skills, preferred ways of working and any development needs they may have.

Be equitable

Some employees will need to be in contact with you more than others. However, it is important that **all team members are aware of your presence** within the organisation. It can be tempting to focus your attention on certain team members, for example an underperforming team member. However, this can cause other members of the team to feel undervalued or even neglected. Make sure that you always **schedule regular time with team members** and stay in close contact with everyone. You may have to dedicate resources to specific team members on occasion, but this should not be at the long-term expense of the other members.

Build team spirit through regular team contact

It is important for a team's manager to foster the belief that their employees are a team, rather than a group of individuals working on related issues. Encouraging your team members to **get to know what their colleagues are doing** and how it relates to them can help to create a greater sense of **team spirit**. You might also encourage employees to **work alongside their colleagues** in other locations on occasion, as this will help team members to think of themselves as part of a collective unit.

By scheduling regular team meetings or workshops together and linking them to a **social event** such as a group meal, you can help team members gain a clearer understanding of the people they are working with. It also allows an opportunity to **develop personal relationships** face-to-face and share experiences and ideas in a more laid-back setting.

Keep in touch

Staying in contact with individual team members is vital to help ensure that they feel part of the greater team. Planning updates at agreed times means that you can maintain a regular level of contact with your remote team. It is useful to use these updates as two-way conversations to avoid creating the impression that you are simply 'checking up' on the employee. Use these **regular conversations** to **seek updates** on progress, **share any feedback** or **important organisational news**. Also make each employee aware that this is an opportunity for them to **ask any questions** or **share concerns** with you.

Get the most from meetings

Make sure that your meeting time with team members is utilised fully. When meetings are taking place, have an **agenda** and ensure you have **plenty of time** to complete business. Be fully prepared and ask others to do the same. Stress to your employees that meetings are **extremely valuable** because of the limited time the team has together. This will ensure you get maximum results from each meeting you have together.

Utilise technology

Try to schedule **regular conference calls** amongst the team members. By interacting with each other regularly as a group, they can begin to develop more **positive team relationships**. Email communication is less personal; while it is a necessary tool, use other communication methods and encourage team members to do the same. Although remote teams don't have the same amount of face-to-face time as more traditional teams, using technology such as **videoconferencing** (if it is available) or **instant messaging** allows team members to become more familiar and comfortable with each

other.

Have a conflict resolution strategy

Conflicts will arise within most teams from time to time, but these can be more complicated to resolve between remote employees as there is less opportunity to deal with issues face-to-face. By having a plan in place, employees know that they can follow certain steps to deal with any conflicts quickly and without the problem spiralling. This can reduce the **risk of resentment** growing between employees in different locations.

Be aware of differences

Along with geographical differences come some **cultural differences**. While this may be more obvious from country to country, it will also be true on a regional basis. For example, an employee who is based predominantly in a major city may have a different outlook to someone who is based predominantly in a provincial environment. When dealing with employees, be aware of their individual backgrounds and be mindful of how this may affect their approach to work.

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