



## General Tips & Tricks

**Teamwork.** Treat telework as a team activity rather than an individual one, whenever possible. Develop a team schedule, rather than an independent schedule, and a teleworking system that is consistent with the needs of the department and organization.

**Virtual presence.** Instant messaging systems can be used by team members to check in each morning, and change status when they will be away from the computer for more than a few minutes. Using a rotating system, one team member can also lead a virtual water cooler chat with a question or comment for team members to respond to once or twice a day. Transparent communication tools like shared calendars can also be useful. In addition, advanced collaboration tools such as video conferencing may also be considered.



**Customer service.** If your team members interact with customers, make sure service-level support requirements in communicating with customers are clearly defined. All team members need to agree to meet the same service levels to ensure transparency to the customer. Commit with each other to an acceptable response period for email inquiries or phone calls.

**IT support.** A common reason for teleworking dissatisfaction is IT failure. Teleworkers are dependent on fast, reliable, consistent connections. Work with your IT group to ensure the technology is effective, efficient, operates consistently and provides excellent customer service. IT department involvement and support is critical to your success.

**Trust.** In talking with teleworkers on the phone, managers should avoid comments like, “Hey, I hear a washing machine. Are you doing your laundry, or working?” Instead, managers should use telework as an opportunity to foster trust between employees and management. Established daily check-ins can be useful, but rigid micro-monitoring of daily activities hinders productivity and creates an environment of distrust.

**Office space options.** In some organizations, teleworkers are encouraged to share their space while teleworking, and relinquish their in-office space when working in the office. This will require coordination with other employees, and sometimes the development of shared space protocols. Hoteling software, which can help administrators keep track of space booking and scheduling, can also assist in this process.

**Manage by results.** For managers used to passing offices where employees are working away, telework can be disconcerting. But apparent worker activity should not be confused with the results those activities produce. Establish a clear definition of objectives and performance indicators, and keep track of those indicators.

*Tips taken from Society for Human Resource Management & The American Psychiatric Association*

**Monitor performance measures.** One measure might be team sick days and absenteeism—have they decreased as your teleworking program progresses? Customer satisfaction might be another measure — has the needle moved in any direction since some team members started teleworking?

**Keep evolving.** Managers should think of a telework program as a continual work in progress. Teams are unlikely to get all arrangements right the first time. Evolving work groups and projects may also force changes in the original arrangements, regardless of how successful they may have been. Remain flexible, evaluate frequently, and adjust the arrangements as needed.

## COVID-19

With many organizations requiring employees to stay out of the office, it's more important than ever to encourage and facilitate regular communication with employees. Here are tips for managers and human resource professionals in supporting employees in staying connected to the workplace and each other:

- **Show empathy and be available:** Understand that employees are likely feeling overwhelmed and anxious about circumstances related to the virus. Make yourself available to your staff to talk about fears, to answer questions and to reassure them about work and other issues that might come up.
- **Recognize the impact of isolation and loneliness:** Working remotely can cause people to feel isolated, making it more important to routinely check in with your team, not only about their work product, but also to see how they are doing. Loneliness can lead to depression and other mental health issues. Be aware of significant changes you may see in your team member's personality or work product, because it may be a sign that a person is struggling.
- **Encourage online training:** This is a great time to encourage employees to sharpen their skills with online training. It is also a good distraction to focus on learning rather than worrying about other issues. Find online trainings and new learning opportunities to recommend to employees.
- **Check in with your EAP and Health Plan:** Check in with your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to confirm their availability and to coordinate support for employees. Remind the staff that the EAP is there if they need support and can connect employees with behavioral health support, if needed. Also, connect with the organization's health plan(s) to learn what they are offering to support plan members and pass that information onto employees. Be sure to include all relevant website links and phone numbers for both the EAP and health plan in communicating with employees.