Managing Remote Employees
A Guide for Supervisors

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Working Together When We Are Not Together

Remote work is the new reality for many organizations across the globe, and we want to share strategies on how to lead teams through this new way of work, particularly in a time of crisis. Managing employees remotely can be a challenging endeavor — but it is completely achievable! It is in essence a matter of **Connection, Communication, and Collaboration.** Employees need to feel connected to the rest of your team and your organization, feel cared for, have continuous two-way communication, and have ways and opportunities to collaborate.

Here are some guidelines to manage remote employees. Also, be sure to check out the *"Remote Work Checklist"* at the end of this document.

The Well-Being of Your Staff

The health and safety of your staff is your number one priority and comes above anything else. Happy and healthy staff have higher morale and are more productive. One of TSNE's core values is **valuing the whole person.** It is essential to regularly check-in with your staff about their physical and mental well-being, particularly during this pandemic. Anyone would find it hard to be able to give 100% to their work when it feels like the world is falling apart around them.

Ask questions such as: "How are you feeling?" "What's on your mind?" and "What can I do to help you manage working from home better?" Validate individual experiences by listening attentively and acknowledging what they are going through.

Be "The Calm" — Your mood can easily translate into the feeling of your team members. Think of yourself as representing calmness. Remind your team that you will get through this tough time together, but be open and honest that you do not have all the answers to what is next; while the situation continues to be fluid, you will continue to communicate as soon as you have more information to share with them.

Make sure that you and your team members are following the recommendations of ***Working from Home – A Guide for Employees*** to help them adapt and work through the transition to working remotely.

Information Technology Infrastructure

- Make sure that everyone has the essential physical tools (computer and networking hardware), the necessary software/programs, and the security access they need to do their work.

- Create an Emergency Communication Phone Tree (ECPT) for your organization to be able to ensure smooth communication. Have your Team's ECPT accessible and printed in case you need to communicate an urgent message to everyone on your team in a sensitive-time manner.

Identify Everyone's Core Work

Look at each of your employee's job descriptions and identify any activities that they would not be able to perform remotely. To help you identify those, answer the following questions:

- What tasks can be done by making use of phone or internet communication technologies?
- What tasks would not be done if the employee were not physically on-site or cannot get to a physical location?
- Does this person have enough work they can do at home to keep them busy for days or weeks?
- If the employee's primary job can't be done remotely, are there other tasks they can be assigned until everyone can return to the office?

You can also utilize your own supervisor and your Human Resources team to help you find alternatives for staff who cannot work remotely.

Establish Rules of Engagement

Before setting the rules of engagement, it is important that you are able to set an example and be the standard for your staff. If you are struggling with working remotely, you should check in with your supervisor or Human Resources for additional guidance.

When, How, What and Where to Connect

In times of crisis, when working from home is unexpected and temporary, be sensitive when scheduling meetings. If there are certain times of the day when it is easier for team members to meet (like when their kids are resting), ask them and keep that in mind. In addition, if your schedule calls for several meetings back-to-back, plan a short break in-between, so people can get up, grab a glass of water, stretch or just take a break.

It is more important now than ever to **hold your regular team meetings and one-on-ones with your employees**. We even recommend increasing the **frequency of these meetings to ensure everyone is receiving adequate support**. It is critical to keep all lines of communication open. In some cases, daily one-on-ones and/or team meetings are essential to a remote workforce.

There are many **ways to communicate** while working remotely and everyone favors different approaches. It is important for employees and supervisors to have

discussions with each other and their peers about these preferences. Various ways to communicate remotely are:

- Instant Messaging — such as Microsoft Teams and Slack
- Email — the most common form in and out of the office
- Webcam — there are many types of software to use for this such as Google Hangouts, GoToMeeting, Skype, or FaceTime
- Telephone — this is much easier than webcam and works well for a quick chat, but not recommended for meetings or longer conversations

The Structure of One-on-One Check-Ins

Below is a quick bulleted guide of how we recommend structuring your meetings, but you should still discuss what works for the two of you during this time. You can use TSNE's *Supervision Preparation Worksheet* — this sheet is part of the resources from our Better Nonprofit Management Training Series workshop on Effective Supervision.

- Have an agenda.
- Check in on well-being and how things are going in general.
- Are there action points from your last meeting to follow-up on?
- Is there any new information to share at this time?
- Is there any upcoming work? Is assistance with planning needed?
- Check-in on all relationships — organizational, departmental, and supervisory.
- Are there any needs for professional development or performance improvement plans?

Take notes. It is important to take notes during these meetings so that you are easily able to refer back to them, as needed.

Prioritize face-to-face. Yes, video chats can feel awkward, and it is tempting to just fire off an email or instant message, but talking face-to-face can help keep your connections strong. Yes, some of your team members might not like using video or might ask if they can just call or email their updates instead, but explain that it is important to stay connected at this time and that being able to talk to each other face-to-face can help the team communicate and work together effectively. If video is not an option, coordinate how to best make the connection with them.

Set Clear Expectations

Give clear direction, then let people do their jobs!

Communicate Expectations — If you need your team members to be working specific hours, responding to you within a certain amount of time, or using a specific mode of communication (like email or instant messenger), communicate that clearly. Make sure you confirm with each member of your staff that they have a plan for challenges like childcare, distractions, or unexpected interruptions at their home.

Establish Clear Deliverables — Prioritize deliverables over work schedule. Think about what needs to be accomplished and let that be your measure of productivity. If your

employees are getting their assigned work done, it does not matter whether they worked in pajamas for the entire day or half of day, or listened to music in the background.

Trust Your Staff — Make a decision to let your team members do their jobs. Communicate that you trust them to get their work done and to come to you if they need anything. Then let go and plan a regular check-in with each one to address any challenges that come up.

Performance Management is Continuous

Performance management should not just be a one-time review, but a continuous strategy of setting goals and expectations, 1:1 feedback, tracking and monitoring of completion of functions, competencies, goals, and more. Performance management for remote workers should follow the same principles as when you are in the office.

Recognizing Positive Performance

Working remotely can be challenging in connecting with your staff and peers. It is always important to recognize a job well done, but it is even more important when working in this manner. In the office, staff can see you in-person and can chat at random times and read body language — it's not as easy from home!

- Be intentional by letting individual staff members know about their successes. A personal message from the supervisor is a great way to recognize and connect with your staff.
- Public recognition is something that can show your appreciation. Send a shout out to your team to recognize someone for their hard work. Also, keep in mind that not all folks like this kind of attention so be sure to know if your staff member would appreciate this or not.

Performance Improvement

It is essential to stay connected with your staff while working remotely and still be able to manage their performance during this time. First, **it is important to differentiate between a performance issue and a remote working issue**. Adjusting to fully working remotely/from home can be challenging. Be sure you are offering support and guidance around how to work most efficiently and talk to Human Resources if you need any further guidance.

When there is a performance issue, it is important to manage it as closely to your in-office process as possible. We stress the importance of always keeping Human Resources informed through any performance improvement process.

As a reminder, not every performance improvement process is linear and can vary depending on many factors, such as the severity of the issue or the amount of risk it may pose to a person or the organization. Human Resources will help you assess the situation. The most important thing to recognize with performance improvement is that **documentation is key**.

We highly recommend that any delivery of information regarding poor performance should be done by videoconference. You should reference your own organization's

policy around performance management and check with your Human Resources department to best understand your organization's process.

Make Your Team Feel Connected and Supported

Ask for regular feedback from your team and check in about what is working and how the process could be improved. Then, offer your own thoughts and requests. By sharing feedback you'll not only help the process go more smoothly, but also help your organization's culture for the future.

Although this could mean intentionally providing space for social interactions, there are a few ways you can incorporate this in your day-to-day work. By holding regular supervision meetings, team meetings, and utilizing instant messaging platforms, we can stay connected in many different ways.

- **Open up every team meeting discussing non-work topics —** How was your weekend? How is the weather where you are? Did you do anything exciting lately? Share ideas for self-care.
- **Use instant messenger to catch-up —** Open your day by just saying "Good Morning!" to your team in your platform. Check-in on how everyone is doing in a group setting.
- **Give space during supervision —** Supervision is typically a time to just check-in on work, but also check-in on each other.

There are many ways to intentionally connect with staff on a deeper level while working remotely and not making it all about business. You could set up or delegate things such as:

- Virtual lunch breaks within or across teams
- Sending a personalized email to praise a staff member or a card in the mail
- Set aside some time each week to just purposely check-in as a group about non-work items

If you want some guidance on how to incorporate any of these items in your work, don't hesitate to reach out to your own supervisor or your Human Resources department.

Managing Remote Employees
A Checklist for Supervisors

Employee Well-Being

☐ Establish a way to check-in regularly with employees about their well-being

☐ Ensure that you share self-care practices for working from home, share resources

Information Technology

☐ Confirm all team members have the technology and the secure access to what they need to perform the work.

☐ Create and print a copy of your team's Emergency Communication Phone Tree

Employee Supervision

☐ Review each job description to get a clear picture of their work and adjust accordingly

☐ Schedule regular one-on-one meetings with each of your staff members

☐ Establish a structure to your meetings to create clear expectations and show support

☐ Establish what tools you will use when communicating to each staff member

Clients

☐ Talk about expectations around working with clients

☐ Discuss communication plans with clients for updates and changes related to working remotely.