

September 21, 2020

Guidelines on motivating employees when working remotely



Working from home is a worldwide trend and affects companies in numerous ways.

At the beginning of lockdown, everyone said remote working made them more productive and held many benefits. However, a few months down the line we are already questioning the influence that remote working has on our employees' mental wellbeing.

One of the challenges that some managers face is how to motivate their teams while working from home.

When looking at the remote working concept, we must also bear in mind that we are still experiencing a pandemic and that the pandemic also has stressors that employees need to deal with. *Managers need to communicate with employees regularly and watch for signs of burnout.*

In our previous blog we discussed *how to deal with depression in the workplace*, in this blog, we share some tips on how you can inspire and motivate your team even if they work from home.

What are the most important skills needed for remote working?

- **Communication**, although a critical skill in any working environment, becomes extremely important when working remotely. We must sharpen our communication skills, not only as the senders but also as the recipients. It is not always possible to communicate verbally, or we want to use written communication (for example, e-mail and/or chats) as it is much quicker, and therefore cannot pick up on non-verbal cues or the tone of voice. Our message or instruction must be clear to the recipient to avoid miscommunication and confusion. The recipient might also not view the communication positively, while external factors can influence how they perceive and interpret the message.
- **Collaboration** cannot happen without proper communication. It is sometimes necessary to work with colleagues to enable us to finish specific tasks. If the correct platforms are not used (while remote working) and there is a lack of communication between colleagues, they will be unable to collaborate.
- **Time management** is not only a skill needed for remote working but is also needed to ensure that employees do not experience burnout. If you manage your time correctly, you will find a balance between work and personal life.

Important tips on how to motivate employees working from home

- **Virtual breaks:** Some of the new buzzwords include "virtual" – virtual coffee breaks, virtual happy hour, virtual meetings, etc. These are all things we could normally do by socialising with other people – we are, after all, social beings. We often forget all the social interactions and "disruptions" we had while everyone was still at the office. We could express our emotions while taking a coffee break with a colleague or during a quick catchup with them, as well as a quick body break and mental break from the work at hand.

This can still be done by making sure that you regularly connect with colleagues by taking virtual coffee breaks to make conversation about weekend plans and family, or small talk to let off steam. It is also important for managers to schedule weekly meetings with their teams to report on progress made and to ensure that everyone around the table has something to say.

- o **Designated working area:** Many resources suggest having a designated area in your house to work in, which will allow you to separate your work life from your personal life, as lines can become blurred when working from home. Set a work routine and stay in that routine to eliminate long working hours. All of us have experienced how easy it is to quickly open your laptop and send an email to a colleague or client when you receive such after hours, which bring us to the next point of micro-management and setting of expectations.
- o **Micro-management and setting expectations:** - Micro-management eliminates an employee's freedom in the workplace and can diminish motivation levels. Appeal to the employee's sense of responsibility and duty. Set out expectations and boundaries for responding to emails and when work should be done. If expectations/boundaries are not communicated, employees will feel obliged to respond immediately and will not be able to switch off. Schedule out-of-office replies to make customers aware of working hours so that they do not expect immediate responses from your personnel outside office hours.

In conclusion

With the *enabling technologies available to navigate the 'new normal'*, businesses should continue the 'norm' in order to sustain employee engagement and to keep employees motivated during this trying time when we are all feeling the impact of the cultural shift. Communicate consistently with colleagues to ensure that everyone in the team is doing okay.

Make sure that you listen when someone speaks up; be available and present. Don't forget to praise your employees when appropriate to keep them highly motivated. Appreciation gives a good feeling and doesn't require much effort; remember that motivated employees mean a thriving organisation.

About the Author: Dina Korsten joined SERR Synergy in February 2020 as the HR Manager. She graduated from the University of Pretoria in 2011 with a BCom in Human Resources and in 2018 completed her BCom (Honours) in Industrial and Organisational Psychology.

Resources:

5 Must-have Skills for Remote Work:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashiraprossack1/2020/07/30/5-must-have-skills-for-remote-work/#6b64f6b233c4>

Google's Remote Work Policy has 9 Great Tips You should definitely Steal Today:

<https://www.inc.com/justin-bariso/googles-remote-work-policy-has-9-great-tips-you-should-definitely-steal-today.html>

4 Common mistakes to avoid when remote working and how to correct them:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2020/08/09/4-common-mistakes-to-avoid-when-remote-working-and-how-to-correct-them/#554728517892>

How to motivate and inspire your WFH team -

<https://www.robertwalters.co.za/hiring/hiring-advice/how-to-motivate-and-inspire-your-wfm-team.html>

The new normal calls for leadership with a human touch (virtually) -

<https://www.itweb.co.za/content/WnpNgM2KekgqVrGd>

©SERR Synergy, www.serr.co.za