



Managing Your Team and Yourself Effectively during COVID-19

Most of us have been thrown into a new way of working over the last few weeks and it's been a challenging time for all of us to get to grips with this new way of life.

This week we have seen schools shut down and most of us are in lockdown at home unless we are key workers. As we start to get to grips with how we work from home, either in isolation, with housemates or with our families, we wanted to share eight things to help you manage yourself and the people you work with.

1. Let's reset our expectations.

We are all used to working at a fast pace and this speed has often been aided by us working together in the same office, under the same working conditions, with the same work schedule.

Now that we've shifted into a quarantined environment, managers will need to reset their expectations on how long standard tasks or responsibilities will take. Some team members will be working on shared home WiFi, using laptops instead of PCs and using systems that they need to log into remotely. All of these things will have an impact on speed.

What does resetting look like from a practical perspective? Here are some tips:

- Try not to worry too much about how the work gets done; as long as it gets done and the results are what you were aiming for, that should be good enough. You need to give team members some autonomy around their responsibilities, as well as clarity on what results you need them to deliver.
- Each person you work with will have different challenges, so make time to understand their tasks, responsibilities and projects and how these may be affected by working from home.
- Highlight any potential challenges to the team ahead of a deadline so that you can become solution-focused in this challenging time.
- Readdress the priorities for the week to help your team organise their own workload
- It's also important to acknowledge that certain tasks that used to be a priority may no longer be one.

Our role as managers/leaders is to keep our team motivated and productive, so we need to be more flexible and readjust how we manage them remotely to get the results we all need. If we don't adapt, we run the risk of putting team members under unrealistic pressure, which could impact their mental wellbeing and their overall performance.

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2. Make sure you stay in touch regularly.

Research tells us that shorter communication cycle times are more effective in building and sustaining morale and engagement. In order to achieve this, we suggest:

- Using instant messaging to stay in regular contact.
- Avoiding letting an employee go more than half a day without checking in.
- You might want to schedule a daily team meeting, ideally by video, perhaps rotating responsibility for who leads it. Set the expectation that everyone needs to be present and not distracted. Model what it means to show up as a virtual team player.

3. Support continued learning, but keep it short.

None of us know how long this pandemic will last, so we must keep on learning whilst we work. Growth and development keep us all motivated and productive, so use this time create space for your team members to develop their knowledge or skills in short timeframes.

- Focus on sharing short lessons on a single topic in a five to 10-minute segment. These might cover a specific tool, behaviour, or skill.
- Rotate the delivery of these lessons among team members and allow them to identify their own topics for training.
- If you can, ask a different team member to debrief the lesson and lead a short discussion about the application, relevance, and implications of what everyone has learned.

4. Assign buddies to add a layer of mutual support.

Attending to every team member's needs will quickly exhaust the capacity of most managers. So if you have a large team, think about distributing that responsibility and organising team members into pairs with each individual assigned as a buddy.

Collaboration and supporting each other has never been so critical, so use this time to think about connecting with people who may not have worked with each other before. Also think about how you can build strong relationships with each other across business functions to support each other.

This shared leadership model creates a second layer of mutual support and guards against emotional isolation. Ask the buddies to check in daily and assess overall engagement and well-being.

5. Pay more attention to the way people communicate with each other.

We've already talked about the importance of staying more connected, but we must also be mindful of the challenges we face when trying to read the emotional cues of people who aren't in the same room. We are all in this together and will need to rely on proxy indicators such as text, voice, and video communications.

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We'd recommend paying close attention to patterns in the tone of written communication; rate, volume, pitch, and inflexion of voice communication; and physical gestures in video communication.

We'd also encourage managers to ask more questions and be more direct in their questioning to get to the bottom of how team members are coping.

6. Model optimism.

There's plenty of research which shows that behaviour is contagious. Managers who demonstrate hope and confidence in the future are better able to help their team members find meaning and purpose in their work, especially under stressful conditions.

Purpose has always been a core motivator for a lot of us at work. Make sure that your current purpose is relevant and if it isn't, pivot and reframe it to a short-term purpose that has meaning in our world today.

Remember that fear freezes initiative, ties up creativity, and yields compliance instead of commitment.

7. Update even if there's no update.

The more you communicate and share, the less chance there is to develop an information vacuum within your team. We'd recommend that you communicate regularly even if you don't have new information to share. The importance of maintaining transparency through a crisis with frequent updates is the ultimate expression of good faith, empathy, and genuine concern for your team. So, keep providing the team with an understanding of what you're doing and why.

8. Continually gauge stress and engagement levels.

We all know that our mental health will be impacted by what is going on in the world, especially as there are so many variables that we have no control over. Our brains will be in a state of alert, so we need to make it crystal clear to team members that our main concern is their well-being.

Take time to monitor their engagement by periodically asking each team member two quick questions.

- First, on a zero-to-10 scale, rate the level of stress you currently feel?
- Second, using that same scale, rate your level of overall engagement?

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We are all in uncharted territory, which means that we need to adapt our ways of working to cope with our current circumstances. Human connection has never been so important, so do whatever you can to keep connected, show empathy and give people your time. All of these things will make a big difference to the people we work with.