

Tips for Supervisors Leading Remote Teams

(Grace Leaf, Director of HR at Community Colleges of Spokane - March 2020)

If you find yourself suddenly leading your team remotely, here are a few tips to make sure employees, who must physically distance, stay socially connected virtually.

- First and foremost, practice leader self-care. Get up and work out, stretch or walk so you can exude calm for your team. Body work becomes more important as we isolate physically. Find a way to stay connected with others in your leader self-care practice.
- Reach out to your team in the morning either by email, video conference call or phone calls. Ideas include sending a daily round up email to your team to set the tone for each day, summarizing what people should focus on and well as emphasizing any big-picture items for the week including updates about how the Stay Home/Stay Healthy order is impacting the College as an organization. Share appreciation for the ongoing service of the team.
- Cut some slack for barking dogs, noisy kids and household appliance noise on calls. Everyone is adjusting at their own pace and acknowledge the transition to home can be a challenge, especially for extroverts who value lots of team contact.
- Send short inspirational videos once or twice a day. Harvard Business Review has work-related videos and a new one talks about how to work from home called "[How to Actually Work...When You're Working from Home](#)" is available. TED talks are great as well. Choose talks that relate to positivity, happiness, stress management or learning to sprinkle out to your team.
- Send out a mini-challenge for the week, whether it's to have your team share one wave of gratitude about a team member who has helped them, or to share a success.
- Build new rituals that anchor your team during the workday such as having your team check in via email when they log on and off each day, in addition to sending a quick summary of tasks accomplished. It's especially important to use niceties such as, "good morning, hi there, thanks for reaching out" to infuse tone and a sense of warmth.
- Use each communication opportunity to strengthen relationship. Take the time to type the person's name in the message. We're all attuned to hear our name and when we read our name as we read messages, it makes us pause mentally and feel seen and connected.
- Avoid criticizing publicly in emails to the whole team. If you need to give critical feedback, do it privately over a phone call or video chat. Praise the team's efforts and accomplishments in public.
- Avoid motivation killers such as: Why do you always...Why didn't you...You never...and replace with phrases like: I'm wondering about...Help me understand...I'm curious about...
- Lastly, say "thank you" "I'm grateful" more in your communications with specificity. In other words, notice your team's work and name it as a daily leadership practice. Generic phrases like "you're a rock star" or "you're killing it" feels empty when people need to feel connected without the usual handshakes, pats on the back and high-fives. Physical distancing has robbed us of our ability to connect through human contact and these verbal surrogates are more important now than ever before.

Novelist James Lane Allen said it best, "Adversity doesn't build character. It reveals it." So take this opportunity to reveal that you are a compassionate, capable, competent leader. We can get through this together.