Will it Fly?® Educational Brief

Module: Managing Remote Employees
Section: Virtual Communication

Some managers face a difficult transition when their workers disperse from the main facility. Visual cues, such as facial expression and body language, are no longer available. Email that is too abrupt and "all business" can be misconstrued as anger. To minimize the potential for negative interpretation, take the time to build niceties into your remote communiqués.

However, don't feel that you have to go overboard, and pretend that you are your employee's best friend. Something as simple as asking about the family, using humor, tailoring the conversation to the temperament of the individual and/or being aware of cultural differences can help develop the manager-employee relationship.

Also, even without such an awkward context, it's a good idea to explain the bigger picture of why you are making a particular request, so that you are not interpreted as merely issuing orders. Or, if you tend to jam your emails with technical jargon, tone them down if that specialized language is not necessary to get your point across. The point is to communicate and come to an understanding between you and your employee.

In a similar vein, making sure to solicit feedback from your remote staff can yield money- and time-saving results, and is well worth the effort. Also, include behavioral information, when analyzing this feedback. As an example, say your remote staff and traveling salespeople have difficulty reporting current performance metrics. With their input, you could lower costs and increase efficiency by buying them access to cloud-based applications that automate the "crunching" of their raw data into a usable format you could view at any time, helping you make strategic decisions more accurately.

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