Will it Fly?® Educational Brief

Module: Managing Remote Employees
Section: Enhanced Management Basics

When managing remote employees, you'll need to become a stellar project manager. Some of the key factors to consider are: pooling of acquired information, knowledge management, being proactive and monitoring processes. To be an effective manager in this scenario (even more so than for a "regular" manager), you must be adaptable, exercise good judgment, make hard decisions, possess a dollop of humility, and be accountable for your mistakes. Also, proactive managers are constantly building leadership skills in themselves and others.

A cornerstone to success for your remote operation is to have a work plan put together for the employee that should be completed immediately after the job is filled (or you take over for a previous manager). First, determine what reporting method makes the most sense for the new arrangement. Next, help your employee to set measurable goals, not only for the work output, but for their career development as well. Assure them that they will be given equal opportunities for advancement, and that they will be notified of all key onsite developments.

Also, don't forget about the importance of setting clear performance standards and measurements for your remote employees. One of the most important distinctions of remote workers from onsite employees is that their manager cannot see their effort, observe their interactions or follow their progress throughout the workday. Remote employees must be judged on results, not perceived effort. Other considerations for the remote manager fall within establishing appropriate methods for reporting accomplishments, career development and fair and comprehensive assessment methods.

While remote workers, in general, tend to be more productive, the lack of quick, direct feedback or physical oversight (i.e., as when collaborating together at the office) could result in work taking longer than anticipated. In this case tools used for virtual communication may exacerbate the issue,

particularly if an instruction is misunderstood. Dealing with this scenario efficiently means requiring your team to get approvals or feedback at specific points before going onto the next stage, and that you (or the designated lead) provide a response within a specified timeframe that works for their schedules, as well as yours. Even if not dealing with different time zones, ensure that everyone on the team understands: 1) the deadlines for when work has to be submitted for review, 2) the required timeframe needed to provide feedback and get responses, and 3) the specific circumstances when you (and they) should connect one-on-one for urgent or complicated requests. You will also need to include that review time in the overall timeline, in order to forecast the potential for delays and/or when your employees could end up waiting with nothing to do.

To also minimize other time-consuming snags, it's important to have standardized procedures in place so that the administrative aspects of managing are performed efficiently. These administrative aspects can include documents, such as timesheets, expense reports, invoices and purchase orders. Aside from standardizing due to worker ease and efficiency, remote employees essentially have to be able to "self-manage." No matter how much you would like to be available for them, due to time zones, schedules, etc., essentially no one will be there to oversee the process.

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