

Will it Fly?® Educational Brief

Module: Managing Remote Employees

Section: Provide Training

For employees with no experience working under remote conditions, you'll need to orient them first of all. Besides the time-honored method of shoving the employee out the door and letting him/her sink or swim, a more effective method for setting up the manager-employee relationship is to put them in an onsite home office "laboratory," and have them communicate solely through virtual means for a set period of time. By doing so you'll both work out the kinks in relaying information without actually having face-to-face contact.

Even for employees that have a lot of experience working remotely, You'll also need to keep a closer eye on them at the start: You don't want to micromanage, but like the inexperienced employee, you do need to establish the manager-employee relationship. One of the greatest obstacles with managing remotely is miscommunication, no matter how many fancy communication tools are available. If you set the ground rules for the working relationship at the beginning, miscommunication is less likely. You will also need to train them to meet your expectations.

A good manager makes sure that his/her employees can develop professionally. To avoid the remote employee feeling left out of the opportunities available to onsite employees, make sure they have the opportunity to come onsite when possible. Also allow them to attend the functions/events that they need to perform their jobs. However, when you do so, attach performance measures to your okay.

Aside from professional development, even though you may have no control over your employee's environment, you and the employee could potentially still need to take into account a myriad of required (legal/regulatory) and safety issues. Both the legal and safety requirements will depend on the job; however, while OSHA has not yet won the heated battle over home workers'

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privacy vs. the need for home safety, some companies do require home office safety inspections.

If you publish guidelines, be sure to include proper use of stepladders, storage and materials access, safe installation of wiring and trip prevention methods. Find out if you should provide protective equipment and ergonomic workstations. Consider the underlying causes of unsafe behavior when establishing your safety policy — fatigue, carelessness, etc. Special training such as defensive driving, equipment handling and basic home safety may also be necessary and/or required.
