HRInsights

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Effectively Leading Remote Teams

Due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, more employees are working remotely than ever before. As management is challenged with leading effective remote teams, organizations may consider internal best practices and question whether any adjustments would help these teams succeed. By addressing the unique needs of employees in the remote workplace, employers can set the stage for effective and productive teams.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an all-time high of employees telecommuting, remote work had previously been growing steadily, and likely will continue to expand in the coming years. While many of the same principles of leading effective teams remain in place, organizations can take steps to ensure that remote teams are performing at a high level and employees are feeling engaged in their remote roles.

Challenges of Leading Remote Teams

Managers should be prepared to face a set of challenges that are unique to remote teams. According to the Harvard Business Review, challenges remote employees face include:

- Lack of face-to-face interaction
- Social isolation
- Limited or lack of access to necessary information
- Distractions within the employee's home

Managers should acknowledge these challenges and develop solutions to help employees overcome them and take advantage of the potential benefits of working remotely.

How to Effectively Lead Remote Teams

Effectively leading remote teams begins with defining objectives and creating clear plans to attain them. By outlining details of roles, responsibilities, timelines and expectations, employees will feel less stressed about what's expected of them. To best lead remote teams, leaders can consider the following practices:

- **Schedule daily check-ins**—This could be an individual or team check-in—either way, employees will be comfortable consulting with managers if daily meetings are part of a scheduled routine. Daily check-ins also make sure that all team members are able to share their ideas and stay on the same page.
- **Utilize different communications channels**—Video calls can provide benefits when working remotely, such as minimizing isolation within teams. Consider how your team can use video, instant messaging, project management tools and more to both stay on track and build engagement.
- **Don't always keep it professional**—Creating virtual events for non-work conversations can help build team chemistry and replace water cooler or happy hour conversations.

Providing Support for Remote Employees

As employers consider how scheduled meetings, virtual events and new technologies can be introduced, managers can also think about how they can best support their teams as a resource. An effective management strategy should include offering emotional support and providing encouragement to both individuals and teams. Asking open-ended questions to employees will allow them to speak their minds, and managers should focus on being good listeners. While it may be easy for a manager to pick up on social queues in the office, even the most effective leaders remain more distant in the remote environment. While these challenges persist, being intentional about providing support to employees can help remove any barriers.

Boosting Productivity for Remote Teams

While, in some cases, remote work is being adopted out of necessity, many employees feel confident in their abilities to fulfill their roles remotely. The Harris Poll conducted a survey on behalf of Glassdoor among nearly 1,000 employed adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results indicated that 60% feel confident in doing their job efficiently from home, even if it means doing so indefinitely. The same survey also revealed that 50% believe they would be equally or more productive working remotely.

When utilized effectively, remote work can provide advantages for both employers and employees. These can often include:

- Boosted productivity
- Increased flexibility
- Increased retention
- Reduced greenhouse emissions
- Broadened talent pool

Remote work presents advantages and challenges to the way companies do business. With increased utilization of telecommuting, employers can plan ahead for how they can best accommodate remote teams and increase productivity.

Plan Ahead for Remote Success

Every business is different, so there isn't one right way to best lead remote teams. Create practices that work best for your organization and are accommodating to remote and non-remote employees alike. Contact Relation Insurance Services for additional resources regarding best practices for utilizing the remote workspace.