

# GUIDE TO MANAGING EMPLOYEES REMOTELY

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UNIVERSITY of  
**HOUSTON**  
HUMAN RESOURCES

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# PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this guide is to help leaders understand how to effectively manage employees remotely during these unprecedented times. We understand that employees are facing new challenges while working from home and this guide will assist managers with navigating the unique circumstances that may arise while managing employees remotely.

In this guide, we will discuss the basics of how to manage employees in a remote environment, the importance of creating expectations, best practices for communication, and managing expectations for your team. We will also address how to handle the progressive discipline process remotely when necessary. Lastly, we have included a series of Frequently Asked Questions to help address specific situations and challenges that leaders may experience.

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# BASICS FOR MANAGING REMOTELY



## COMMUNICATION IS KEY!

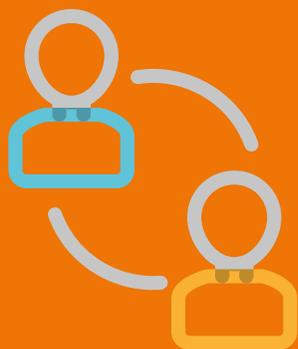
Employees who feel accustomed to working on-site may feel cut off from resources, information, and relationships they rely on to do their jobs. To help overcome this challenge:

- Plan for more conference calls and include time for socializing
- Keep the lines of communication open
- Consider sending videos or emails to reiterate your reasoning, intentions, and expectations

## STRUCTURED DAILY CHECK-INS

Increasing communication during this uncertain time is highly recommended. Daily check-ins provide employees with an opportunity to communicate with their leaders, ask questions, and express any concerns they may have. Check-ins can be:

- Team based or one-on-one (based on the nature of the work)
- By phone or video call (video is highly recommended to maximize communication and engagement)



## SET RULES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Ensure employees know how to engage with you and each other:

- Set expectations for team communication
  - Include frequency, method, and timing
  - Example: "We will use videoconferencing for daily check-ins, but use IM when something is urgent."
- Explain how your team can best contact you during the workday
- Include expectations for communication among team members to ensure that they are sharing information

## TRUST YOUR TEAM

Trust your employees to act independently, responsibly, and professionally. Micromanaging will make your team feel like you don't trust them, which can have negative effects on employee engagement, morale, and performance. Agree on specific, measurable goals that should be completed every week and remember to focus on productivity (see Productivity Mindset, pg 3).



# OFFER ENCOURAGEMENT & EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

## ACKNOWLEDGE

Acknowledge stress employees may be experiencing. Ask general questions to elicit important information that you might not otherwise hear.



## LISTEN

Listen to employees' anxieties and concerns. Restate employees' response back to them to demonstrate that you hear and understand them.



## EMPATHIZE

Empathize with employees' challenges and struggles, and provide EAP/CAPS resource information when necessary.



## PRODUCTIVITY MINDSET

It is unrealistic to expect that employees can maintain pre-COVID-19 levels of productivity under the current circumstances. It is imperative that you focus on keeping everyone safe and healthy while having an open mind about productivity.

- **Consider what productivity means for your team.**
- **How can productivity be achieved?**
  - Compassion - Be understanding of challenges and make accommodations when possible.
  - Flexibility - Remember to focus on results. If employees are completing tasks and achieving goals, be flexible with when, where, and how the work is getting done.
  - Accountability - Manage productivity by creating expectations and maintaining open lines of communication to ensure expectations are being met.



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# CREATING EXPECTATIONS

## Why is it important to set expectations for your team?

It is not possible for an employee to succeed if you are not clear about your expectations. How can you measure your employee's performance unless clear goals have been established? Managing employees remotely can make this process more difficult because you can't see what they are doing daily. However, managers have the ability to ensure success for employees by being specific when determining what they need from their employees both individually and as a team.

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## When creating expectations, managers should be sure to include:



### TASKS & PROJECTS

Provide details on the task to be completed, but be open to change in outputs and expectations as situations or the current environment changes.



### RESPONSE TIMES

Set deadlines. Employees must be made aware of your expectations regarding assigned work. "As soon as possible" is subjective. Be specific about when you need the assigned completed.



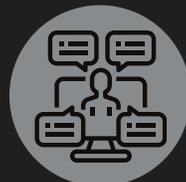
### WORKING HOURS

Be specific when setting expected hours of work. Hours in the office may differ from those needed in a remote environment.



### WORKING LOCATION

If you expect your employees to remain local, let them know. Many employees may be able to work from anywhere there is an internet connection



### COMMUNICATION

Make it clear how often you expect employees to communicate with you. Be specific about how they should communicate and how quickly you expect them to return phone calls and emails.



### FLEXIBILITY

These are unusual times; be willing to listen to employee concerns and hardships and make adjustment if possible.



# COMMUNICATING EXPECTATIONS

Employees need to have clear, effective communication regarding the detail of what is expected. There are several ways to ensure employees know what you need and expect from them.

1. **"Live" face-time opportunities:** ( Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, etc.) These platforms give employees the opportunity to feel the "normalcy" of being able to communicate with managers face-to-face. Employees have the opportunity to ask questions and obtain clarity, if needed.
2. **Phone:** Phone calls also give employees the opportunity to actually hear what is being said, create a dialogue with managers, and ask questions if needed.

3. **Email:** Email is the least preferred method of communicating expectations since much can be lost in written communication. Email should always be followed up by an opportunity for the manager and employee to have a verbal conversation.

4. **Letter of Expectations:** Managers should consider using the Letter of Expectations document to gain their employee's agreement to the expectations that have been set and hold the employee accountable.



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# WHEN AN EMPLOYEE FAILS TO MEET EXPECTATIONS

While we encourage managers to practice flexibility and compassion during these challenging times, you can still hold employees responsible for meeting expectations. When an employee fails to meet expectations, leaders are encouraged to follow these steps.

## IDENTIFY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

*(Probationary vs. Non-Probationary Employee)*

**Exempt Employees** (salaried): 12 month probationary period

**Non-Exempt Employees** (hourly): 6 month probationary period

\*Employees are subject to only informal disciplinary actions during the probationary period. Employees who have completed the probationary period are subject to both informal and formal actions.

## INFORMAL ACTIONS

An informal action is a conference between the employee and their supervisor and is documented with the [Informal Employee Conference Record](#) document.

Informal actions may also include:

- Coaching and feedback given via email or one-on-one meetings
- Re-training
- Job shadowing with team members

## FORMAL ACTIONS

All formal actions are documented with the [Formal Employee Conference Record](#) document and must be approved by Human Resources before being administered to the employee.

Formal actions include the following steps:

- Written Reprimand
- Final Written Reprimand/Suspension
- Termination

\*Typically, all steps will be followed sequentially. However, depending on the severity of situation, some steps may be skipped when necessary.

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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **How do I manage my staff effectively while working remotely?**

The key is to set clear expectations for productivity, communicate often with employees by having daily/weekly check-in meetings, and demonstrate trust in your team. It is also recommended to provide encouragement, offer emotional support, and avoid micromanaging.

## **How do I manage my full-time employee who does not have enough work for 8 hours per day or 40 hours per week?**

Working remotely presents a different set of challenges for you as a manager and for the employee as a subordinate. Being creative about new tasks or other duties beyond what is normally assigned on campus can make a huge difference and add to a new layer of employee satisfaction. Maybe there are administrative duties they could assist with, reach out to your peers to see if there are any tasks that they could assist with, remotely.

## **Are employees required to take a lunch break while working remotely?**

The policies related to lunch breaks still apply. Per [MAPP 02.04.02](#) Hours of Work policy, each full-time employee is provided a meal break near the middle of the work day. The time for meal breaks may be scheduled by management in the department with appropriate regard for workload. The meal period should not exceed 60 minutes. However, meal breaks of different lengths may be approved where departmental work schedules require it and daily schedules are adjusted accordingly. Employees are not paid for meal breaks.

## **Can I contact my remote employees outside of normal work hours?**

Managers are encouraged to be mindful of their employees' work-life balance and regular work schedules. Contacting employees outside of normal work hours may be compensable time, specifically for non-exempt (hourly) employees, under the Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Prior to contacting employees, it is best to determine if it is truly necessary on a case by case basis and not make it a standard practice.

## **How can I follow up on performance challenges with my team?**

Supervisors are encouraged to have communications with the employee regarding the challenges and collaborate with the employee on how overcome such challenges. This may include establishing short-term goals and setting up follow up dates to ensure the staff member has met the expectations of those goals.

## **I have previously been managing performance issues with my employee? Now that they are working remotely, the performance issues have continued. What can I do?**

You are encouraged to manage employees by following the progressive discipline protocols in collaboration with HR. Please refer to [MAPP 02.04.03](#) Discipline and Dismissal of Staff Employees which outlines the disciplinary process.

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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **How do I administer progressive discipline while working remotely?**

In order to administer a formal reprimand, complete the Formal Employee Conference Record and submit to your HR Business Partner for review and approval before issuing to staff member. Upon approval, you can administer the document via telephone or video conference.

## **How do I obtain signatures on the Formal Conference Record?**

In order to obtain signatures, both parties can print, sign, and return via scan (if capable). Alternatively, digital signatures are acceptable or email acknowledging documents will suffice.

## **Do I need to document all my conversations with my staff?**

While it is not required to document all conversations, it may assist you with managing expectations and performance, including deadlines, projects assigned, etc. If you are discussing performance or discipline issues, it is advisable to document your conversations. A follow up email to the employee including details of the conversation is advised.

## **Are probationary terminations being approved while working remotely?**

All probationary termination requests are being reviewed and approved per normal guidelines. In order to submit a probationary termination request, a draft of the probationary letter of termination and justification must be submitted to your HR Business Partner for review. The justification should include a timeline of the issues and corrective actions taken. If you have questions about a probationary termination request, please contact your HR Business Partner to discuss further.

## **Can the probationary period be extended due to working remotely?**

No, the probationary period will not be extended due to working remotely. The only option to extend the probationary period is if the employee is on an approved leave during their probationary period.

For additional resources and information, please visit our website at [www.uh.edu/hr/employee-relations](http://www.uh.edu/hr/employee-relations).

For assistance or questions regarding managing employees remotely, contact the HRBP team.



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