

5 Ways to Successfully Manage Remote Staff

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Berbay Marketing and Public Relations Firm Blog

Managing your law firm staff in the office or remotely can and should look remarkably similar; however, there are unique challenges to working virtual. Understanding this and adjusting your management approach will be the difference between a productive, seamless transition, and one that potentially costs your business. We've rounded up 5 ways you can navigate successfully managing remote staff during a pandemic.

Ensure a proper workspace setup

You want your employees to have a comfortable setup that allows them to be productive in the office and working from home should be no different. While some of the usual office luxuries may not be possible (e.g. two computer monitors), ask your staff about what they need at home to create a similar environment. Do they have a desk and proper chair to work from? What type of lighting is available? If they're relying on their personal computer, is it functional for work purposes? What about a printer? Is there access to high-speed internet? Some employees may not feel comfortable asking for at-home office supplies, and these are just a few of the questions that need to be addressed to allow your employees to work happily and efficiently.

Minimize loneliness and isolation

One of the downsides to working remotely is a sense of isolation, which can lead to anxiety and depression. Consider that employees may live alone, further exacerbating the possibility of loneliness. Identify ways for your team to interact throughout the day, ideally via video and phone versus email or text messaging. Don't make conversations all about business; make time for small talk. Maintain office structure with designated times for breaks and lunch and consider holding virtual lunches together. Encourage employees to go for brief walks throughout the day to stay energized. Host team building activities such as workouts in the evening or happy hours via Zoom or similar platforms.

Overcome communication challenges

When working virtually, you automatically lose the opportunity to quickly pop into someone's office and bounce an idea off them, but communication challenges go beyond that. Despite everyone's best efforts, there will likely be more emails and texts, which, if not carefully crafted, can result in an

unintended tone. Combat this by picking up the phone or getting on FaceTime, Skype or another video-oriented platform. It may take more effort and organization but will avoid employees questioning what you meant and an endless back and forth over email. Schedule time to brainstorm and strategize versus just talking about to-dos. While not as natural as having a quick chat in the office, it ensures continued creativity and interaction.

Don't forget about encouragement and celebrations

It's important that your staff stays motivated and focused on personal growth. In addition to team meetings, carve out time for one-on-one conversations, too. This will allow you to address any questions or concerns employees have that they aren't comfortable bringing up in a group setting. It's also an opportunity to discuss their goals and how those can be achieved. Don't let evaluations go by the wayside simply because you're not meeting in person.

Promote camaraderie by acknowledging milestones as you would in the office – five-year anniversary with the firm, birthdays, etc. This maintains positive employee morale and helps to minimize the isolation factor addressed earlier.

Establish a culture of ownership and accountability

Your team's organization and productivity is only as good as yours. Implement systems to keep staff accountable. For example, schedule regular check-ins at the same time each day/week and use project management software such as Asana to keep everyone on top of projects and tasks. If you need to cancel a team call, reschedule immediately rather than telling employees you'll get back to them. This allows them to plan their day and prevents wondering when they'll be able to talk to you about a particular client or issue. Your team will take clues from you on how to best navigate working remotely so be an example they should emulate.

Remember that not every employee is suited to work from home, and you need to do what you can as a manager to set them up for success. This will benefit everyone in the long run.

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