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9 Tips for Managing a Remote Team Effectively Amidst Coronavirus Shutdown

Working from home has its challenges — here's how to manage remote employees.



(<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.seekcapital.com/blog/tips-managing-remote-team/>)

By [Laura Martin \(https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.seekcapital.com/blog/author/laira-martin/\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.seekcapital.com/blog/author/laira-martin/)

May 15, 2020

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Whether you're a proponent of remote work or staunchly against it, it's now very much the reality for workers and small businesses across the country and the world. The coronavirus outbreak has forced many businesses to pivot (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.seekcapital.com/blog/ways-businesses-pivoting-coronavirus-shutdown/>), making work from home the norm in many industries.

Moving from office life to home office life (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.seekcapital.com/blog/home-office-essentials-small-business-owners/>) is not always an easy transition, but for now, it is a necessary one. All that said, many entrepreneurs chose the remote work lifestyle long before now, and they've picked up a few tips along the way. To help, Seek Capital spoke to entrepreneurs to get their best advice on managing a remote team amidst the COVID-19 shutdown.

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1. Don't Forget the Basics

"Managing a fully remote team can be challenging for even the most seasoned managers, especially with a rapid and unplanned transition to remote," said McKendree Hickory, facilitator at [LifeLabs Learning](https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://lifelabslearning.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://lifelabslearning.com/>). "First, it's important for managers to not forget the basics. Coaching team members, giving feedback, and staying aligned on top priorities are just as important when teams are fully distributed. Second, when teams cannot physically be together, communication becomes even more critical for success. A key way managers can support their teams is by focusing on making the implicit, explicit. Explicit communication norms on what tools to use, reasons for using them, and when to communicate (e.g., response time, dark time) will create a sense of clarity and certainty for team members, which is particularly important in times of change."

2. Communicate Human to Human

"In this unprecedented time, even normally non-emotional employees may unknowingly be feeling on edge," said Zain Jaffer, founder and CEO of [Zain Ventures](https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://zain-ventures.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://zain-ventures.com/>), an investment firm. "An undercurrent of uncertainty may affect the productivity of your workforce as they don't know when life will return to normal, whether they will still have their jobs on the other end of this pandemic, or whether this global situation will come to their door. Find ways to provide opportunities for them to give a voice to any un-asked questions — and provide answers whenever possible. Your employees will appreciate your efforts of transparency and open communication."

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3. Write Down Daily Priorities

"To help us stay grounded, I developed and have recommended my team to get in the habit of writing three things down at the end of the day that need attention the next business morning," said Ian Kelly, vice president of operations at [NuLeaf Naturals](https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://nuleafnaturals.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://nuleafnaturals.com/>). "Then, before working the next day, review the note — that means before email, before Slack, before everything else. With all the stress and all the changes, this little habit helps us get into work mode so the virus doesn't take anything more from us."

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4. Keep Up With 1-on-1 Meetings

“Have managers schedule regular 1-on-1 meetings with each individual to check in on any challenges they may be experiencing at home, accessing resources, or being productive. It’s so important not to make any assumptions,” said Jessica Lambrecht, founder of [The Rise Journey](https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.therisejourney.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.therisejourney.com/>). “Check in on the basics regularly as situations are in flux. Make sure you’re checking in on at-home resources for remote workers, and on-site safety protocols and supplies for in-person staff.”

5. Be Empathetic

“For this specific time with coronavirus, managers need to understand that their employees aren’t just working from home in a standard fashion,” said Catherine Tabor, CEO of [Sparkfly](https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.sparkfly.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.sparkfly.com/>). “This is a unique situation that brings new challenges. Your employees aren’t just focused on working, some are juggling having their children at home with them or their roommates are also trying to work in the same area. This specific situation brings in completely new distractions that may require some adjustment. In order to achieve success, you need to have empathy. Show your employees you understand, you support them, and that they are an important part of your team.”

6. Allow For (And Encourage) Sick and Vacation Time

“Perhaps it is somewhat countercultural, but our company is extremely strict about making sure that people don’t work while sick and that they take the breaks and vacation time that they are due,” said Chris Eckstrum, SEO Manager at [Housecall Pro](https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.housecallpro.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.housecallpro.com/>). “That still applies in pandemic-land. We also find that for our team, set working hours are crucial; but if they’re not crucial for your business, consider whether you can let people have at least some control over when they work. Other things to bear in mind include using shared calendars and set times to ‘check-in.’”

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7. Avoid Micromanaging

“It’s easy for business owners to feel like they have to micromanage employees when working remotely,” said Chane Steiner, CEO of [Crediful](https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.crediful.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.crediful.com/>). “Since workers aren’t present and you don’t see them as you would in an office, there’s a lack of connection and leaders try to compensate that lack of connection by being overbearing, and breathing down employees’ necks. However, this is a mistake. During a remote, work-from-home setting, most employees thrive and enjoy the personal freedom of getting to work when they want, and as a business owner, it’s important to let your workers have that freedom. Overbearing, micromanaging bosses are bosses that don’t trust their teams, and successful, productive teams aren’t built on distrust.”

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8. Talk About Things Other Than Work

“Make things fun! Just because you’re only interacting online while working doesn’t mean every single conversation needs to be about work,” said Sean Nguyen, director of [Internet Advisor](https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.internetadvisor.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.internetadvisor.com/>). “Share photos with one another or things you’ve done on your off day, or unique places where you’ve plugged in to work, and share memes and other funny internet finds. And anything else you can think of! The more fun people have, the more connected they will feel to the company and their work, which will help develop an awesome culture that will be a huge asset for your company.”

Up Next: 8 Morning Routines of Successful Entrepreneurs

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9. Be Patient

“Managing a remote team during the coronavirus is very different from a normal remote work situation,” said Walt Capell, president and owner of [Workers Compensation Shop](https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.workerscompensationshop.com/) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123222916/https://www.workerscompensationshop.com/>). “Patience with your staff is extremely important. Most of your staff is working from home for the first time, they may not have a formal office set up in their house, they may be sharing the house with a partner who is also working from home, and they may have children who are home from school. Because of all of these distractions, a manager cannot expect the same amount of work as during normal times.”

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