



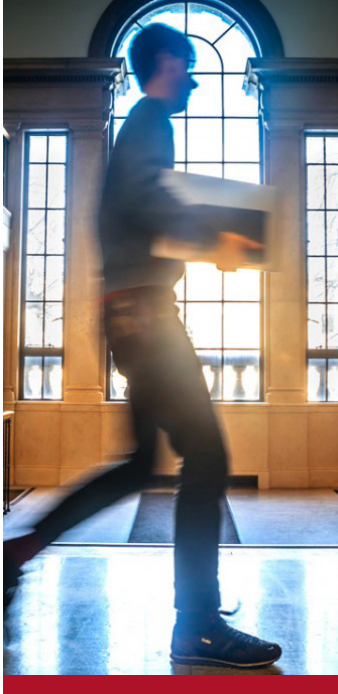
Managing Remote Teams

GUIDE FOR **MANAGERS**

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Managing Remote Teams

Why Remote Work?

With the COVID-19 pandemic still posing a threat to public health, we need to continue limiting the number of people physically on campus to effectively achieve social distancing. Having employees continue to work remotely to fulfill some or all of their work responsibilities is critical to our continued efforts to reduce density on campus in order to reduce the potential spread of the COVID-19 virus. As we move forward with our gradual reactivation of campus, remote work

arrangements can be done in a full or partial day/week schedule as appropriate and are expected to be an integral part of reactivation plans where feasible. Though local, state, and federal agencies may allow for certain levels of reentry, these should be viewed as a maximum threshold and reactivation plans should continue to minimize employees' physical presence on campus with continued use of remote work where possible.

Emergency remote work during a pandemic is quite different than a consistent remote work arrangement. Some of these key differences include:

- Remote work is being done as a social distancing measure. Employees are being isolated in all parts of their lives. Regular remote workers can often resolve feelings of isolation by coming into offices, working remotely from coffee shops, etc. – all things that are currently limited.
- Many employees did not have the tools or resources to work effectively away from campus because the situation occurred without planning or training.
- With K-12 schools being closed and childcare programs impacted, many employees are juggling work, caregiving and homeschooling. Under normal circumstances, Cornell's Flexibility in the Workplace policy does not allow for remote work while caregiving. An exception to this policy has been made due to the pandemic and parents having no other care/school options.
- Many employees have a less than ideal office space (no privacy) which has been exacerbated by having children and/or a spouse/partner present who typically wouldn't be at home during work hours.
- Some managers have employees working both remotely and in essential positions on campus.



Even under normal circumstances, remote work can pose challenges with:

- Managing performance and productivity
- Building trust
- Communication
- Connection and collaboration with others
- Helping employees navigate work and life (maintaining boundaries)

Formalizing Arrangements

For employees whose anticipated return to on-campus work is planned for a later reactivation phase, managers should meet with them to discuss how remote work has been working for them, the supervisor, their co-workers, and those they support. They should also (if they haven't already):

- Review the [Security Practices When Working From Home](#) web page.
- Review the [Flexibility in the Workplace Policy 6.6.13](#). Note: a temporary exception has been made to this policy regarding the requirement that an employee must have child care while working from home. This policy exception will likely remain in effect until the K-12 school system and community child care options are back in operation.
- Set up a time to clearly outline performance expectations, communications and needed resources for effective remote working. Cornell's [Flexible Work Agreement Form](#) is a helpful tool to guide managers with both their conversation and documentation of the arrangement.



Best Practices for Managing Remote Employees

Focus on Outcomes

Now that you and/or your team members are working from home, you may be asking, “What is my team doing on a day-to-day basis?” or “Is my team still positively contributing to the goals of my department or the university?”

These questions exemplify the differences between an “input” style of management vs. an “output” style of management. Not being able to see our employees everyday forces leaders to set strong performance goals and expectations for what an employee achieves vs. measuring the amount of time they spend “on the job.”

It’s not possible to manage every aspect of the work done by a remote employee – nor should you try. Instead, be sure that your employees know what is expected of them and provide productive feedback to help them maximize their effectiveness. This is also a non-judgmental way to find out about current capacity and if your people are overloaded or underutilized.

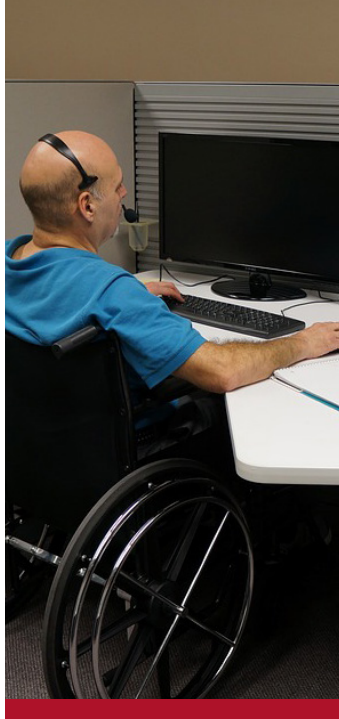
Keep in mind that even under the best output style of management, employees are navigating many stressors and distractions that can make accomplishing work difficult. Consider what projects may be most appropriate given the focus and timing required and speak openly with employees about their ability to complete them.

Set Clear Expectations

- Ask employees what they are working on each week and be clear about what you expect to be completed.
- Define the scope, deadlines, and deliverables for each task or project your team is working on.
- Take a supportive role by asking, “What do you need?” or “How can I help?”
- Do not micromanage – leave it to the individual to figure out how and when to get the work done.

Ask direct reports...

- What concrete directions do you need to move forward on your current projects?
- How do you feel about your capacity and workload?
- What clarity do you need on your priorities for this week?



Provide Frequent, Honest Feedback

- Don't assume "no news is good news." A lack of regular communication can lead to confusion about an employee's status and performance, for you and for them.
- Choose the best medium to communicate. While text and IM are quick and easy, they lack the nuances of spoken communication that are important for both good and bad messages.
- Get specific about praise, and constructive feedback. "Good job" is fine sometimes, but specific details will be more meaningful and show your employees what they can continue to do to be successful.



Exchanging Feedback

Actively make more space for feedback. It's important that you don't assume that your direct reports will feel comfortable sharing. Ask what more you could be doing to support them.

- What could help you to meet your current commitments and responsibilities?
- What roadblocks are you facing?
- What remains unclear on expected outcomes, and how might you get there?
- What help do you need prioritizing work and/or deliverables?



Build Trust

Trust is the foundation of a successful team, and it starts with managers building trusting relationships with each employee on their team. This can be more challenging during a crisis that brings high stress, uncertainty, and a quickly changing environment where people feel nervous and insecure. Misunderstandings can (and will) occur more frequently.

Cornell employee surveys have shown a primary factor impacting employee intention to leave is whether or not there is a trusting relationship between a manager and their employees. And employees have indicated that trust in their leader starts with their leader demonstrating trust in them.

You can build trust by...

- Setting clear expectations, as previously outlined
- Providing employees with the space to decide how to accomplish a goal themselves (not micromanaging)
- Having transparent two-way communication
- Managing your reactions to situations in your words (in your voice and written) and remaining calm
- Recognizing and respecting the unique differences of team members and respect them as a "whole person"
- Demonstrating you care about employees as people person by asking about their well-being and things that matter to them personally
- Trusting that every team member is working to the best of their ability during this time
- When you miss the mark, own your mistake, apologize, and indicate what you will do differently next time



Communicate & Collaborate Effectively

While we have numerous tools at our disposal to interact with each other during this crisis, it isn't the same as in-person interaction. Employees also have different engagement styles and handle interruptions differently. Whereas one will find Skype chats effective, another person may find them intrusive and distracting.

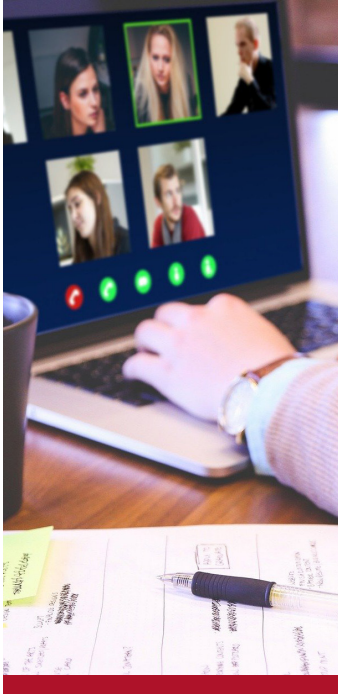
It can be harder to share ideas and collaborate when you don't work at the same time or run into each other in the hallway. This is compounded when everyone on your team is juggling both the personal and professional requirements of this crisis. Many employees struggle with reduced access to managerial support and communication in a remote environment.

Be thoughtful about your collaboration tools.

- Discuss as a team what tools you will use to work together (Zoom, Google Docs, Slack, Skype for Business, etc.) based on the topic or need. If you try something and it doesn't work well, make a shift!
- If someone is struggling with effectively using a collaboration tool, share free training and tips to help them learn.
- If you have both remote and on-campus employees, ensure that the collaboration tools support both populations.

Be planful about your time, and the time of your team members.

- Use video conferencing meetings for short check-ins or for meaningful discussions. Routine updates can be shared asynchronously through email or instant messengers.
- Hold short daily check-in "water cooler" meetings with your team if it can occur effectively and not pose added stress
- Meet individually with direct reports regularly. Use this time to understand how they are doing, discuss workload, goals, and deliverables, and remind them of self-care.



Arrange and Lead Effective Meetings

- Be intentional about meeting duration (we suggest a maximum of 45 minutes) to ensure employees have visual and auditory breaks before their next meeting and can do some self-care.
- Share verbally things you may not say explicitly if you were in a room together.
- If employees are working strange hours, unavailable for a Zoom meeting, etc., think about how information will be flowed to them. Asking people to watch a recording may not be effective for everyone. Share notes and highlights in addition to the recording so that they may digest information in their preferred way.

Use Multiple Communication Channels

Manager Tip: Vary the communication style you use for different situations. For example, a non-urgent question doesn't necessitate a video conference, but you certainly want to use video to discuss difficult messages.



SHARED ONLINE DATABASE

Collaborative work
Discussion threads
Idea sharing



EMAIL

Progress updates
Non-urgent questions
Individual or team accomplishment highlights



INSTANT MESSAGING

Urgent questions
Informal discussions
Real-time information sharing



TELEPHONE

All sensitive or urgent issues
Any situation where tone is key
Real-time information sharing (brainstorming, decision-making)
Formal discussions regarding progress or projects, development needs, and recent successes



VIDEO CONFERENCE

Delivery of difficult messages (when in-person meetings are not an option)
Formal discussions regarding progress on projects, development needs and recent successes
Monitoring team morale
Team meetings



Zoom Fatigue

Have you noticed that you feel exhausted after a Zoom meeting? One reason for this is that when you're in person, your eyes tend to look in the direction of one person and your brain is very good at blurring things happening in your peripheral vision. This allows your brain to translate the data in your direct line of site.

In group Zoom meetings, you're not only concentrating on the person speaking to you, but your brain is subconsciously trying to make sense of all the data it's receiving from other participants, the chat window, the reactions, etc. All of this overstimulation can cause us to miss subtle clues we may more easily pick up in one-on-one or face-to-face conversations.

Productivity Tools

It's important to choose the right tools for your team that will allow for efficient and effective sharing of information and content.

Meetings and Collaboration

See CIT's [Collaboration Comparison Chart](#) for more on our supported services.

- [Zoom](#) provides audio and audio/video conferencing with screen-sharing and text chat features, especially for small and large groups.
- [Skype for Windows](#) and [Skype for Mac](#) provide on-the-fly messaging and audio/video chat, along with some group features.
- [Slack](#) provides real-time chat with discussion and media sharing. Slack is not officially supported by CIT, but we recognize that it is used broadly.

File Sharing and Documents

- [Cornell Box](#) provides great flexibility on sharing and managing files, available to faculty, staff, and students. See the Cornell Box home page and Get Started with Box.
- **Cornell G Suite** ([students](#), [faculty & staff](#)) includes Google Drive, where you can store and share files.
- Microsoft Office includes [OneDrive](#) for Business.
- Cornell's [Secure File Transfer](#) service lets you securely send and receive files that contain confidential and restricted information.





Increase Your Transparency

The more you tell people what you know, and what you don't know, the more likely they are to trust you as a leader. Answer what you can. Then, the best thing to say is, "I don't have the answer to that question, let me see if I can find out." It doesn't reduce the anxiety long term, but it gives people a sense that what you tell them they can believe.

Support Your Team

When employees are working from home, their professional and personal lives may be difficult to separate. This is especially problematic for employees who do not have a separate physical space to work in at home, and who cannot work in other physical venues because of COVID-19 restrictions.

With the added caregiving challenges as a result of school and childcare closures, changes to nursing home and caregiving regulations, etc., employees are under more duress than typical. You may be experiencing this personally as well.

In these unprecedented times, your team is looking to you for support more than ever, and they need you to stay calm and grounded. Because of this, you have the opportunity to lean-in to leadership in essential ways.

Tune In With Yourself

Check in with yourself:

- Are you okay?
- What do you need right now?
- Are you getting enough sleep?
- Are you taking enough breaks through the day?
- Are you moving your body?
- Are you getting outside?
- Is there anything you need from your manager to feel more supported?

There are going to be days where you don't feel like you can create a sense of confidence in your team. Be aware of this and consider if you are in the right mindset for the meetings that are on your calendar or if they can be rescheduled.



Mental & Emotional Wellbeing Resources

[eni Confidential Counseling Services](#)

1-800-327-2255 – provides confidential counseling services at no cost for up to three visits to benefits eligible employees and family members. Available 24/7, licensed mental health professionals provide phone or in-person counseling for a variety of stressors and needs. At the end of the three visits, eni will work with the employee's own health coverage benefits to refer to an in-network provider, when possible and as appropriate.

[Faculty and Staff Assistance Program](#)

fsap@cornell.edu, 607-255-2673 - Benefits eligible employees, retirees, and spouses/partners may contact the FSAP by phone to obtain free support. If the volume of calls exceeds the FSAP's ability to respond in a timely fashion, please consider contacting ENI (above). FSAP is now offering virtual sessions for employees.

[Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic \(pdf\)](#)

Guidance from the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program provides tips for employees to help with coping during the pandemic.

Support Flexible Scheduling

In many cases, supervisors, managers, and their teams have the ability to update normal working hours to allow employees to adjust to this crisis. You should start the discussion with your employees about their schedule by asking them what they need to be most successful. Some alternatives to consider include changing their "shift" from 9 to 5 to: early morning hours, late day hours, or working four 10-hour days.

For represented employees, be sure to make changes within the parameters of the collective bargaining agreements which apply. In many cases, the union must approve proposed scheduling changes before they can occur. A general best practice is to seek advice from Workforce Policy and Labor Relations if you have questions about your bargaining unit employees.

Ergonomics

Ask your employees how they are set-up for working from home. If they are experiencing ergonomic issues, encourage them to visit the [Wellbeing web page dedicated to ergonomics](#) for tips on making the most of their home space.

Support Boundaries

Encourage employees to unplug when their work is done and to focus on their self and family care. Encourage employees to be fully "off" outside of that time. Modeling this behavior for your team will signal that it is ok to do.

Be Mindful of Mental Health

We encourage you to be open to these discussions by asking employees how they are doing, and reminding them that if they need a break, it is natural, acceptable, and will not come with negative repercussions from you or other campus leaders.

As a leader, it is important to ask your direct reports how you can best support them. Ask:

- How are you doing / feeling right now?
- What is one thing I could do to help you?

Offer a time to discuss, one-on-one, how the current situation is affecting them.

Discuss personal and professional barriers or challenges that may make it difficult to perform at their best. Again, before providing solutions here, ask them if they would like you to help them think through these questions and make the suggestions about them, not you.

It is ok to show your team that you are human too and share some of the feelings they are experiencing. This may help some to feel they can open up with you as well.



Lead Equitably

Marginalized and underrepresented communities are suffering even more during this crisis. They are more impacted in terms of who is getting and dying from COVID-19; the inequities in our healthcare system are real, as are the financial repercussions, food insecurities, and lack of social support. As a leader, you need to be particularly aware that you may have staff members dealing with these situations, and they may be reluctant to share their concerns.

Remote Manager Best Practices

Set clear expectations

- Make sure people have a clear understanding of the expectations, time-lines and desired result
- Provide clear directions and expectations that will enable others to make sound decisions
- Identify and focus on the most significant priorities, setting achievable goals, milestones and deadlines

Trust and be trustworthy

- Focus on results and what each person delivers, not when, how or where they work
- Demonstrate respect for all individuals
- Actively invite new ideas, alternatives and perspectives
- Establish a culture of accountability for self & team
- Show empathy and emotional intelligence
- Build relationships with staff
- Give, ask for and act on feedback
- Follow through on commitments
- Be a role model

Communicate productively and effectively

- Communicate often during individual check -ins and team meetings
- Share important information and decisions in a timely manner
- Convey thoughts clearly, verbally and when writing.
- Adapt messaging and mode of delivery to audience
- Leverage technology
- Centralize information

Foster connections

- Prioritize relationships
- Use technology to build community
- Be accessible
- Make time for small talk
- Encourage collaboration
- Build a culture of adding people into conversations
- Create opportunities for employees to connect informally with you and each other
- Manage team dynamics and address conflict

Coach for performance and development

- Make work challenging, meaningful and engaging for others
- Take a personal interest in your team's learning and life goals while connecting them to the goals of the organization
- Ask insightful and probing questions
- Provide others with productive and timely feedback
- Talk with everyone on your team about career aspirations and development goals
- Delegate and provide good exposure for team members
- Develop people and support their growth and mobility

Reward Achievement

- Be specific
- Recognize the value of individual and team efforts
- Be consistent
- Individualize your approach, learn how each employee likes to be recognized
- Encourage your team to recognize each other
- Check in regularly

8 TIPS FOR MANAGING REMOTE TEAMS



1. BE PREPARED

Make sure your employees have the technology and system access they need to work remotely and are comfortable using it.



2. SET EXPECTATIONS & GOALS

Talk with your team and each person about your, and their, expectations of working remotely. Create working agreements and goals to encourage accountability and measure success.



3. KEEP CONNECTED

Continue team meetings and 1 on 1s, check in throughout the day to ask if they need anything. This may look different for different employees depending on their needs and experience level.



4. TRUST YOUR EMPLOYEES

Trust your employees just as you would if they were in the office and manage accordingly. Great employees will still be great employees when working remotely!



5. CHOOSE TECH WISELY

Use Zoom, with video, for meetings when possible. As appropriate, continue to connect via phone, email, MS Teams, etc.



6. KNOW YOUR TEAM

Identify team norms and encourage positive cultural aspects. For example, some teams are very collaborative—find ways to continue that virtually.



7. BE MINDFUL OF BOUNDARIES

Working remotely does not mean working 24/7. Identify, discuss, and respect boundaries such as "office hours".



8. ADAPT AS NEEDED

Periodically review working agreements and modify as needed to ensure work is getting done and employees stay engaged.