

Supervising Remotely: Guidance for Managers

The challenges presented by Covid-19 are unprecedented and continue to evolve. In order to cope with these challenges, organizations have had to adapt in the way they are getting work done and supporting employees to be able to work productively from home and/or partial time on campus. The shift from face time management to virtual management has not been straightforward or simple. Virtual teams are fundamentally different from in-person work teams. They cross boundaries related to geography, time, and organization and use technological means to communicate and collaborate. These differences *can* be overcome with planning and intentional management. This resource is designed to help you navigate this “new normal” while maintaining productivity, trust, and communication.

First, know that all employees, managers and non-managers are experiencing challenges with these changes at the same time. Some have been able to adapt more easily, while for others it is more difficult. Access to resources, equipment and reliable internet is not the same for all. Additionally, some employees and managers are navigating working from home, while overseeing children learning from home. Patience is required!

The following are general considerations that will help you, the manager, support productivity in the virtual work environment.

- **Clarity:** Given the current context, you need to talk to your team; what communication technology are you using to communicate? What access do folks need to do their job? What are the expectations in this context? Set expectations for completing projects or performing ongoing duties. Put the details in writing to the degree possible. Define work systems and timelines. Establish a regular meeting schedule so everyone knows the cycle of when work should be completed. Send an agenda for the meeting so people have time to prepare. Have clear deliverables.
- **Check in regularly** using [virtual communication tools](#). Make sure each person knows what tools should be used for communicating different types of information and the right contacts. For example: what system will you be using for conference calls vs. one on one check-ins? Are there channels available for informal conversations (remember that people are still challenged by missing the information that comes from passing in the hallway)? What works best for your employees to communicate information that is time-sensitive or emergencies?

The following suggestions are more specific to management processes that you will want to maintain during the time of virtual work. Most of these are fundamental management skills that you already use every day, with special focus on the skills required for virtual leadership.

- **Trust is essential.** If employees trust you and their team to be working toward common goals and a shared vision, they naturally collaborate and engage more with each other. Keep reiterating your mission and focus regularly, especially as the focus can change based on current context and work needs of your department. Establish shared goals and connect the work of individuals and sub-teams to those goals.
- **Make sure that everyone is on the same systems.** For example, if there are shared projects and communications, [Outlook](#), [Box](#), [Microsoft Teams](#), [Zoom](#), or others. Be sure that there are guidelines for how documents will be stored and edited. If you have one team member editing a document in a separate platform, information will get lost in translation. Use project management tools and practices and document what you can about work that gets done. Consider doing some individual and team training with the tools you need/want to use if needed.
- **Be clear on work hours/Be flexible where needed.** While a traditional 8:30am-5pm schedule may not work for your entire team given potential family care challenges, make sure employees are working at least 3-4 hours of the same time so problems can be addressed in real-time. If employees are taking time off, this needs to be marked on how your team records time.
- **Be intentional.** Physical distance and communicating through a screen make it easier for miscommunication to happen and make it harder to listen. You may also face accessibility concerns for employees. Use active listening techniques, ask people to repeat what you've said/check for understanding, and build action plans so everyone is on the same page. Follow-up with emails/action plan in writing.
- **Check in with employees more often.** Remote workers are more likely to feel alienated or disconnected. Ask team members about their work, but also talk with them about how they are feeling (physically and emotionally) as they cope with the changing rhythm of their life. Choose video channels/phone over email whenever possible.
- **Keep an eye out for new stressors.** Because of social distancing measures, some team members may be forced to spend more time around their families/others with less quiet time to themselves. Parents whose children are home due to school closings may be trying to balance keeping children occupied with getting productive work done. Some may feel trapped and isolated and may need a different type of social interaction. Help people name their feelings and identify their stressors. Know the resources available to help team members cope with these changes.

UMass Amherst offers two support options for faculty, staff and their families:

1. The on-campus counselors at the [Faculty and Staff Assistance Program \(FSAP\)](#) will continue to be available to support the staff and faculty of the University during this closing. In order to comply with the social distancing plans implemented by the University, FSAP is conducting most routine appointments by phone. They are monitoring phone messages closely and will get back to people as soon as possible. They are happy to talk about how to support individuals or departments through this time so don't hesitate to reach out to them.

Call: 413-545-0350

2. UMass Amherst Employees also have access to **additional services** and **workshops** through our outside EAP provider, **Optum**. They offer various support services including referrals to off-campus therapists for free consultations.

Call Anytime: 1-844-263-1982 or visit the website:
<https://www.liveandworkwell.com> (use access code: Mass4You)

- **Be clear about your availability.** While everyone may be working virtually, that does not mean you, (or your staff), must be accessible every moment of the day. Use tools like Outlook calendars to mark out lunch times, time off, etc. Let your team know when they should call you with questions. Be sure to let people know how you prefer to be contacted after hours and how they should contact you in case of an emergency.

Skills of Effective Virtual Team Leaders:

- Encourage team members to lean into their strengths and pair them with members whose strengths are complementary to theirs.
- Promote a feeling of inclusion.
- Create regular time for meeting and sharing.
- Provide information in a timely fashion.
- Promote trust and collaboration.
- Be Inclusive.
- Encourage discussion and remain open-minded.
- Manage conflict in timely ways
- Communicate through multiple channels.
- Demonstrate sensitivity.
- Develop processes that encourage accountability and commitment.
- Provide adequate resources and support.
- Be open that each employees will have some struggles, in different ways.

Resources for managers

UMass Resources:

- [UMass Amherst Spring 2021 Plan](#)
- [Disruption Resilience: Remote Work Resources for Staff and Faculty](#)
- [Stay Connected: Communication & Collaboration Tools](#)
- [Email Support Articles and Tools](#)
- [Zoom at UMass](#)
- HR Phone and Email for Questions: Central HR at 413-687-2283 or AskHR@umass.edu

Resource Articles:

- [Leaders: 9 Things to Watch for When Your Team Goes Remote \(& A Checklist of Things to Get Your Team\)](#)
- [Challenges Managing Remote Team and How to Overcome Them](#)
- [Remote Working Best Practices](#)

Online Learning:

Access [LinkedIn Learning](#) for workshops for supervisors and employees on Managing and Working Remotely. Available to all Faculty and Staff

Workplace Learning & Development:

- [Workshops that are being offered via Zoom](#)
- [Guides to support Remote Work](#)
- [Self-Guided Learning](#) (encourage staff to use some of this time for professional development)
- [Wellbeing/Wellness workshops](#)

Partnership for Worker Education:

- [Workshops on applying for Unemployment](#)
- [Microsoft Teams and Zoom Workshops](#)

Adapted from work by Emily Wilson, HR Appalachian State University, 2020

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