

Building an employment relationship from afar  
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We often have business owners ask us how to manage teams when they have team members working from home, dotted around the country, and in some cases even overseas.

These days businesses are playing smart and adopting different ways of working. This is great in terms of workplace flexibility, exploring new business opportunities and having people on the ground at source. The only question is; how can you build rapport and trust when you don't see your team members on a regular basis?

To manage from afar, you must establish norms and grow trust quickly and steadily. Then, you must keep the trust - because it can be lost just as quickly. Here are a few simple measures you can put in place to make managing from afar easier.

- 1) If possible, get the team member who is working off site to spend some time with you in the business. If you do this from the outset you can discuss the role, expectations and agree how they will be supported to deliver on their key performance indicators it will set a strong foundation for the future.
- 2) Spend time building the relationship and establishing trust via email or phone. Find out how things are going, ask if there is anything you can do to support the person and if they have a request for resource or assistance, make sure you deliver wherever possible. Commit to actions, deliver on commitments, set norms and establish expectations.
- 3) Ensure you provide your team member with consistent and reliable information. Provide agendas before meetings, send information in advance, be a facilitative leader, ensure you communicate expectations clearly and measure these expectations against performance.
- 4) Use technology. Using skype, telephone or video conferencing, blogs or a telephone call to keep virtual team members feeling part of the team. Prior to meetings go online early to greet team members informally and invite them to stay on after the end of the meeting to clarify any issues that they may not have fully grasped. Be open with your team members and make sure they know they can email or phone at any time.
- 5) Ensure that communications and messages that are sent to your on site team are distributed to your off site team. Keep communication lines open understand that off site workers do not have the same opportunities to obtain information, particularly in the informal communications.
- 6) Be sensitive to time zones. If you have employees working overseas you may need to set some guidelines around expectations in terms of when you will be contacting them and duration of calls. There is generally no good time for everyone so perhaps you both have to have turns to be inconvenienced.

There are many factors that you can influence to build trust when managing team members from afar. Learn them and increase your ability to build excellent interpersonal relationships, navigate conflict and lead highly effective teams from a distance.