TOOLS AND RULES FOR TELEWORKING

A GUIDE FOR MANAGERS and SUPERVISORS

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CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
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The City University of New York is committed to safely and effectively meeting the public health challenge presented by COVID-19. This means that ensuring, where appropriate and possible, that university employees may continue to work from home or at an another off-site location for all or part of their regular workweek.

EXPECTATIONS

Remote working and teleworking, often used interchangeably, refer to a work arrangement in which some or all of the work is performed from home or another off-site location.

Teleworking can be informal, such as working from home for a short-term project or a formal, set schedule of working away from the office. The employee or the supervisor can suggest telework as a possible work arrangement. It is subject to approval by the supervisor and is granted on a conditional and temporary basis.

Employees are held to the same performance standards for their position as they otherwise would under a standard, on site work arrangement. Supervisors are responsible for clearly communicating expectations of work assignments, check-ins, and any other parameters for supporting a remote arrangement.

Additionally, all labor and employment laws and agreements remain in effect, regardless of work locations.

For more information on CUNY's Flexible Work Arrangements, visit:
https://www.cuny.edu/coronavirus/flexible-work-arrangements/

MANAGING A REMOTE TEAM

While there are clear benefits to remote work -*reduced commuting and travelling time and expenses, more flexibility, fewer distractions* – there are also new issues that may arise for supervisors that are responsible for managing their teams. With employees working in different geographical locations, it can be harder for a supervisor to synchronize expectations and it becomes much easier for dissatisfaction to fester between employees. Supervisors can create a successful remote work culture for their department by setting clear expectations for their employees from the start. Employees will know what is expected of them and the standard of work that is to be continued while teleworking.

Certain topics that should be outlined immediately include:
- Hours of operation
- Team availability *(when, where, and how to be reached)*
- Available resources and tools
- Weekly and monthly goals
- Preferred communication methods and timing

While communication is one of the most important skills for a supervisor to have in order to successfully manage a team, its importance is even greater in managing a remote workforce.

1. COMMUNICATION

A. Establishing Structured Check-ins

Supervisors should establish daily check-ins with their employees. These check-ins should be short "water-cooler" meetings and can be just to say hi and see how everyone is doing before getting the day started.

Supervisors should also schedule weekly face-to-face check-ins with their employees for meaningful discussions of a project or task. This could mean a series of one-on-one calls if your employees work more independently or a team call if the work is more collaborative. Calls should be regular and predictable to allow employees to establish a solid routine.

In addition to structured check-ins, it is also important to maintain regular contact with team members throughout the day since there are no opportunities for chance encounters and unplanned collaboration. This means ensuring that the lines of communication are kept open. This could mean allowing for calls, texts, email, or instant messaging – depending on your preference or the situation at hand.

B. Collaboration Tools

One of the most essential aspects of managing employees that are working remotely is staying in touch and, both receiving and giving feedback. Supervisors should discuss and decide with their team what tools they will use to work together based on the topic and need. A quick overview on the communication channels available and how they may be used include:

- **Phone:** allows for long, detailed, difficult or sensitive conversations
- **Email:** allows for objective and brief or detailed information
- **Chats and Instant Messaging *(i.e. Microsoft Teams, etc*.):** allows for informal messages, general announcements and news, or quick team collaboration
- **Video *(i.e. WebEx, Zoom, Microsoft Teams):*** allows for long, feedback-rich conversations

Each of these tools present their own strengths and challenges, and should be evaluated for effectiveness based on the situation and need.

Email alone is not sufficient, especially as a communicator in an urgent situation. Employees that are inundated with emails daily may not be able to distinguish an email that requires attention immediately and therefore those urgent requests may fall through the cracks.

A practice for communicating urgent requests should be put in place and may include a phone or video call rather than just an email. Following up by text or instant message may also be an option. Asking for a receipt or acknowledgement of an important or time-sensitive email so that the supervisor will know that the message has been received and that the employee is taking appropriate action.

For quick collaboration, mobile-enabled individual messaging like Microsoft Teams can be used for simpler, less formal conversations.

If a sensitive situation emerges, it is also best to avoid email discussions. Instead, request a phone or video call that allow for greater audio and visual cues and reduce the chance of misunderstandings.

If an employee is not maintaining ongoing communication with you or other members of the team, this should be promptly addressed to see why they have not been as available as they should be, and learn if anything needs to be done to support them. A follow-up email should be sent out immediately after, reiterating what was discussed and the solution that came out of it. If the employee continues to be unavailable to you and/or the rest of the team, it should be documented, and HR should be contacted to discuss next steps and possible corrective action.

Ongoing communication is the most important factor in creating an effective remote team. By ensuring that employees are communicating regularly with one another, team members will be more likely to stay engaged and motivated.

2. MANAGE WORKLOAD AND DELIVERABLES

To ensure employees meet the same level of performance expectations that would be expected of them onsite, it is important that supervisors and managers:

A. Establish Clear Performance Objectives

Set goals and priorities and the purpose for each and communicate them with your team. Define the scope, the dates of completion, and the deliverables for each task. This provides team members with actionable goals, reduces ambiguity, identifies common ground, and will help your team members understand how their success will be measured. This also helps you keep track of what each member of your team is working on and if they are on track.

B. Track Productivity by the Achievement of Predefined Goals

Focusing on the results allows you to see if employees are doing what you have asked them to do, and in the manner requested. Four general measures for supervisors to review employee results include quantity, quality, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness. If an employee is not meeting standards in any of these areas, have a discussion with him/her to explore if there are any barriers to success that can be removed or additional support that should be provided.

C. Monitor Workload

Supervisors should keep track of the work they are asking their remote workers and teams to complete. Giving an employee too few projects will make then unengaged and bored, while piling on too many projects can become overwhelming and demotivating. Use a project management tool that best works for you to keep track of which assignments each employee is working on.

D. Schedule Regular, Frequent Check-ins

Once you have established the goals, communicating regarding progress should be done frequently. Employees need feedback on their work in order to maintain good performance and to develop overall. Since employees may hesitate to reach out for assistance or to check in with you about their progress or difficulties, it is imperative that good communication and scheduled check-ins are in place to ensure employees are set up for success.

E. Recognize Performance

When working off-site, supervisors need to make more of an effort to acknowledge employee achievements as casual, unplanned interactions are not as common. A simple "thank you" or shout-out of appreciation can go a long way. Remember that when a team member has a victory, the whole team wins, so everyone should share in the celebration. It is important that supervisors be very consistent with this. If you are publicly congratulating one individual, you must do so with any other team member who meets the same criteria. Failure to do so will cause resentment and the perception of favoritism.

F. Poor Performers

No matter where they are, employees are responsible for their own performance and should be held accountable for their work. If an employee is not meeting an acceptable performance standard while teleworking, consult with your HR team to discuss next steps and possibly developing a written performance improvement plan.

3. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

A manager's responsibility to provide performance management, including evaluations, to its team does not change under a teleworking arrangement. If anything, performance management both formal and informal, is even more important when employees and managers are not working on site.

A. Evaluation of the "Trial Period"

Employees and managers who agree on a teleworking arrangement should evaluate that arrangement after a three-month "trial" period. Both employee and manager should discuss accomplishments, concerns and possible solutions. Based on this discussion, a decision should be made for continuance, modification or discontinuance of the arrangement. Again, it is particularly important to focus on the results and meeting of objectives when evaluating teleworkers.

Supervisors must also remember that this should not be the first conversation they are having with their employees about their performance. The evaluation at the end of the trial period does not replace the daily and weekly check-ins the supervisor should be having with the employee.

B. General Performance Management

Performance reviews for remote employees should generally be conducted using video chat to allow for a more personal connection.

Some key competencies for evaluating remote workers include:
- **Communication** – does the employee communicate effectively throughout the day with his/her team and through appropriate channels?
- **Collaboration** – is the employee able to collaborate effectively with his/her team while working remotely?
- **Work and Solve Problems Independently** – is the employee self-motivated and disciplined to get the work done without constant feedback and coaching?
- **Productivity** - instead of evaluating the employee on the time and effort they spend working, evaluate them on the quantity and the quality of the work produced.
- **Outcomes** – is the employee meeting measurable and agreed upon goals in order to receive a desired outcome (i.e., milestones, deliverables)?

4. ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR EFFECTIVELY MANAGING TELECOMMUTERS

- Review technology needs and resources – Identify technology tools staff use in their daily work and ensure employees know how to access their IT team should they need assistance.

- Make time for face to face – Seeing your co-workers and team members, even virtually, allows a feeling of being connected.

- Emphasize work-life balance – It can be easy for dedicated employees to become overworked and burn themselves out by working longer hours in a remote setting. Help employees by ensuring they are taking an appropriate amount of break and vacation time.

- Observe boundaries – limit sending emails outside of scheduled work hours when possible. Draft messages and send the next day, set on delayed delivery or clearly indicate that you are not expecting a response until the next workday.

- Be Flexible – Given the current environment, employees have a lot going on at home. While this is not an excuse for not getting things done, it can mean working with your employees to find a schedule that allows them to be their most productive.

- Sponsor your employee's advancement – Your teleworking team will need your support in order to stay visible. Facilitate connections with others outside of the team, select high-profile projects for employees to showcase their skills, give credit publicly when appropriate opportunities arise.

5. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Managing Your Team After COVID-19*

- *Managing a Remote Team*

- *ProHabits – Thrive Remotely*

- *Questions to Ask Your Remote Team*

- *4 Tips for Keeping Your Newly Remote Team Engaged*

- *Cornerstone Care – Free Learning Platform*

TELEWORKING TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES

1. **Set up a proper plan for the structure of your day.**
   Take the first 10 minutes of every workday to ask yourself:
   - *Which tasks absolutely need to be done today and in what order?*
   - *What, if anything, is behind schedule?*
   - *Where do you expect the most challenges?*

   From there, you can proactively manage your calendar to organize and structure your work effectively within the day. Set time up to support getting work done. Treat the time as a locked meeting, the same you would if you were meeting others. You can always change the time if priorities shift.

2. **Create a dedicated space.**
   A recurring, organized, dedicated space can help maximize productivity. Some things to consider when creating a dedicated space include:
   a. Natural light – It can affect mood and alertness and is a great motivator.
   b. Noise control – Decide what type of noise environment you require to work more effectively. This could mean allowing for some background noise, whether that be music or natural noises from outside, or it could mean complete silence.
   c. Comfortable temperature
   d. Essential office elements – Fill your space with a chair, desk, storage, computer, and smartphone. In addition to the essential office items, include some personal touches like pictures or plants to enhance positivity in your space.

3. **Stay focused. Eliminate distractions.**
   a. Respect work time. If you are scheduled to work from 9am-5pm, make sure that you are ready to go by 9am and are available for your colleagues throughout the day.
   b. Keep potential distractions out of sight. This may mean not having your personal email open while working or having the television in the same room as your workspace.

4. **Establish a solid routine.**
   By establishing a solid work routine, you can create order out of chaos to work thoughtfully instead of randomly. Include intentional breaks within your routine as well.

5. **Use technology to build connections and stay in touch with your colleagues.**
   You can use technology to serve many goals, including:
   a. Keeping others up to date on your status
   b. Attending meetings
   c. Asking questions
   d. Sharing knowledge
   e. Connecting with others for collaboration

   Decide how you will monitor all relevant, professional communication channels that your team agrees to use.

6. **Avoid feeling isolated while working remotely.**
   a. Remember to use technology to connect and communicate beyond instant messaging. Finding time for face-to-face interactions via video calls or even a phone call can help you feel more connected to your colleagues.
   b. Do not work nonstop all day! Remember to take breaks and move around.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *3 Tips to Avoid WFH Burnout*

- *5 Tips for Staying Productive and Mentally Healthy While You're Working From Home*

- *How to Succeed in Your Office Job When There Is No Office*

- *Remote Work Starter Guide for Employees: How to Adjust to Work-From-Home*

- *Parents Share Their Best Tips on Working From Home While Parenting During the Coronavirus*

- *Cornerstone Care – Free Learning Platform*