IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCE

Manager's guide to leading remotely through Covid-19

Keep your team engaged and productive from home

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RECOMMENDED FOR
Managers of remote teams

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Contents

Lead an engaged and productive virtual team

Covid-19 has introduced unprecedented challenges for managers who may now be managing a remote team or a team adapting to ever-changing circumstances amidst the pandemic. Leaders need new tools to keep their team productive, engaged, and aligned.

Focus on what you can control as a leader. Here's what your team needs from you right now:

1. **Clarity** – Clearly communicate the most important priorities. In check-ins and conversations with staff, state what needs to get done, why, and by what date. Help your team prioritize, especially as you pivot to accommodate changing circumstances —and manage urgent requests more closely.

   Tools: One-on-one check-ins, Team weekly check-ins

2. **Autonomy** – Be flexible about when and how the work gets done as long as deadlines are met. Staff need your encouragement to exercise autonomy when making decisions about work-life balance and their working preferences.

   Tools: Individual working preferences assessment, Establish team norms for the new normal

3. **Connection to mission** – Remind team members of the "why" behind their work and recognize team members when they exemplify the organization's mission and values.

   Tools: Tips for recognizing staff, Connect the team to the mission through storytelling

4. **Sense of belonging** – Create space for team collaboration and feedback with effective and engaging virtual meetings and social events.

   Tools: Weekly team huddle guide, Tips for recognizing staff, Virtual team-building activities picklist

Special Report: Virtual Onboarding Tool

Tool #1: One-on-one check-ins

Overview

Use your ongoing one-on-one check-ins to maintain productivity and morale. Focus on understanding how your team members are faring, removing roadblocks, and setting clear expectations about their priorities.

Time: 30 minutes

Depending on the size of your team, one-on-one check-ins may not be feasible. Consider taking a virtual rounding approach allocating about 5-10 minutes per team member to touch base. See virtual touchpoint questions below.

To prepare:

1. Ask for materials to review in advance to give feedback. Limit giving live feedback, especially if you know you need time to digest something first.
2. Send any materials to review for new projects you plan to assign.

During the check-in:

1. **Assess morale and support emotionally distressed staff**. While you shouldn't assume the role of a therapist, you should check in with your staff emotionally, invite them to discuss their concerns, and, when appropriate, direct them to additional support services.
   - How are you feeling? (*Note: Encourage them to label the emotion rather than just respond "fine" or "OK." – use this feelings inventory. Do not feel the need to "solve" the emotion. Simply listen.)*
   - How have you been staying connected to the rest of the team?
   - **Optional:** Consider having staff rate their mood on a scale from -3 to 3 and explain their choice.
2. **Understand their workload**. Ask your team to create work plans for major projects so they are in control of their timelines and can report back if they are on or off track.
   - What are your top priorities this week—and how are you allocating your time across them? *(Note: Push team members to be clear about what they're working on and how much time things are taking.)*
   - What's something that's taking up a considerable amount of time? *(Note: Aim to rebalance priorities if things are overwhelming. Give staff permission to take less time on a certain project.)*
   - **Optional:** What's something you're working on that you're excited about?
3. **Give feedback on projects.** Tell your staff what they are doing well and where they can improve so that they can push their projects forward.
   - Share praise for something they are working on that they are doing well—even if it's small.
   - Offer feedback on how they can improve their work product. Ensure the feedback you provide is actionable.
   - **Optional**: Invite them to share their experience with the project, including what they enjoyed or what was frustrating.
4. **Assign new projects (as needed).** Take extra time when assigning new work to provide clarity on your expectations.
   - Explain what the project is, and any history or previous conversations that set the groundwork for the project.

- Help them scope the work from the outset. Help them define a clear goal for the project. Talk through what they should not be doing. Set expectations about how much time they should spend.
- Ask them to create a work plan for the project and keep you updated on how they are progressing.

Virtual touchpoints

If you only have 10 minutes or less with each staff member, ask these 3 questions:

- How are you feeling?
- What's your top priority?
- What's one thing I can do to support you with that?

Additional tools to support one-on-one check-ins

Compassion Fatigue Assessment: Compassion fatigue is a condition that occurs when caregivers are overwhelmed by stressors stemming from either the clinical or interpersonal components of their role. Individuals affected by compassion fatigue are unable to deliver highest quality care and are at risk for burnout. Our Compassion Fatigue Assessment tool helps staff recognize the visible and invisible signs of compassion fatigue, investigate the root causes, and seek additional help, if necessary. *(Note: You can use this to assess your staff or yourself.)*

Individual Stress Assessment: Identify how you typically cope with stress at work so you can recognize it and react productively. *(Note: You can use this to assess your staff or yourself.)*

Recognition Preference Assessment: This tool helps you assess your staff's personal preferences for recognition so that you can reward them in an impactful way. *(Note: You ask staff for feedback about how they like to be recognized, it's important you follow through and recognize them in the way they prefer. Otherwise, staff may feel like you asked for their input, but then didn't act on it.)*

Tool #2: Individual working preferences assessment

Overview

To help individual team members stay productive and engaged, discuss their preferences and working style. Send the questions you plan to ask in advance so that your team member has a chance to reflect before your conversation. Aim to find at least one adjustment you can make to adapt to each staff member's working preferences and support their productivity.

Time: 15-30 minutes per staff member.

For the discussion:

- What times of the day are you most productive? When are you most distracted?
- Are you taking time for breaks throughout the day? When do you think is best for breaks? How can I support you in taking that time away?
- How are you separating home and work life?
- When are you most overwhelmed?
- How would you rate our level of communication? Too much—too little—just right?
- What's something that we do as a team that is helpful to you?
- When did we have a meeting in the last week that you felt wasn't necessary?
- How much time are you spending in meetings? Are those meetings productive?
- What's one thing I can do to protect your time?

Keep notes of the staff member's preferences. Encourage staff to exercise flexibility, including blocking protected hours on their calendar when they feel they're most productive, or letting the team know when they will stray from traditional working hours to accommodate personal time or family commitments.

Follow-up:

Maintain a document of each staff member's preferences to inform your interactions with individuals and with the team as a whole. Use the feedback they provide to shape team meeting and communication strategy. To discuss preferences as a team, see Tool #3.

Tool #3: Establish team norms for the new normal

Overview

As your team is working amidst a pandemic, you may need to revisit your team norms and make sure that everyone is operating from the same list of assumptions and rules to protect the team's time and maximize individual productivity.

Time: Approximately 30 minutes, depending on the size of your team

In a team meeting, have each team member share their answers to the following questions to help all team members get on the same page about flexibility and preferences. Consider sending staff these questions in advance so they can prepare their answers, or, depending on the size of your team, conduct the individual working preferences assessment with each team member before hosting this team meeting. During the meeting, go category by category, ask the associated questions, give staff a minute to contemplate their answers, and then ask each team member to share with the group. Record answers on a shared document throughout.

1. **Protected work time**
   - When do you want to have a 'no meetings' zone on your calendar to protect your most productive work time?
   - Would it be helpful to coordinate consistent 'no meetings' days or times of the day for the team?
2. **Communication preferences**
   - How do you prefer to be contacted for urgent needs?
   - What's the best way for us to maintain contact throughout the day for social or non-urgent communication (e.g., text group, chat group, email, standing 15-minute huddles)?
   - Are there subject line abbreviations or other email practices we can all agree on to streamline inbox management?
3. **Preferred working hours**
   - What hours of the day do you prefer to be offline to attend to your personal needs?
   - How are you creating separation between the work day and your personal time?
   - How are you building in time for breaks?

Follow-up:

Create a shared team calendar that outlines times that are set aside for meetings and times that are protected teamwork time. Encourage team members to block their individual protected time or OOO hours on their calendar and turn on their away messages during that time.

Ensure all team members have access to the shared document with team agreed-upon communication practices and each team member's preferences. Ask for commitment from all team members that these preferences will be respected.

Optional: Set team ground rules

Laying out a set of rules or operating principles to guide interactions amongst team members can help fuel productivity, collaboration, and mutual respect in day-to-day work. In order to facilitate an effective conversation in a comfortable setting, pose the following questions to the team, give them a couple minutes to write down their answers, and then have each report out. Keep track of their recommendations on a shared document, and have the team refine and discuss until they've settled on a final list. Consider asking staff to sign the list to demonstrate their commitment to honoring the ground rules to the best of their abilities. (Adapted from the Center for Creative Leadership)

- Think about the worst team you've been on. What made the experience so terrible?
- Think about the best team you've been on. What made the experience so great?
- Based on those experiences, what values or ground rules would you recommend we stick to as a team?

To see an example, check out Northumbria NHS Trust's Staff-Driven Code of Conduct.

Tool #4: Team weekly huddle guide

Overview

As staff are remote, it's harder to have visibility into what people are doing and feel a sense of connection to the team. To avoid micromanaging, clarify ownership of projects and deadlines during team meetings and document this in a shared location.

Time: 30 minutes at least once per week. You can host a truncated version of this to check in on progress mid-week for 15 minutes or less.

In each team huddle, touch on the following points:

1. **Kick off with an icebreaker**
   - A simple discussion question will suffice, such as "what restaurant will you visit first out of quarantine?" Or, "what are you grateful for today?"
   - Ask attendees to raise their hands if on video or chat in their answers. Call on a few people to share. Make sure to call on different people each week. *See Tool #8 for more icebreaker ideas.*
2. **Recognition of how the team is living the organization's values**
   - Take one of your organization's values each week and ask the team to share a story of how a fellow team member lived up to that value. Encourage them to be specific.
   - Share a story. *See Tool #6 to make your story more meaningful.*
3. **Reminder of the team's key priorities**
   - Share the top 3 goals for the team.
   - Explain any organizational priority shifts since your last huddle. (*Note: Don't shy away from the difficult messages. Share the reality, why it's important, and necessary context. Gather input to share with senior leadership.)*
   - Keep staff updated on relevant news.
4. **Share individual priorities**
   - Create a shared document (e.g., Google document) and have each team member fill in their top 3 goals for the week.
   - Consult the team's list to align on priorities and ensure individual priorities tie back to overarching goals.
   - Provide information that will make projects easier and identify roadblocks the team may encounter.
5. **Save time for questions & input** (*Note: Always build in time for questions, reserve at least ten minutes so staff don't feel rushed.)*
   - Invite the team to give input on an ongoing project that relates to your team's goals.
   - Open the floor for questions related to organizational changes or strategy and elevate as needed.

For more guidance on running effective meetings, check out these resources:

- For you: 6 ways to make virtual meetings effective
- For your staff: Can't stay focused during virtual meetings? Here are 5 tips to help
- Infographic: Anatomy of a Great Meeting

Tool#5: Tips for recognizing staff

Overview

More than ever, your team needs to know that you recognize their contributions and that the work they are doing matters. Take the time to give targeted recognition. As a leader, aim to recognize at least one person every day for accomplishments like:

- Receiving positive feedback from a patient, internal customer, or colleague
- Achieving specialty certification or an advanced degree
- Taking on extra work to cover for another team member
- Providing an effective idea for process improvement
- Taking on an informal leadership role as a mentor to less experienced staff or leading a project or committee

Pro tip: When giving recognition, be specific. Spell out how your team member is advancing organizational goals, its mission, and its values.

Individual recognition

- Use the Customizable Staff Recognition Card to easily build appreciation into your staff’s daily work.
- Use the Manager’s Recognition Box - This tool sets you up to send personalized, handwritten notes to your staff members’ homes to acknowledge great performance. This is a simple and effective way to deliver timely and professionally meaningful recognition to your staff.
- Consider administering the Recognition Preference Assessment to assess your staff's personal preferences for recognition so that you can reward them in the ways that are most meaningful to them.

Team recognition

- Create spaces for staff members to share their stories. Give them opportunities to recognize their peers by creating a live forum to share their stories on the front line. If asking staff to join a meeting is too time intensive, you can collect video clips or photos in advance and compile them in a video to be shared on your organization's website and intranet.
- Offer a chance for staff to connect with leaders. Organizational leaders can make themselves personally available to staff as long as it meets hospital safety standards. For example, one organization is planning a "Latte with Leaders" event where frontline nurses can connect with nurse leaders stationed by a free coffee cart.
- Set a predefined team goal that staff can work toward to achieve known recognition. This has two benefits: first, staff will know exactly what they need to do to earn recognition. Second, defining the goal in advance helps ensure you won’t accidentally overlook team accomplishments that should be celebrated.

Tool #6: Connect the team back to the mission through storytelling

Overview

When your team is going through significant changes and challenges, you must reconnect them to their purpose. Storytelling is a powerful way to convey meaning, enable empathy, and stick in staff's memory. It is especially effective when you can tie the story to the organization's mission and values.

In advance, think about how you can tell the story in 90 seconds.

1. **Identify a value that you want to anchor staff in.** Reflect on an organizational value that resonates with your staff.
2. **Share a story that illustrates that value**. If possible, use a patient story. Tell staff how they made a difference for patients or for their internal customers in the organization. Highlighting the impact they are having on key constituents can reconnect them to their purpose. You can also share a story about a team member whose behaviors illustrate that value.
3. **Connect back to the mission.** Share how the story supports the organization's mission.

Mediocre story		Effective story
Brian stepped up and took Stephanie's shift last week when her daughter was sick. Thanks Brian!	→	Today I want to remind us of the value of teamwork. Last week, Brian stepped up and took Stephanie's shift when her daughter was sick. We were able to stay fully staffed that day. This helped us, as a team, have a manageable workload and provide the high-quality service we strive for. When we work as a team, we are able to live out our mission of healing our community.
Did you all see that the transplant patient on Ward 5 had some family come in to celebrate his son's wedding? I guess a couple of the nurses coordinated with his wife to set up some decorations in his room and have a surprise ceremony.	→	I understand times have been especially chaotic recently, but I wanted to call attention to a story I heard that really shows what "going the extra mile" looks like in practice. Down on Ward 5, Karen and Jim heard that one of their patients would be missing his son's wedding over the weekend. They coordinated with his wife, set up some decorations in his room, and got his son to the hospital before the wedding. The patient was so appreciative of the nurses' support in making this day special. It showed both the patient and his family, that as an organization, we go the extra mile to provide care for the whole person.

Tool #7: Run an effective virtual meeting

Overview

Team meetings can become difficult when operating remotely—or when part of the team is remote and part is in-person. Keep these guidelines in mind so that your meetings are productive.

1. **Decide if a meeting is necessary**
   - Can these updates *not* be shared in an email?
   - Will this meeting help our team achieve our top 3 goals?
2. **Streamline attendee list**
   - Is everyone going to be involved?
   - Note if you will have some of the team remote and some in person. Secure appropriate technology so that every attendee can fully participate.
3. **Provide an agenda ahead of time**
   - How can this be at least 50% interactive with the team?
   - Where am I going to build in time for discussion?
4. **Build in opportunity for interaction**
   - Start off with a short icebreaker. A simple question will suffice, like "what is the first food you are going to eat (not at your house) when you are out of quarantine?" Or, "what are you grateful for today?". Have attendees raise their hands if on video or chat in their answers. Call on a few people to share. Make sure to call on different people to get various voices in the room.
5. **Assign a moderator to manage discussion**. Phone meetings can feel awkward because attendees may not be sure when—or how—to jump in during the meeting. The moderator's role is to keep the conversation focused on the goal and ensure everyone has a chance to participate.
   - Additionally, assign participants roles to manage the chat function, take notes, or lead an ice breaker.
6. **Start with a rapid round of introductions.** Baking in time for introductions ensures the group knows who is on the line and allows space for the socializing that would otherwise happen as colleagues walk into or out of a meeting.
7. **Reserve 10 minutes at the end to recap and review next steps**. Before closing the line, outline next steps and ensure each has an assigned owner and deadline.

Adapted from 6 ways to make virtual meetings effective.

Tool #8: Virtual team-building activities picklist

Overview

Plan activities for the team to connect socially and continue getting to know one another – either as an icebreaker for a team meeting or an event on its own. In addition to planning virtual activities, encourage team members to share favorite recipes, fitness outlets, or other suggestions to pass time in quarantine.

Idea	Instructions	Best for:
Speed Networking Happy Hour	• Use WebEx function to break out into smaller groups. • Discuss question prompts (personal, professional, riddles/would-you-rather questions, etc.).	Large groups, especially with mixed levels, where some attendees may not know each other well
WebEx Whiteboard Pictionary	• Divide attendees into 3-5 person teams. • Use this word generator and to select Easy/Medium/Hard words. • Each participant will generate a word and draw the word using the WebEx whiteboard function. Their team members will guess. If you have not used the whiteboard feature in WebEx, click here for a quick tutorial. • For each turn, the team guessing will have 45 seconds to guess the word. For each correct word the team scores 1 point.	6-20 person teams **Use an icebreaker or standalone team event
Codenames	• Divide attendees into 2 teams. • Use this website to create a codenames game board.	6-14 person teams
Name That Workspace	• Take photos of various things that team members may have seen in the background of your video calls when you've been working from home. *(Think: a close-range photo of your backsplash tiles, curtain pattern, or a picture frame on a table – try to make it challenging)* • Compile the photos on a slide and send to one person who will compile the deck. • Go through the deck and have the team guess who owns which slide.	Teams of 4+ people who work together somewhat frequently **Use an icebreaker or standalone team event
Guess Who?	• Each team member makes a slide with personal artifacts of their choosing; for example, a baby photo, fun fact, picture from a recent vacation, something funny. *(Think: "things the team doesn't already know about you")* • The team discusses and guesses who each slide represents.	Any size team **Use an icebreaker or standalone team event

Scavenger Hunt	• In a short period of time, collect items from your house and send visual proof that you have them before the other team collects all the items on the list! If you want to take it a step further, have each scavenger hunt team perform a skit with the items they collect.
	    • What is your favorite childhood movie?
	    • What is one item you couldn't live without?
	    • What is your unusual talent? (Perform it for the group)
		Any size team

Virtual Art Museum Team Building Exercise:	• In advance of your team gathering, have each team member find a favorite piece of art. (*Several art museums have made their collections available to the public online including The Met, MoMA, The National Gallery, Art Institute of Chicago and many others*) • Each team member shares the art on their screen and talks about why it was meaningful for them. ~2 min. a person.	Smaller teams, where attendees know each other well. **Use an icebreaker or standalone team event
Show-and-tell	• Bring something meaningful to introduce to the group. (*Think: kids, pets, a plant, an artifact related to a personal hobby, etc.*)	Any size team **Use an icebreaker or standalone team event

Special feature: Virtual onboarding

Overview

A new employee's start with your company is a defining moment and an opportunity to lay the groundwork for success. While the current pandemic has made some parts of onboarding especially challenging, there's still plenty you can do to help employees get off to a great start. Whether in person or virtual, a great onboarding experience should focus on two things— fostering a strong connection to the organization and empowering the employee to feel purposeful and productive.

Cultivate Connection

A new employee's sense of connection to your organization is essential to their engagement. Despite the current physical separation, there are many things you can to do help new hires feel more connected to the organization and other new hires.

- **Make virtual experiences interactive.** Even though the content will be offered virtually, still make it interactive. Encourage new hires to use their webcam during orientation if possible. Call on participants by name throughout onboarding. Use these quick tips to make virtual meetings more engaging in our resource: **Tips to make telework work for your team.**
- **Facilitate personal connections.** Connect new hires with their manager and a peer on their team for virtual one-on-ones and/or coffee. If possible, managers should still check in with staff on the first day and at 30, 60, and 90 days. Also consider connecting the new hire with a peer as soon as possible.
- **Don't do it alone; tap multiple channels to check in.** To mitigate the potential downsides of a virtual working environment and onboarding, tap someone within HR or a senior leader to check in with new hires more often than they regularly would. This will ensure questions, needs, or concerns don't fall through the cracks.
- **Build a sense of community.** Proactively schedule time for new hire cohorts to connect virtually on a regular basis even after the onboarding experience is over. The goal is to ensure all new hires feel they have colleagues they can connect with. Until operations are closer to normal, keep the new hire cohorts connected with virtual, informal touchpoints.

Help New Hires Feel Productive

After the initial onboarding formalities have passed, you may be tempted to check the box and move on. To maintain engagement for the long haul, however, it's critical to empower your new hire with the tools, direction, and information they need to be productive.

- **Keep them in the loop.** To make a meaningful contribution, your new hire will need to understand the context of their work. Ensure the manager includes them in all ongoing team meetings and informal chats. While teams are working remotely, it will be harder to remember that there is a new team member to include in pre-existing events and meetings. Remind leaders to forward all existing events and meetings as soon as the new hire starts.
- **Create a work plan.** Ask managers to have a work plan in place for the new hire so they can hit the ground running. In a time of chaos, it's easy to leave new hires with nothing meaningful to do (or nothing to do at all). Connect with new hires' managers to guarantee that there's something the new hire can work on in their first few weeks so they feel they are making a contribution to the team.