UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESOURCES

Telework Success Tips For Supervisors

Telework works best when employees and supervisors communicate clearly about expectations. It is also effective when the supervisor understands their role in ensuring a successful arrangement. The following tips will help you establish a foundation for effective teamwork and continued/enhanced productivity.

Understand UMD's Telework Guidelines

Review the telework guidelines and related tools which can be found on UHR's telework webpage. You should also be familiar with the specific telework agreement with your employee(s). Supervisors should verify that the employee who is requesting telework has read and understood this information as well.

Understand your role in the success of the arrangement

Supervisors play an important role in successful telework arrangements. It will require you to communicate often (see below for suggestions) and to be effective in a number of different areas. Here are just a few of the important tasks – You should:

- Discuss with your teleworker(s) specific goals, deliverables, and customer service expectations.

- Have regular conversations with your teleworking employees about any concerns you have about their expected work hours or work product.

- Check in with other employees in the unit to identify and resolve any workflow, productivity or customer services issues that may arise.

- Treat all of your employees fairly and equitably regardless of telework status.

- Brush up, if needed, on your skills with communication tools (i.e., Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, Slack, etc.).

- Be sure to include your teleworker(s) in office and unit events to preserve the teamwork environment.

Review technology needs and resources

Identify technology tools staff use in their daily work and determine whether the resources will be accessible when working from an alternate location and ensure employees know how to access your team's local technical support should they need assistance. Ensure employees know how to set up call forwarding and how to access voicemail remotely. Determine which online platform(s) you will use to communicate as a team (i.e., Zoom, WebEx Teams, Google Meet), clarify expectations for online availability, and confirm the employee has access to the technology tool(s) and support resources.

Review work schedules

Be clear about your expectations with employees for maintaining their current work schedule or if you are open to flexible scheduling based on employee needs. Respect the employee's work schedule – don't assume that because they are working remotely that they are available at all hours, especially if you have agreed to an alternate schedule for their work.

Make a communication plan

You should tell your employees how often they should send updates on work plan progress and what those updates should include. You should also communicate how quickly they expect the employee to respond while teleworking and the best ways for the employee to contact the supervisor while working remotely.

You may feel hesitant contacting an employee who is working remotely because you may feel you will be interrupting them. Remember, they are working, not vacationing at home! You should feel confident about calling or messaging an employee who is teleworking just as you would walk to their office or call them if you were working on-site. You can even keep your daily coffee run – just do it as a video chat.

If you normally make daily rounds to visit employees at their desks, you can give them a call during this period. Maintain team meetings and one-to-one check-ins, altering the schedule if needed to accommodate any alternative schedules that have been approved.
Plan for a regular check-in with a phone, video or instant message chat. Decide on a frequency that works for you and your teleworker, so long as you are in contact frequently enough to ensure you both are in sync on work tasks and expectations.

Assess performance and the telework arrangement at regular intervals

Assessing performance and providing regular feedback is even more important when you have employees who telework. The PRD requirements are the same for teleworkers and non-teleworkers. The difference with teleworking employees is that you will monitor and evaluate performance by relying more heavily on work results rather than direct observation.

This makes discussing with your teleworker(s) their objectives, expected results, and evaluation criteria for the work to be performed even more important. Establish regular intervals to review your employee's work performance and be sure to address any work-related issues as they arise.

It is also important for you and your teleworking employee to have regular check-ins to review the effectiveness of the telework arrangement. Here are a few topics to discuss and assess: performance, impact on workflow and unit operations, impact on teleworker's job satisfaction and productivity. You can make modifications to the agreement based on your discussion or end the arrangement if it is no longer effective for you or the teleworker. In this case, be sure to provide the employee with the amount of notice outlined in the agreement.

Be positive

A positive attitude toward teleworking and a willingness to trust employees to telework effectively is key to making such arrangements successful and productive. Teleworking presents an opportunity for managers to become better supervisors. Instead of focusing on how many hours your employees are working, shift your focus to measuring results and reaching objectives—regardless of work arrangement. The employee's completed work product is the indicator of success, rather than direct observation. By focusing on the employee's work product, "telemanagers" will improve their organizational abilities and their own skill in managing by objectives.