

# Key Lessons for Success with a Remote Workforce

By Judith Filek—President  
Impact Communications, Inc.

Thirty to fifty percent of our labor force works remotely today. That's an increase of about 300 percent in the past twenty years. With a remote workforce, companies feel they can attract smarter people, increase productivity and reduce their carbon footprint. What we are now learning is that different techniques and tools are necessary than managing on-site teams. Three key considerations will ensure success.

- 1. Communication**— This is the ability to share important information about the company, its happenings, its employees and various departments or business units. Obviously, if I work down the hall, I can share important information by stopping by your cubicle or office. I can also mention news over lunch or at the water cooler. This is not easy when people are remote, but by setting clear standards and expectations, you will avoid communication gaps or miscommunication. First, the company must set up the appropriate technology so that co-workers can easily provide real time feedback and information sharing. Then, each manager must decide if daily or weekly check-ins are necessary for employees to feel a part of the team or stay up to date. For new projects or new employees, a list of daily tasks to be completed may be a way of helping individuals set priorities. While video conferences are a great way of helping people to feel connected, there are a variety of other web-based tools for collaboration that might be considered as needed. The important thing is that communication be clear and frequent, whatever the vehicle.
- 2. Emotional Intelligence**— This relates to having a sensitivity of what others need and insight into one's self. Technical infrastructure and communication can go so far, but the X Factor to successful remote teams comes from the emotional intelligence of its members. When managers have an understanding of

their direct reports, their skills, temperaments, preferences and motivations, they can put the right person in the right job, regardless of where they are in the world. They can help the person achieve their true potential. Personality inventories are a must in this new organization.

- 3. Culture**— This refers to the company's core values. When somebody works remotely, the danger is that the person only focuses on the tasks at hand and not a shared set of values. Many companies now make it mandatory for a new hire to spend a week at the corporate headquarters so as to absorb the culture firsthand. The manager's job is to foster a culture of trust and team cohesion by enforcing processes, procedures and performance metrics. Everyone on the team must know how we do business— how and when to provide updates, review deliverables and make decisions. Obviously, what the manager models, others emulate. Operating outside the perimeters of the company's culture undermines performance over the long haul.

Creating a remote workforce is challenging, to say the least. It requires a new paradigm. When you think of your company, examine how you and the broader organization communicate remotely, whether there is a strong sense of connection and whether everyone understands and adheres to a shared vision. To achieve increased productivity, cost savings and build morale, these learnings must be embraced.

***Question:** If you are part of a remote workforce, what difficulties have you seen? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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