Teamwork

Managing a virtual team through the COVID-19 response

Many employees who are used to working in an office or facility are moving to work from home to try and curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As a manager, this might be your first time working with a virtual team. You might feel a bit disoriented. How do you make sure your team has what they need to do their jobs? These tips can help you adjust to remote work.

Use technology to connect.

E-mail's only the beginning. Instant messaging allows for real-time discussions. Desktop sharing is great for training and problem-solving. For meetings, you can get applications that act like phones through your computer hardware or use a phone conference line. Participants can share computer white-boards. Then they can type notes everyone else can see. If you add webcams into the equation, it's not that different from sitting in a meeting room together.

Stay in touch.

Keep up your relationships with everyone on your team. When working at home, it can be easy to get "in the zone" and accomplish a lot — but miss out on interacting. Just remember, if you were sharing the same workplace, you'd be talking every day. Don't be afraid to recreate that in your virtual environment.

Help your team members connect and prevent loneliness.

Employees who enjoy coming together for work each day may be especially prone to feelings of loneliness or isolation. Have regular meetings and start with ice-breakers or team builders. Let team members take turns leading projects, and have them work together in rotating sub-groups. Host social events — virtual style. Encourage the use of webcams so you can feel like you're all in the same place, if only for a little while. Even with a remote team, you can enjoy all of the benefits of working together and none of the germs!

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Listen, ask questions and be a resource.

Just as you may be feeling a few bumps in the road with a sudden shift to working at home, so may your team members. Check in with everyone and see if there are any issues you can help them solve.

Consolidate schedules and contact information.

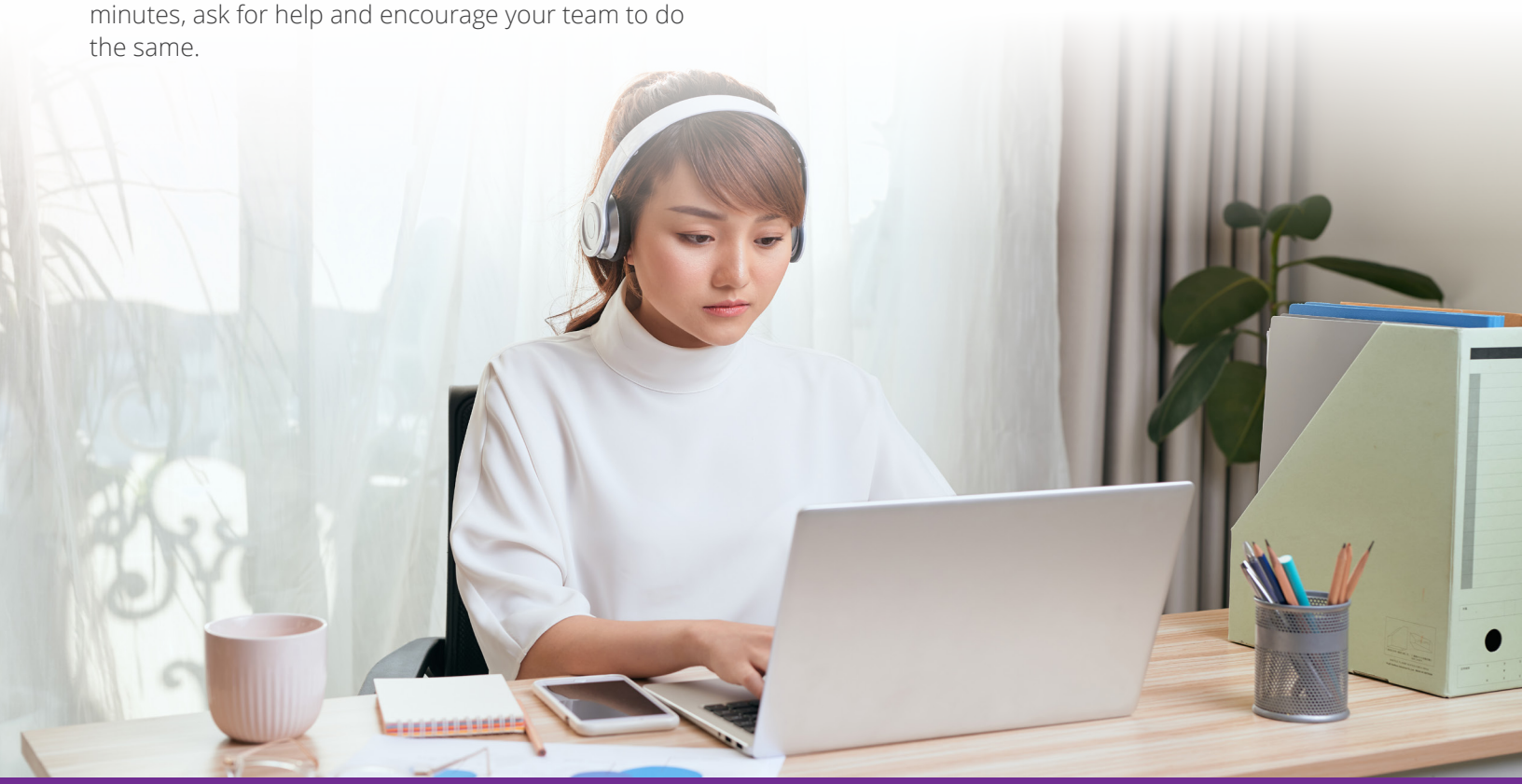
Create a master schedule for everyone on the team. You can also use it to track upcoming time off and make sure business needs are covered. A contact list can include work phone, cell phone, home phone and personal email. You may not be able to walk over to your team member's work station, but you should always be able to reach one another.

Lean on each other.

While you're working out new processes, try not to sit and struggle alone. If you're stuck on something for 10 minutes, ask for help and encourage your team to do the same.

Getting comfortable with your new work arrangements will take time.

By sticking together, even while you're working apart, your team can learn new skills to help everything run smoothly.



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