Holding Remote Success & Development Conversations

Communicate frequently. Your team members may not have the opportunity to communicate with you as frequently as they would in the office. Make sure that you keep the lines of communication open so they know that they can contact you with questions or concerns outside of pre-scheduled meetings. Successes or concerns about performance should not be raised for the first time during the conversation. Establishing a recurring check-in with members of your team will give you the opportunity to raise any issues or concerns outside of this process. Both positive and negative feedback is best delivered as close as possible to the event so give real-time feedback wherever possible and take time to say, 'thank you' and 'well-done' regularly. Similarly, if something goes wrong, try to get to the bottom of things quickly by speaking to the individual about what just happened.

Context matters. The pandemic has heightened anxiety and raised stress levels across the board. Many are dealing with increased uncertainty, impacts on loved ones, and juggling home-schooling, to name a few. It's essential to be sensitive to what is going on for staff and to be empathetic. Remind your team of College health and wellbeing benefits (such as confidential care or occupational health), and how to access them when working remotely.

Show Empathy. Get to know what really matters to your team, remembering that everyone's different: What motivates them? What are their personal triggers for stress? Do they feel resilient and able to manage their emotional needs? Do they feel secure and supported in their job, and a sense of belonging and inclusion in the team? Are they happy with their work–life balance? Are they clear about team priorities and is their workload manageable? How do they feel about working from home and about returning to the office some day? Would they feel comfortable raising any ongoing health concerns or personal issues with you? Being aware of all this will help you to do your job as their manager better.

Recreate the 'in-person' experience. It's important that staff feel that you've taken this time to speak with them directly so use Microsoft Teams or other appropriate video conferencing software that will enable you to pick up on important nonverbal cues and engage in more organic conversations. If they really do not want to appear on camera, that's OK.

Schedule the time in both calendars and respect it, only postponing if there is a compelling reason. Plan to have a private conversation and wherever possible, find a quiet space where you won't be interrupted. Likewise, encourage the staff member to do the same, if this is possible, but be flexible if it isn't.

Allow for small talk. Many people are craving social interaction right now, especially if they live alone. Before diving into the meeting, allow a few minutes for chit-chat. Ask them about their family or social plans, topics completely unrelated to work. This is an efficient use of time as it lightens the mood and sets the stage for a more productive, amicable discussion.

Consider your employee's **Work-life balance**. Watch out for members of your team working excessive hours – it could mean there's too much work to do, or your team might need support and development to work more effectively. Use the success and development conversation to discuss ways you can help them set boundaries and rest outside of their working hours.

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Evaluate based on Outcomes, Clear Metrics & Expectations. When you manage by presence and time-based measures, you are focusing primarily on one aspect of the inputs – monitoring the hours put in. Changing your focus to the **output** of work means that the emphasis moves to how *effective* that work is rather than the duration and location of work activities. That provides the basis for adjusting the inputs (resources, skills, time, effort, processes, collaboration) in order to improve productivity and quality. The key to working well with remote staff is to be very clear and specific with all expectations and to have a clear and shared understanding amongst the team of what inputs are necessary to achieve the targeted results.

Trust your staff**.** Unless your metrics show otherwise, trust that people are working hard to complete the tasks you give them.

Make Feedback Constructive. People can be more sensitive if they're feeling isolated or anxious, so take this into account when giving feedback to staff. Positive feedback is critical for learning. People are often quick to notice what needs developing, but it's equally important to pay attention to and provide input on what is working to support development.
It can be uncomfortable criticising someone's performance, but if you avoid doing so, you will leave the individual with the impression that all is going well and you are more likely to encounter the same issues in the future. When raising concerns, use specific examples and focus on observable behaviour, not the person. Be open to feedback or suggestions yourself for how you could better support them especially with establishing priorities and managing workload.

Use a coaching approach. Practice Active Listening and ask curious questions. You'll foster more engagement and mutually beneficial learning by asking questions that stimulate reflection and coach people into exploration and experimentation.

Set Goals. It is important that you are both clear about what happens next. Situations of novelty, uncertainty and uncontrollability can lead to increased stress levels. As a manager, you can reduce this stress by creating a calm microclimate within teams where there is clarity around short term goals. Ensure that you also devote time to personal goals, training opportunities and other topics related to career development.

Be positive. End the conversation on a positive note. In a remote environment — especially during unstable times — concluding positively is essential to boosting employee self-esteem and performance.

Please use the FoE Tips Success & Development Conversations Framework to help guide your conversations