Teleworking Best Practices for Supervisors

Telework Supervisor Best Practices

- **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.
- **Draft a work plan.** Review the questions below with staff and work through answers together.
  - What routine responsibilities/tasks cannot be fulfilled while working remotely and how will it impact operations or other people? What are ways to reduce the impacts?
  - What routine responsibilities/tasks require regular communication and collaboration with others? Proactively contact each partner to confirm how you will communicate while everyone is working remotely.
  - Oftentimes employees experience fewer interruptions while teleworking. Are there any special projects or tasks that you can advance while working remotely?
  - What events or meetings are scheduled during the time in which the temporary telework arrangement is in place? Will they be postponed or canceled, or will they take place using technology? What follow-up needs to occur due to postponements or cancellations?
- **Make a communication and accountability plan.** Supervisors should tell employees how often they should send updates on work plan progress and what those updates should include. Supervisors 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.
  - 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.
  - **Conduct regular check-ins.** Start each workday with a phone, video or instant message chat. Your employees will be eager for connection and information during the disruption and the structure will help everyone create a positive routine. Every other day or weekly may be fine, so long as you are in contact frequently enough that your employees are in sync with you and/or with one another.
- **Trust.** Managers should use telework as an opportunity to foster trust between employees and management. Established daily check-ins can be useful, but rigid micro-monitoring of daily activities hinders productivity and creates an environment of distrust.
- **Manage by results.** For managers used to passing offices where employees are working away, telework can be disconcerting. But apparent worker activity should not be confused with the results those activities produce. Establish a clear definition of objectives and performance indicators and keep track of those indicators.
- **Monitor performance measures.** One measure might be team sick days and absenteeism—have they decreased as your teleworking program progresses? Customer satisfaction might be another measure —has the needle moved in any direction since some team members started teleworking?
- **Customer service.** If your team members interact with customers, make sure service-level support requirements in communicating with customers are clearly defined. All team members need to agree to meet the same service levels to ensure transparency to the customer. Commit with each other to an acceptable response period for email inquiries or phone calls.

- **Virtual presence.** Instant messaging systems can be used by team members to check in each morning, and change status when they will be away from the computer for more than a few minutes. Using a rotating system, one team member can also lead a virtual water cooler chat with a question or comment for team members to respond to once or twice a day. Transparent communication tools like shared calendars can also be useful. In addition, advanced collaboration tools such as video conferencing may also be considered.
- **Keep evolving.** Managers should think of a telework program as a continual work in progress. Teams are unlikely to get all arrangements right the first time. Evolving work groups and projects may also force changes in the original arrangements, regardless of how successful they may have been. Remain flexible, evaluate frequently, and adjust the arrangements as needed.

Tips for Supervisors

- Keep an open mind, experiment and evaluate how the arrangement is working; do not rush to make a yes or no decision.
- If you are uncertain about workplace flexibility or concerned about managing someone working flexibly, try to put your assumptions aside and look at the evidence.
- Be clear about the business objectives that must be met by individuals and teams.
- Do not ask why a person is seeking a flexible work arrangement; ask whether the work can be done and whether the employee will be able to be just as effective working flexibly as not.
- If the flexible work arrangement needs to be revised, identify areas that require additional information or modifications.
- Remember that you play a key role in successful implementation.
- Recognize that employees and teams may have different working styles and preferred hours.
- Trust that your team is managing its work responsibly and empower your team to meet business objectives.
- Help your employees think about all the components of working flexibly, so they are more likely to succeed.
- Share best practices, so employees can learn from the experiences of others.
- When considering supervision of employees working different hours than you work or at a different location, think about how much of each employee's time/work you actually personally observe when he or she is in the office during traditional working hours and how much is already conducted via e-mail and other information and communications technology (ICT) options.
- When appropriate, hold meetings by phone rather than in person.
- Establish core hours for your team if everyone needs to overlap for several hours each day.
- Set reasonable deadlines, so you do not force employees to abandon their flexible arrangement.
- Schedule regular check-ins, allowing both you and the employee working flexibly to touch base and to discuss how the arrangement is going.