

Rebuilding your team and remote working

We've faced many unimaginable challenges over the last few weeks and months. But, ahead of us we're now starting to see that we can begin working towards a brighter future with the potential for new and better ways of working more effectively together.

Whilst some businesses haven't stopped working, others who had to stop are now beginning to bring their teams back together – either remotely or with social distancing in place. In some businesses there's been a mix of people put on furlough or working from home.

It's important that we take time to reconnect, reenergise and reengage people who may have been out of the business and unable to work for a number of weeks. They may need to be refocused so they are ready to relaunch, replan, restart and get back to business.

These teams could be at any level in the business. It could be the senior management team, established work or project teams, supervisors and team leaders or all the employees in a small business.

This paper offers some thoughts to help your teams to improve their capability, productivity and delivery by becoming more efficient and effective as a team and improving the business processes. In turn, this should help to deliver improved business performance.

There may be a need for some of your team members to work remotely for a longer period of time. You may also choose to allow people to work from home more often than they did in the past as it could be more effective for you and them.

I've included some additional thoughts to help engage and lead your teams with members who continue to work remotely.

Rebuilding your team – A five step process

Work through these steps as you bring your team back together.

1. Reconnect and Reenergise

Depending on the situation your business has been in, it could feel like you're forming a new team again. Consider using some icebreaker or energiser questions and activities to help team members to reconnect.

- What new skills have you learnt during lockdown?
- Share something new that you've done.
- Where will your first break or holiday be when this is over?
- What are your book, music, TV, film or box set recommendations that you've discovered?
- What new Apps have you discovered?
- What's the story behind the most recent photo on your phone?

2. Review and Reflect

You need to recognise and acknowledge what people (including yourself) have been through, and may continue to go through. Review what's happened over the past few weeks. Help your team to reflect on their experiences by using some of these questions as prompts.

- How do you feel about returning to work?
- What concerns do you have?
- What's changed for you as an individual?
- What are you looking forward to?
- What's changed for us as a team?
- How has the experience affected us?
- What have you learned from the experience?
- What positives are there that we can build on?
- What do we want to take forward?

3. Refocus and Reengage

Help team members to refocus on what they need to work on and encourage them to engage with those areas of focus and each other. Create opportunities for people to work together on projects or tasks. Work through some of these questions as a team.

- What does being a member of this team mean to me?
- How does being part of this team benefit me from a personal perspective?
- How does being part of this team benefit me from a professional or career perspective?
- What do we want to be different in how we operate as a team?
- What do we want to be different from a broader business perspective?
- What new ideas do we have to make things better than they were previously?
- What opportunities have been created by what we've been through?
- Has our focus changed as a result of the past few months? If so, how?

4. Reprioritise and Replan

Prioritise the team's new ideas and activities and put together a plan to deliver them. Use these prompt questions.

- What are our top five business priorities from a team perspective now?
- What are our top five people priorities from a team perspective now?
- What barriers might stop us achieving our priorities?
- How can we overcome those barriers?
- What do we need to do to deliver the priorities we've identified?
- How do I contribute to achieving the priorities as a member of this team?
- What resources do we need?
- What are the timescales to deliver our priorities?

5. Relaunch and Rebuild

You're now in a position to relaunch the team and its activities and rebuild the business. Consider these questions.

- Who needs to know what we're doing?
- How are we going to communicate what we're focusing on?
- How will we measure our progress?
- How will we report our progress?
- How will we keep all the team members informed?
- How will we keep up our momentum?

Leading remote team members

Here are some thoughts around things to consider if some members of your team are working remotely.

Styles and preferences

People will have their own preferred styles and ways of working remotely. There's no right or wrong, good or bad – just difference. Some will be more comfortable with working remotely than others. Understand each individual's preference and if you don't know, ask them. Adapt your style to help them as their preference may be different to yours.

Working time and hours

Be more flexible with how people manage their working time to suit their individual situation. Also bear in mind your own personal responsibilities. Manage expectations around response times to emails and phone calls.

Communication

Keep in contact with your team members by phone or video call. Set regular times so people know there's a formal opportunity to speak, but be available in between if they need you.

Tasks and objectives

When you ask for a task to be done, check understanding and make sure people are clear on what they have to deliver. Ensure they have what they need to complete it – the skills, knowledge and resources. If they rely on other people to help deliver the task, how will they manage that? Set up progress review calls.

Meetings

Meetings need to be well planned, structured and managed. Use video calls if possible. Identify the best times when people are available. Consider what meetings you really need, their purpose and frequency, who needs to attend, what's the structure and agenda, who will capture and share the action notes. Define some groundrules for participating in virtual meetings.

Training

Use remote working as an opportunity to develop. Is there any training that people need that could be delivered virtually? This will help them to focus on the future.

Team relationships

Have regular full team catch up sessions which focus on relationship building. Share positive news and personal stories. Encourage team members and have virtual coffee or lunch breaks to connect informally between sessions. But don't put pressure on people.

Culture

Encourage your team to continue to work to the business's values and culture, even when they're not physically together. Make sure that you also demonstrate the values in what you do and how you treat people.

Well-being

Regularly check in with team members to make sure they're OK from a well-being and non-work perspective. Be aware of, and look after, your own well-being as well.

Summary

As their leader, you still have the same responsibilities to your team when they're working remotely that you had in more 'normal' times.

Don't treat them any differently (assuming you already treated them well before). It's how you might have to do it that will be different, not what you do.

Use this time to improve how you work together now and back in the workplace.

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