

Establishing a remote employee code of conduct

With more employees than ever working remotely, establishing a remote employee code of conduct is just as important it is for on-site employees. However, enforcing appropriate workplace behavior and a code of conduct for employees you never see in person brings its own set of challenges.

Despite these challenges, there are some clear steps you can take to ensure the success of both your business and your employees. It's key to set clear and transparent expectations for employees through your code of conduct and update it to include remote work considerations. In addition, you should acknowledge the challenges of remote work and provide support for employees and managers to overcome them. Doing so can ensure that employees are engaged, productive, and successful working remotely.

A remote employee code of conduct still includes the basics

Due to COVID-19, the transition to remote work happened rapidly for many employees and companies. The policies or procedures may not have been in place for you to communicate the rules and expectations to your workforce when the pandemic started. However, it is vital to ensure clear communication around acceptable behavior and employee expectations.

To start, remote workers are held to the same Business Conduct policies as their colleagues who work in the office. A general code of conduct usually explains how employees should behave day-to-day, the company's core values, and the company's culture.

CONSIDER ADDING THESE COVID SAFETY MEASURES IN YOUR CODE OF CONDUCT:



REQUIRE EMPLOYEES TO COMPLETE ALL THE NECESSARY SAFETY TRAINING. ESTABLISH PROTOCOLS FOR TESTING, QUARANTINE, ISOLATION, AND CONTACT TRACING.



ENSURE EMPLOYEES DON'T COME TO THE OFFICE IF THEY HAVE ANY COVID-19 SYMPTOMS

(HAVE BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WHO IS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19, OR IF THEY HAVE TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19 WITHIN THE LAST 14 DAYS.)

Many policies are usually the same, regardless of worksite:

- Time and attendance tracking.
- Social media conduct.
- Confidentiality and data protection.
- Resource use guidelines.
- Anti-discrimination/equal opportunity.
- Appropriate dress code when meeting with customers or partners.
- Equipment usage.

- Avoiding conflicts of interest.
- Compliance and ethics standards.
- Non-discrimination and disability protections.
- Health and Safety requirements (including updates for social distancing, mask requirements, and contact tracing if needed).

However, with the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing, there may be some code of conduct changes you wish to establish for all employees.

Consider COVID safety measures in your code of conduct:

- Require employees to complete all the necessary safety training.
- Establish protocols for testing, quarantine, isolation, and contact tracing.
- Ensure employees do not come to the office if they have any COVID-19 symptoms, have been in close contact with someone who is positive for COVID-19, or if they have tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 14 days.

Additional Resources: Consider these additional [COVID workplace practices](#).

A remote employee code of conduct needs special considerations

In addition, a remote employee code of conduct should include guidelines to help employees be successful from their home office. These guidelines may include temporary or more permanent arrangements for employees to work remotely. Setting up a formalized agreement for employees who are regularly working remotely can help ensure that employees meet their responsibilities and know what is expected.

Provide tips for successfully working from home:

- Reduce interruptions by finding a quiet, distraction-free place to work.
- Ensure you have a reliable internet connection.
- Set working hours that allow you to dedicate your full attention to your work.
- Adhere to the break and attendance schedules set with your manager.
- Coordinate with your manager and other team members to ensure projects are completed effectively.
- Share video call best practices.

Address the challenges of remote work

For many employees, this may be the first time that they have worked at home for an extended time. Simple things like muting a microphone when not talking, logging on early to troubleshoot technical issues, and notifying team members if they have to step away from a call may seem obvious to some. Still, as anyone who has been on a video call lately knows – it isn't for everyone. There are other challenges that employees new to remote work may face:

- **Lack of supervision/oversight.** Managers have to resist the urge to micromanage while still overseeing employee goals, achievements, and work.
- **Communication difficulties.** Keeping the team dynamic healthy, adapting to new technology, and employees with differing schedules can make communication challenging with remote workers.
- **Isolation.** Many remote workers are working at home for the first time, as are their managers. Many feel isolated when they can't go to the office or have casual chats with colleagues.
- **Distractions.** One of the biggest fear of all managers and employees alike as they face remote. Distractions are inevitable in these times, but there are ways to help remote employees reduce them.

Managers and HR should be positioned to support remote workers

Today, managers and HR teams are working overtime to support remote employees and keep them engaged in the workplace. Here are some ways to avoid remote work challenges and keep employees productive.

- **Establish regular check-ins.** Managers should set up regular meetings with their whole team and one-on-one check-ins with individuals. Emphasis on clear, regular communication can help bridge any gaps that come from working remotely. Make sure everyone on the team knows how to use the selected communications tools.
- **Model behavior.** Managers can set the example – if business casual clothing is expected on video calls, be sure to dress appropriately.
- **Reinforce work/life balance.** Managers can help reinforce work/life balance by ensuring employees are taking breaks and taking time off from work – working at home shouldn't be a 24/7 job. Determine if employees must have set office hours or if they can split their day.
- **Set clear goals.** Managers and employees should determine priorities and how they'll evaluate success. Regular goal setting can help keep productivity high despite the challenges of remote work.
- **Allow for multiple technology options.** E-mail, texts, video chats, phone calls, or using group messaging services can help give a team a sense of cohesiveness despite being dispersed.
- **Be consistent in implementing and enforcing rules.** While facing a pandemic has brought on new challenges and required new levels of flexibility, employees should still be making clear progress on goals and meeting company standards. Managers should avoid micromanaging but still need to provide feedback and support if team members are off track.
- **Allow time for social interaction.** Whether at the end or beginning of team calls, or a special time set aside for team chat, supporting social interactions is essential to avoid feelings of isolation.
- **Offer support.** Employees are likely under more pressure than ever and likely face much uncertainty. Ensuring that you offer support, whether it's time to talk or additional resources, during this time is crucial.
- **Provide the necessary tools.** Provide remote employees with the equipment to do their job correctly. This may include laptops, headsets, and mobile phones.
- **Be flexible when possible.** Many employees may be trying to balance caring for elderly family members, children who aren't in school or daycare, and pets who aren't used to everyone at home. A little flexibility can go a long way.

Most of all, celebrate every success. As the pandemic surges again, many employees will be facing lockdowns or quarantines again. Any form of celebration or recognition can help people feel more connected and happy, despite the challenges of navigating so many unknowns.