Coronavirus and managing remote work

With the global spread of the coronavirus pandemic, workers across industries have been forced to work from home where possible. Companies such as Google, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, and many others around the world have all initiated mandatory work-from-home policies. While many other companies are unable to allow for remote work, which has led to mass layoffs, remote work can be both a blessing and a curse for those who can do it

Meanwhile the World Health Organization has indicted that we should expect this work situation to become the "new normal" for the foreseeable future. But working from home can be a major transition for people who have always worked in an office and it may require an adjustment period. "Some employees are working from home for the first time," observes Nancy Halverson, SVP, Global Operations. "They have to figure out how to work effectively in an environment that may be distracting, isolating and disruptive to productivity."

Communication is key, believes Halverson. "That means leveraging technology like Skype and Zoom to establish day-to-day communication and keep people feeling connected and focused on their jobs," she says. "Your employees are bound to have many concerns about the impact not only to their workday, but also about the longer-term implications for the economy and their jobs. Communicate with them often about the impacts of the pandemic to your business and encourage employees to express their concerns and questions."

Halverson suggests offering clear guidelines for people who are new to working from home. "Your team needs to know exactly what is expected of them," she says. "Not being crystal clear about expectations can lead to problems that can cause major disruptions in your team's workflow and performance. Clarify what tools your team will use, how you will communicate, what hours everyone is expected to work and when projects will be completed. Put the plan in writing so that everyone understands it and knows what is expected of them."

"It's also important to remind them to treat remote work the same way as if they were working from their office," she says. "They should be making the effort to create a dedicated workspace - and resisting the temptation to lounge around in pajamas all day."

Keep in mind, too, that when working remotely, employees don't always receive the same level of feedback on their work as they would in the office. "Make sure to provide consistent feedback," says Halverson, "even something as simple as an email that shows you're aware of what they're accomplishing. Ask how they are adjusting, how they are feeling and if they are having struggling with anything."

The coronavirus has dramatically changed the way many people in the U.S. and abroad are working. It's critically important that during these uncertain times your employees feel valued and that their well-being matters. That's powerful motivation for them to perform well and do their part to keep your business on track.