

Managing A Remote Team In Information Management

You need the right approach to bring members seamlessly into the fold

 By [Jill Shuman](#)

It's rare for any one role in an organization to regularly collaborate with staff across all departments and geographic locations, but that is often the daily reality for information managers. One of the greatest challenges for this specialized group of practitioners is managing a remote team, defined by most as employees who work away from their manager's office environment. This could be an employee working from a home office, or an employee working in a satellite company office away from yours.

And the challenge is only growing. A 2018 [Global Workplace Analysis of the US workforce](#) found that 50 percent of workers hold a job that is compatible with at least partial remote work, which has grown by 115 percent since 2005. Remote workers make up 2.8 percent of the workforce (roughly 3.7 million employees) but more

than 80 percent of the nation-wide workforce reports that they would like to telework, at least part time. As trends and demand for remote and flexible work grows, so too will the challenges for information managers when it comes to hiring, retaining, evaluating and engaging employees in this ever-changing landscape.

Hiring

Hiring presents the first challenge and should reflect the company's overall hiring strategy. For all prospective remote employees, information managers should follow a similar interview path to determine their eligibility and "fit" for the role. After human resources effectively vets the employee, information managers should schedule a videoconference for the interview. This will not only show the prospect's comfort with technology, but also allows the manager to pick up on body cues, similar to a face-to-face

interview. These videoconferences should then be scheduled with other members of the team to determine personality alignment and work congruencies.

A prospect's writing style should also be evaluated, along with the ever-important reference checks. Here, it's critical to ask a former colleague or employer questions specific to time management, accountability and any previous remote work experience.

Some questions prospective remote employees should be asked in the hiring process include:

- Describe your remote work experience.
- Describe a time you've handled a project remotely and how you resolved communication and collaboration challenges.
- What strategies do you use to stay on task?



- Do you have any reservations about working remotely?
- What tools do you use to manage and complete your work remotely?
- How do you keep up with industry news?
- How do you troubleshoot problems on your own?
- How would you manage a project with many steps and people?
- Could you tell me about a time you got tough feedback from a boss?

Ideally, new hires for the remote workforce should meet the job skills outlined and have experience working remotely. This experience may immediately remove some of the remote management burden from information managers, as these employees are typically used to frequently scheduled team meetings – often outside regular

business hours – and have experience working in the cloud.

Self-motivation and self-management are two of the most important characteristics of a successful remote worker. Such an employee will come armed with proactive communication strategies, an independent work style, strong time management and the focus and discipline it takes to be successful at working remotely.

Onboarding

Remote onboarding is no less important than onboarding employees onsite. This process may take several weeks and should be broken into segments to support a new remote employee's proper transition. Much like the interview process, onboarding should be done via videoconferencing and include

interactions with as many team members as possible, so the new employee can quickly feel part of the team.

Much like an office environment, remote employees should receive a virtual tour of the office where many of their teammates work, pausing to connect with various team members to delve deeper into a "day in the life" at the workplace. This will help the new employee identify the tools at their disposal – such as chats and IM – as well as key contacts to help them define a typical work day – and any other expectations.

To ensure new employees quickly become part of the workplace culture, information managers should share any and all "water cooler tools" with them during initial onboarding, such as Google Hangouts and Slack. The new

employee should also quickly become familiar with IM tools (Lync, Skype for Business) and document storage and sharing tools (Google Docs, One Drive, SharePoint).

Engagement

Remote micromanagement is just as unwelcome as it is in the actual work space, but information managers should set up a verbal or video regular check-in to discuss programs and deadlines with remote employees. Following these meetings, provide a written checklist of action items to be completed before the next call. This gives employees a sense of collaboration and sets expectations for the week ahead.

An “open door” policy is obvious in an office, but what about for remote employees? The best way to create a feeling of access is to encourage remote workers to reach out virtually, whenever they have cause. It’s also important to note that emails and IMs can lack nuance and tone may be inferred, so try not to rely on electronic communications solely and instead schedule phone or video calls on a regular basis to ensure employees are on-task and feeling confident. This way, managers can also provide feedback when necessary, without feeling detached from the employees’ regularly scheduled day. Information managers should also set aside time to visit remote sites, when possible, and be cognizant of time zone differences for employees who require support outside of standard business hours.

Another important consideration is ensuring there’s no stark differentiation between remote and in-house staff. Some ways to foster this include running meetings where everyone “attends” using the same technology and creating staff newsletters that encompass the updates and successes of the full team. Where budget allows, information managers should bring all staff together at least once a year, and for those who live in the same area, provide funds for team-building activities they can do together. When possible, team meetings should be held at a time that allows the greatest number of employees to attend, regardless of their time zone.

Aside from geographic limitations, employees may have cultural needs or preferences when it comes to the timing and method of communication. Younger employees – like Millennials and Gen Z – may prefer IM, while more seasoned workers might prefer a phone call. An information managers’ role is to identify and respect the communication needs of each employee in order to foster a collaborative, positive and productive workforce.

Evaluation

If properly run, performance evaluations of remote employees should be fairly simple and present no differently than in-house evaluations. In addition to reviewing work outputs, all staff should be provided with at least one peer evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses, distilled for the employee into

useful takeaways. This peer evaluation, combined with management observation and self-evaluation of the employee, will provide information managers with 360-degree feedback of the remote workers’ performance. As much as possible, tailor your management approach for each remote worker.

Hiring, onboarding, engaging with and evaluating remote employees isn’t an easy task. But with the right approach, information managers can successfully bring new team members seamlessly into the fold—regardless of where they ‘sit.’



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