

Remote Working: The Basics for a Happy Remote Working Life

Spring 2020



Introduction

Remote working has lots of advantages for many people including working from the comfort of your own home, using your commuting time for something more fun, and the luxury of celebrating Casual Friday every day.

The covid19 pandemic, however, is throwing many of us into this way of working with little time to prepare.

This guide gives you some introductory tips for adjusting to remote working. Inside you'll find

1. Top tips for anyone new to remote working

2. Top tips for managing remote teams

We will be creating other support materials to help. Once you've read this, you might want to check out the guide to Managing Your Day.

Remember there's more guidance and FAQs, including the essentials for getting your IT set up, available on SCC Daily and Jive

<https://surreycc.jiveon.com/groups/coronavirus/pages/coronavirus-support>



If you have any questions
please email
[employee.experience@surreycc.
gov.uk](mailto:employee.experience@surreycc.gov.uk)

Whilst we may not always
have the opportunity to
provide 1:1 support, we will
closely manage the
inbox and do our best to
respond to your email
within a reasonable
timeframe.

New to remote working?



1. Are you sitting comfortably?

Whilst you are unlikely to have the set up at home that you are used to in the office, use the IOHS guidance [Ergonomics of homeworking during covid19](#) to ensure your workspace is as healthy and safe as is practically possible for the period that you are working from home. As comfortable as they seem, beds and couches are not recommended.

2. Start and finish

Working at home may mean start and finish times flex on each day based on personal circumstances (especially with children at home). Try to align your working hours to access times for your customers and discuss arrangements with your manager if this is not going to be possible.

3. Get social

It can get lonely working remotely. Check if you have current contact details of your team members and think about ways to stay connected and socialise with your colleagues; perhaps a 15-minute online coffee break via Skype or setting up a Whatsapp group with your team's consent to enable check-ins and boost morale.

New to remote working?



4. Setting up your tech

Getting your technology set up and working is understandably a priority – we rely on it for doing so much of our day to day tasks and staying connected. IT&D have been working to enable as many people to work from home as possible, including access from home devices via Citrix. Check out the guidance available on the website <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/staff/coronavirus>

5. Planning your time

You do not need to be always online or available. You might feel the pressure to respond to every chat, email, skype message instantly but that is not productive. Try to carve out some “quiet” time where you can get work done and switch your status on Skype to ‘busy’ or ‘do not disturb’ to let others know.

6. Let others know when you're around

Keep your Skype status and Outlook Calendar up-to-date and open so others are aware of your working times and commitments, and can take this into account when arranging meetings. If you are unsure how to do this, it's likely one of your colleagues can help you.

New to remote working?



7. Take a break

Working from home can be great, but it's easy to get distracted or forget to take the breaks you'd normally get in an office setting. Remember to get up and walk around every hour or so, and don't skip your lunch break. Creating a schedule to give you some routine can be really helpful.

8. Stay in touch

Determine keeping-in-touch arrangements and the frequency. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to this, you just need to go with what is most appropriate for your team (e.g. 10-minute daily team stand ups, virtual 1 to 1s, informal team catch-ups).

9. Empathy and grace

Most importantly, be patient and give yourself and colleagues time to figure things out. It doesn't need to be perfect and we'll all be doing some learning and adjusting. If someone's child, cat, significant other *[replace as appropriate!]* walks across a video call, that's fine; wave and say hello!



Top tips for managing a remote team



1. Getting started

As much as remote work can feel fraught with challenges, there are some relatively quick and easy things that managers can do to ease the transition. We'd suggest prioritising a team call as quickly as possible to agree your rules of engagement, e.g. frequency and timing for regular team and 1:1 check ins, which communication channels to use for what, and how to share information. The agile team charter may be a useful prompt.

2. How will I know what work is being done?

Managing a remote team means you don't have the same signs to tell you work is being done as when in an office environment and this can feel like a loss of control. It can be tempting to micro-manage, but that reduces productivity for you and your team.

Managing a remote team starts with trust and communication. Be clear what outputs and results are expected, and use planned 1:1s to review progress and performance.

3. Flexing your approach

It's ok to tailor your management practice according to your knowledge of your team and their work; for example, some you might speak to twice a day, some once a week. Do what works for you and your team.

Top tips for managing a remote team



4. Agreeing objectives and managing performance

Agreeing clear objectives, using measurable outcomes to monitor performance, and having regular 1 to 1s is as important. Review work priorities with each of your team members to ensure the focus is on service and business critical priorities.

5. Resist the paranoia!

We know it can be hard at first but resist the paranoia that people are not working because they are away from the office. You don't need to monitor when people appear online and offline; it is not evidence of work being done. And do your best to stick to planned times for checking in.

6. Think differently

It's not necessary to replicate every aspect of the office in a remote environment; some of it just doesn't work effectively. It offers a great opportunity to think differently. Consider if there are different ways to do what's needed, e.g. you could write a memo to update teams or email a request for ideas, allowing team members to determine when best to respond, providing a thoughtful rather than reactive response.

Top tips for managing a remote team



7. Connection

Encourage your team to stay in touch with each other. It's important to keep the social aspects of being part of a team and studies show it boosts productivity. Perhaps try a daily online coffee break together, which can include those in the office too. Keep the cadence of regular team meetings and apply the same discipline of agendas, recording actions, and encouraging participation

8. Keep an eye on the mood

Monitor mood of team at daily stand up and follow up where needed. Not everyone will adapt to remote working in the same way. Make use of the wellbeing support and guidance on SCC Daily.

9. Role model and offer encouragement and support

It's important to acknowledge stress and anxiety at times of change. At the same time, research suggests teams look to managers for cues on how to react. Effective leaders take a two-pronged approach, both acknowledging the stress and anxiety that employees may be feeling in difficult circumstances, but also providing affirmation of their confidence in their team – “I know it's tough but we've got this”.