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## How to Manage Remote Employees

BY ADAM HICKMAN, PH.D., AND ILANA RON LEVEY



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### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Remote workers are too valuable for managers to overlook their unique needs.
- Individualization, clear expectations, trust and talent help them thrive.
- Read more on how managers can [improve teamwork in the workplace](#).

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Selecting the right manager is the most important part of a leader's job.

Managers account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores, and engagement is strongly linked to productivity. But managers of remote workers have a particular challenge -- extending that influence to people they may rarely see and may barely know.

It's a growing concern. Currently, 43% of all U.S. employees work off-site at least part of the time, according to Gallup's *State of the American Workplace* report.

A Stanford University study found that the productivity increase among remote workers is equivalent to an extra day per person per week. And remote workers are, on average, less likely to burn out and in many ways more engageable than in-house workers.

To leaders, this indicates that remote workers contribute too much value to overlook their unique management needs.

## The productivity increase among remote workers is equivalent to an extra day per person per week.

Gallup's workplace research shows that to get the best out of a remote worker, managers must:

### 1. Individualize.

Some remote workers feel isolated by working alone, while others feel liberated. Some love 24/7 access to work; others need to have a real boundary between office and home. Some do their best work in the middle of the night, while others keep strict office hours. Accepting a remote worker's method and reasoning helps managers coach to the individual on behalf of the company, promoting the corporate benefits that characterize off-site work. Individualization helps remote workers "feel cared for as a person," which is a fundamental element of engagement.

### 2. Define expectations.

People learn a lot from context, and the less time they spend in the office, the less context workers have about their manager's expectations. So managers need to be explicit about what the remote worker must produce. The parameters, deadlines and metrics of tasks must be crystal clear, but so should the manager's personal feelings. If a manager needs weekly progress reports, for instance, or prompt replies to emails, the manager must say so and hold the employee accountable.

### 3. Build trust.

Managers build trust through individualization, keeping their promises and frequent conversations. A good bit of face time during onboarding helps, as well as annual in-person meetings once the worker is established. These meetings can be more social than not, but there's always a business case to be made for face-to-face conversations. Building lines of sight for the remote worker builds trust too. Knowing whom to turn to for help enhances productivity and aids development, but remote workers lack that perspective. Managers who make themselves a proxy in their remote worker's network prove themselves both trustworthy to the worker and indispensable to the worker's success.

### 4. Believe in talent.

More than any other trait, talent is the key to performance. The worker's CliftonStrengths report, which identifies their internal drivers and areas of potential excellence, can be a tremendous asset to the manager. Still, it may take diligence, creativity, resourcefulness and a great deal of conversation to develop that talent over a distance. Assignments aligned with the employee's talents help the individual develop those talents into strengths while improving business outcomes. And while managers should always seek out the opinions of remote workers -- distance often offers valuable perspective -- asking opinions informed by talent can yield especially useful feedback.

# The Most Important Thing a Leader Can Do

The basic elements of an engaging workplace, which the Gallup Q<sup>12</sup> measures, are necessary for all employees to do their work well. And the best managers share a few basic qualities that increase engagement, productivity, profitability and a host of other bottom-line issues.

To be fair, not even the best manager of remote workers does all that every day with every worker. But effective managers have the innate talent for it.

Leaders should consider such talent the boon it is. According to Gallup's latest bestseller, *It's the Manager*, 53% of employees say greater work-life balance is very important to them when considering a job, 63% of millennials would change jobs for flextime, and if given the choice between a small raise and remote work, most workers would choose to work from home.

Currently, just 44% of employees say their workplace offers flextime. As the labor market gets tighter -- already, 51% of workers say they'd quit their job in favor of one that allowed flextime -- remote work is becoming less of a perk and more of an expectation that leaders must accommodate if they want talented workers. And there's no sense putting a talented remote worker under an inadequate manager.

True, there's *never* any sense in pairing a worker with a bad manager. The impact on business outcomes is just too severe. But managing remote workers effectively requires an approach recalibrated to fit the worker. Leaders need to keep that in mind as they select their managers.

Nothing has a greater long-term impact on a business than the people who have an immediate impact on its employees -- no matter where they work.

## **Not sure if you're losing value to ineffective management? Gallup can help:**

- Read more about our research and insights in our latest bestseller, *It's the Manager*.
- Register for the Leading High-Performance Teams course to get the tools and techniques you need to develop and engage all employees, regardless of where they work.
- Watch our Managing Your Remote Workers webinar to hear what our experts have to say about the importance of communication in engaging remote employees.

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Adam Hickman, Ph.D., is Content Manager at Gallup.

Ilana Ron Levey is Consulting Director at Gallup.

*Jennifer Robison contributed to this article.*

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CONTACT: Gallup World Headquarters, 901 F Street, Washington, D.C., 20001, U.S.A

+1 202.715.3030

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