

WORKING FROM HOME

Change is a challenge that seasoned leaders face on a day-to-day basis. Almost all leaders will tell you that experience has taught them well through lessons from the past. Leaders draw from previous successes and failures when they sense similarities in a planned or sudden change. However, the recent coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19) has upped the ante and the anxiety with a new challenge that most leaders have never experienced. That is leading a workforce that is working from home. This may, or may not be new for you, but it's certainly new for the UMMS workforce.

The following information is intended to assist you to lead your teams through the change of working from home and keeping our employees focused and productive. We offer this practical advice as a guideline to assist you.

Guidelines for Leaders

Communicate

Above all else, continue to stay in contact with your staff. You've probably already heard the saying, 'In the absence of information, we make stuff up.' The error in this normal human behavior is that the stuff we make up is rarely good.

When left on their own, employees will wonder what decisions are being made, wander around in an unproductive state, and worry about how all this uncertainty will impact their personal lives and their careers long term. Leaders play a critical role in minimizing unnecessary worry and lack of productivity.

The UMMS IT department is making every effort to ensure virtual meetings are as easy as possible for teams to stay connected. If technology is holding you back from connecting with your team, simply pick up the phone and say, "I just want to check in to see how you are doing today." Ask employees what their biggest concern is right now, and if they do not share concerns, ask what you can do to support them while working remotely.

Build in work routines and structure

To stabilize the disruption, when possible, keep regularly scheduled meetings. It is not easy to transition from working onsite to working remotely. Employees may struggle if they don't have some sense of normalcy. The first few days of working from home will be extremely

unproductive for both you and your direct reports. Be flexible knowing productivity levels will be extremely low during the adjustment.

Bring your teams together as soon as possible so they can feel connected to the bigger picture. The more frequently you connect with your teams in groups and one-on-one messages and meetings, the more effectively you reduce fears and anxiety.

Set Expectations

Talk openly to your direct reports about your expectations for working remotely. Be clear on the work hours and set a reasonable time when anyone on the team can anticipate a response to requests.

Create a schedule for meetings and check-ins. We recommend daily check-ins with each one of your direct reports through email, telephone or Zoom, and a weekly Zoom meeting with your team(s) to exchange information and provide an opportunity for members to share their experiences and build best practices.

Establish the preferred method of communication for regular correspondence and differentiate the channels for emergencies and urgent requests.

Ask employees to send you their work plans for the week. Review their plans and respond within an appropriate time frame to confirm they are on the right track and call via telephone or schedule a zoom meeting to guide them with direction so you're both aligned with their goals and deliverables. Create an agreement on how and when to send follow-up reports.

Exercise Self-Care

Leaders put a lot of pressure on themselves. Often self-identifying as high achievers, leaders want to be seen as going above and beyond the call of duty. Remember these are stressful times for you as well. It's easy to immerse ourselves in projects, to book our schedules with back to back calls, and to forget to take breaks for lunch or to step away from our computers and phones. Block time in your calendar for self-care. Go for a walk, call a friend, or listen to music that makes you happy. Celebrate small victories and remind yourself of the great work we're all doing during these challenging times.

Guidelines For All Employees

Organize Your Workspace

Employees function best when they have a place to work that is organized and clear from clutter. Dedicate a space in your home where you can focus with minimal distractions. Select an area where you know you will be able to walk away from your work at the end of the day and not have a visual work reminder during your personal time. Keep your UMMS documents secure and protected. Reach out to your supervisor if you have requests for supplies and resources to help you do your work remotely.

Continue Your Work Routine

Keep your daily routines by starting and ending your workday at regular business hours. Get dressed rather than working in your pajamas. Prepare for the day just as you would if you were working onsite. Take breaks, get outside and enjoy a brisk walk, or plan to connect virtually for lunch with colleagues and friends. At the end of the day, walk away from your workspace. Protect your personal time and relax with family and friends.

Overcome Procrastination

Work closely with your supervisor to establish a workplan. Create a daily check list of work priorities to ensure you are focused on work goals. Set short time frames to maintain focus and review your intended outcomes before you start.

Dealing With Distractions

We recognize that our employees have families. Working remotely in a quiet home or apartment is very different from working remotely while caring for children, an elderly parent, or pets. In this case, we recommend you set work hours that correspond with your energy levels and needs of your family. Be upfront with your supervisor and colleagues during virtual calls to inform them of possible interrupts such as a barking dog, or a child or loved one who may need your attention. Use the mute button when necessary to listen in during virtual team meetings.

Create a 'do not disturb' sign to let family members know when you unavailable and need focus time to work.

It can be tempting to turn on the television, or to finish a home project. This can be a slippery slope that quickly turns into a habit. Pretend you are not at home. Ask yourself if this is a good use of your time. Schedule short breaks with an allotted amount of time. Limit television time to your personal time only. Home projects are best done on the weekends.

If you have questions, or need support while working remotely, reach out to your supervisor or contact the UMMS Human Resources department.

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Additional Resources:

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/blog/2020/03/10/staying-productive-while-working-remotely-with-microsoft-teams/>

<https://youtu.be/X5uSZP5TNQE>

<https://www.pcmag.com/news/get-organized-20-tips-for-working-from-home>

<https://youtu.be/AcxeMU0I1b4>

<https://www.bamboohr.com/blog/remote-workers-best-practices/>

https://pennyzenker360.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/P10_HomePitfallschecklist-1.pdf

<https://www.self.com/story/remote-work-productivity-tips>