



# THE SUPERVISOR/HR NEWSLETTER

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## Deer Oaks 2020 Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series *Employee Engagement*

*Advanced Communication Skills that Improve Employee Motivation*  
February 3rd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

Register: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/794103984746779139>

*Successful Approaches to Difficult Employee Conversations*  
May 4th, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

Register: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/444956266369821443>

*Maintaining Effective Communication Channels*  
August 3rd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

Register: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5196350630268998915>

*Advanced Coaching Skills for Leaders*  
November 2nd, 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT

Register: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8703449675246617347>

# COVID-19: Managing Virtual and On-Site Teams

Social distancing recommendations for public health have led to an unprecedented increase in the number of employees working from home. By now, you and your team have probably weathered the early pains of that transition and found some of the benefits. For managers new to widespread virtual work, the biggest challenge is often letting go of the need to monitor employees by visually checking to see that they are physically present. With virtual work, “face time” metrics need to give way to productivity metrics as a way to gauge performance. There’s more than a silver lining to that attitude shift. Productive output is a far more meaningful measure of employee performance and value than mere physical presence. If the work is getting done and customer needs are being met, does it really matter where your employees are working?

In the next phases of the response to the pandemic, public health recommendations include a gradual and controlled reopening of the economy. Where offices, stores, and company facilities have been largely emptied, this will include a cautious return to in-person work—with only a portion of the workforce present at any one time. For many organizations, that will mean a changing mix of virtual and on-site work, with some employees continuing to work from home while others go into the workplace. It will mean new social distancing and sanitation measures. It may mean shift changes to spread out the times at which employees are present. Those changes are likely to move both forward and backward as business activity and the number of COVID-19 cases in the community rise and fall. Experts predict it will be some time before organizations are able to return to previous work practices of full workspaces, large meetings, and regular travel. Here are some suggestions for leading your team through these next phases of transition in response to the pandemic.

Continue best practices in managing employees who are working from home:

- Out of sight can’t mean out of mind. Check in regularly with employees to see how they are doing and whether they are encountering any problems in their work that need your support or intervention.
- Ask about how the technology is working to enable efficient work from home. Look for weak spots that may be hurting your team’s productivity, and work with your organization to address them.
- Adjust performance metrics to include reasonable outputs given changing needs and goals. Look for achievable and measurable output goals as opposed to subjective factors.
- Trust your employees to be working to the best of their ability unless individual employees give you reason to believe they are not. Show that trust by resisting the temptation to over-monitor. The vast majority of employees want to do good work and will respond positively to a trusting and supportive manager.

Be sure you understand individual concerns and constraints when you make decisions about when and where employees are expected to work:

- Discuss any concerns individual employees have about their own health risk or the health risk of other members of their household.
- Discuss how child care and school closures are affecting when and where employees are able to work.
- Discuss how your employees would get to and from work safely if they are asked to, especially if they normally use public transportation.

Demonstrate your care for employees who are asked to come into the workplace:

- Show that you are on top of measures to make the workplace safe. The list at the end of this guide offers an overview of what those measures might include, but the specific measures for your organization will be decided by your leadership team. Explain your organization’s infection-control measures to your employees when you ask them to come into the workplace. Take the time to answer their questions.

- Make sure your employees understand what will be expected of them to keep the workplace safe—how they are to practice social distancing, whether they will be required to wear face masks or other personal protective equipment (PPE), whether temperature checks will be required, and what sanitary and disinfection practices they will be expected to follow.

Show that you are monitoring adherence to the safe practices in the workplace, including the availability of hand sanitizer and PPE as required, and behaviors relating to social distancing and handwashing.

Make the most of meetings:

- Manage meetings to encourage discussion. If you're simply telling the team news that doesn't require discussion, send or post the information rather than taking up the team's time in a meeting.
- Consider shorter, more frequent meetings for problem-solving as the team's work changes.
- Be respectful of employees' time when deciding who to invite and who needs to be on for each part of the meeting. For a team meeting, you might have everyone join for the start of the meeting for both social connection and news and discussion relevant to all, then allow some members to drop off as you begin detailed discussion of other items.
- Be attentive to the quality of group meetings when some people are in the workplace and some are not. Veteran, virtual employees can tell you how difficult it is to attend a teleconference when some people are together in person and others are not. The virtual attendees often have trouble hearing what is said in a meeting room. Because visual cues are important in jumping into a conversation, virtual employees can feel excluded unless specifically asked for their thoughts. With social distancing and PPE requirements, it may not be desirable to have any employees gather in a conference room. It may be best to continue all-video or all-telephone meetings even when some employees are present in the workplace.
- Be attentive to the quality of video meetings. If people are showing video of themselves, ask that all do, so that people can read each other's facial expressions. Note that some meeting technologies involve a slight time lag, which can make meetings awkward as facial expressions don't correspond in time to what is being said. Time lags can also make it difficult to have a natural back-and-forth conversation. If you find that video meetings are making people anxious or frustrated because of time lags, you might switch to phone meetings or a different video-meeting platform.

*Source: Morgan, H. (2020). Best practices: Managing virtual and on-site teams. In Leading teams in a COVID-19 world: A guide for managers (pp. 16–19). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.*

# How Managers Can Help Their Employees Succeed

As a manager, motivating and helping your employees succeed ought to be among your top priorities. You need to build a succession plan with a leadership bench that is broad, wide, and deep. The people in your work group need the leadership, direction, and support that only you can provide. In this article, you'll find seven proven strategies managers can use to help employees reach their full potential and be ready for the next move up the organizational ladder.

Here are some key ways leaders can help their employees succeed.

## **1. Provide mentoring.**

You want your employee to have mentorship from the manager or other men or women in leadership inside the firm. These mentors can provide specific information and guidance to help employees do their jobs better and improve their overall performance and productivity.

## **2. Find training opportunities.**

Training is important to employee development because it helps them improve skills and gain deeper knowledge in the areas that might be lacking. When selecting a training program, consider the areas that need the most development and choose what will best help achieve the desired end result.

## **3. Create on-the-job development.**

Sit down with your employee and discuss what can be done to learn and grow. Find projects, activities, group involvement, and responsibilities that can be added to the current position to help with growth and development.

## **4. Identifying the skills that need development.**

Once the skills have been identified, you'll want to get the employee's buy-in and commitment to improve. An obvious place for this to happen is during the employee's quarterly or annual performance review. This is also an opportunity to set specific goals. Also, this sets the stage for monitoring and documenting their improvement (at their next review).

## **5. Provide honest feedback.**

A high degree of feedback will directly improve the effectiveness of an employee. The constant feedback will help make incremental changes in behavior and skill level.

## **6. Provide clear expectations and steps for success.**

An employee needs to know the expectations of their manager and what is important for them to be working on to improve their overall skill level and abilities.

## **7. Celebrate their successes.**

This will not only encourage further development, it will help to inspire others in the work group to develop their skills.

About the Author

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Joel Garfinkle is recognized as one of the top 50 coaches in the U.S., and the author of seven books, including *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*. He has worked with many of the world's leading companies, including Google, Deloitte, Amazon, Ritz-Carlton, Gap, Cisco, Oracle, and many more. Visit Joel online at Garfinkle Executive Coaching. Subscribe to his Fulfillment@Work Newsletter and receive the free e-book, *40 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!*

*Garfinkle, J. (n.d.). Get credit for your work. Retrieved January 11, 2019, from <https://www.garfinkleexecutivecoaching.com/>*

# Ask Your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.

*Q. Many supervisors with whom I have spoken have yet to make a referral of an employee to the EAP. I believe many see the EAP only as a source of help for troubled workers. What are they not fully understanding about the EAP and what it can do?*

A. EAPs are often viewed mistakenly as programs that only address personal problems. Principles that govern the establishment of EAPs allow for much more. In fact, “confidential and timely problem identification/assessment services” for employees is the third such element in what is referred to as EAP “core technology” principles. Preceding it is “consultation with, training of, and assistance to work organization leadership (managers, supervisors, and union officials) seeking to manage troubled employees, enhance the work environment, and improve employee job performance.” That’s a lot to consider! And this is item #1 in defining EAPs. Supervisors should consider how EAPs can help them be better managers, help workers improve performance, and help resolve “people problems.” Studies often show that poor workplace communication is every organization’s key productivity roadblock. EAPs can train on this topic, and consultation with EAPs is always confidential. Other issues may include stress management education, a multitude of wellness topics, increasing emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, tips for motivating workers, and dozens of other productivity improvement topics that can help supervisors.

*Q. The political environment this election season is very contentious. My employees talk constantly about it, and it gets a bit testy. I don’t mind political discussions; uncivil behavior, I can’t tolerate. Do you have tips for how I can help discussions remain civil?*

A. Let your employees know how much you value workplace harmony and positive relationships between workers and that you will act to maintain these aspects of the workplace for everyone’s benefit. The most important resource is your own modeling. If you actively avoid political conversations, it will be recognized and modeled by others. Most employees naturally conform to behaviors that they perceive the management values. Intervene as appropriate, like you would with any offensive and disruptive behavior. Many supervisors believe free speech rights prevent them from prohibiting disruptive political discussions at work. This is generally not correct for private employers, but do always consult with an HR advisor to clarify what actions or recommendations, if any, they want you to follow.

*Q. What are some of the problems I can expect with my employees who have become teleworkers or remote workers?*

A. Some research shows that the most common complaint of remote workers is isolation. The inability to engage coworkers in a way that allows an accurate perception of the collective mindset of the workgroup is a stressor. Group video technology may be a solution to this problem by helping workers feel more cohesive and mutually understood. The need to experience “what everyone is thinking and feeling” is valuable for worker mental health and productivity. “Presenteeism” (working while sick) or feeling compelled to put in too many hours is an additional problem. Most remote employees understand the “net positive” aspects of their position, and working longer hours (not necessarily a good thing in the long run) is perceived as a way to avoid others’ doubts about their role or contribution. The EAP should be a top-of-mind resource for remote workers and promoted frequently to them so they can easily consider it when needed. And supervisors should consider productivity issues as reasons to suggest use of the EAP just as they would in a non-remote work setting.

Source: [www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com](http://www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com) [search “teleworking stress”]

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