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**Subject:** COVID-19: Five Things You Can Do to Help Manage Newly Remote Employees  
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## **Five Things You Can Do to Help Manage Newly Remote Employees**

### **1. Apprise yourself of best practices for remote management**

The COVID-19 emergency has brought about a rapid transition to remote work, and this is new territory for many of us to navigate during a very challenging time. But some good news is that remote work in general has become much more commonplace over the past few years, and many who have already gained experience working and managing remotely are sharing the lessons they learned so that we can get up to speed quickly. Two great articles worth reading to get a better sense of remote work best practices are: [A Guide to Managing Your \(Newly\) Remote Workers](#) from Harvard Business Review and [COVID-19 Has My Teams Working Remotely: A Guide for Leaders](#) from Gallup.

### **2. Check in with each of your team members**

We know our employees are grappling with enormous change in a short time period. This is a very stressful situation for all of us. Our employees may be experiencing a wide range of reactions, including fears or worries about the COVID-19 emergency and what it means for them and their families, as well as about their ability to transition to working remotely or knowing what is expected of them. We strongly encourage supervisors to reach out to their employees individually, via a phone call or a videochat, to see how they are doing and find out what kinds of questions they have. If you do not have an answer to a question, just let them know you will find out, and contact [libraryhr@library.illinois.edu](mailto:libraryhr@library.illinois.edu). The HR team is collectively monitoring this email address, and responding as quickly as possible. However, it is vitally important to reassure employees that we're all transitioning together to this new way of working and they are not in this alone.

If you find that an employee is having a very difficult time coping with the overall stress of the COVID-19 situation, please let them know there is professional support available. A good starting point is the University's [Faculty/Staff Assistance Program](#), which offers phone and virtual appointments to employees and their families at no charge.

### **3. Identify things your employees can do**

A question coming up a lot, especially with such an abrupt transition to remote work, is what can employees work on while they are remote?

First, please encourage your employees to take a little time to get settled in. Many are juggling trying to create their home workspace while also reacting to a quickly changing landscape in terms of

daycares and school closures, and other significant disruptions to their daily routines. In addition, other members of their household may likewise be setting up their home workspaces, which can create some logistical challenges in smaller homes. If your employee is trying to maintain normal productivity amongst all of these changes, they will likely become even more stressed. We as supervisors and managers can encourage our employees to take a little time to set up their workspace in a quiet area in their home conducive to focusing, and create some structure for themselves.

Secondly, if you do not have urgent work that takes priority (such as, for example, staffing the Ask a Library virtual chat), and your team members need something to do, then encourage them to take online training for the time being. A detailed list of training and other remote work options has been provided to unit heads, so please check with them for recommendations pertinent to your unit. But some immediate options are:

1. The [Title IX Preventing Harassment and Discrimination Training](#) that all University employees need to complete by April 3rd.
2. Zoom or Skype For Business, to brush up on how to use videoconferencing software, if they have not used these tools frequently before. Library IT has developed a useful [web page about working remotely including links to both Zoom and Skype For Business tutorials and knowledge articles](#).
3. Ex Libris Alma & Primo-related training (especially if your employee currently uses Voyager, but all Library employees would benefit from gaining more familiarity with this software). If your employee(s) is new to Alma, they should start with [Alma Essentials](#). The [Ex Libris Knowledge Center](#) has a plethora of videos about more in-depth topics for those who are already beyond the Essentials.

#### **4. Develop communication practices compatible with remote work**

Many best practices for remote work strongly encourage increased or deliberate communication practices to help compensate for the lack of face-to-face interactions and hallway conversations that naturally take place in an office setting (see the articles in the first point as examples).

Some common approaches to communication with a remote workforce are:

- regular one-on-one virtual meetings with each team member
- daily email with brief bullets about work accomplished and any questions
- virtual team meeting, with an opportunity for social time padded in, or a separate social meeting (i.e., virtual coffee chat)
- online collaboration spaces, such as Microsoft Teams; here's a link to an introductory video, developed by an IT Pro in the Gies College of Business:  
[https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1\\_4hdal8wi](https://mediaspace.illinois.edu/media/t/1_4hdal8wi)

This may seem like a lot. But again, these strategies evolved out of remote teams learning how to work effectively together online and realizing that being intentional about communication can go a

long way in helping create new routines, promote information sharing, and prevent feelings of self-isolation. And it's OK to adopt them one at a time so you and your team can adjust over a period of time. Ultimately, please feel free to use what you think works best for your team and employees. Like any new habit, these practices will become second nature over time, especially if they are done consistently.

## 5. Create clear work expectations

This recommendation may be a little more challenging to implement, especially with so much change happening at once. However, it's very important to try to do this as soon as practical, for a number of reasons:

1. To help make sure you and your employee are on the same page about work routines, to prevent misunderstandings and conflict
2. And especially, to help alleviate anxiety on the part of employees, who are learning how to work differently than how they were used to. Part of this remote transition means they may be using new tools or workflows for the first time, and can feel like they are 'new' to their jobs. Being proactive about workplace expectations can help allay these concerns.

In terms of setting clear expectations, please use what works best for your supervision or management style. However, if you are looking for ideas on how to get started, you might first start with workplace expectations in general and make sure you talk to each employee about:

- **When and how you expect your employees to be available when working remotely.** For example, having a clear idea when they start and end work, and when they are working, if you would like them to be available via Skype for Business instant messaging, etc. unless they are in meetings.
- **How you would like to be notified of vacation requests or sick leave (if there are any changes)**
- **How you would like to be kept informed of their progress on assignments**
- **How you prefer your employees to reach out to you with questions,** especially if you had previously has an "open door" policy for your office
- **Any expectations you have regarding participation in team meetings,** such as if you would like your employees to use video when possible

Please be mindful that this is a period of adjustment for everyone. To allow some flexibility should you later determine your expectations need adjusting, you could let your team know upfront that these are an initial set of expectations to try out together for the first 2 weeks of remote work, and based on how it goes and any feedback you receive, you may modify them.

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