

# Distance Coaching Guidelines

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Managers and senior staff are managing people that work from remote locations on an ever-increasing level. A survey conducted by the International Telework Association and Council, estimated that out of 135.4 million American workers, 45.1 million worked from home, client sites or some form of satellite office. As employees work from remote locations, clear, regular and defined coaching is imperative to support high performance and effectiveness.

The impact of distance on both the coach and the remote worker is significant. The coach cannot observe the employee's performance nor can he observe the potentially more informative exchange of body language and tone of voice found in face-to-face interaction. The remote worker on the other hand may feel isolated and ignored with their development needs often being forgotten. They may also avoid telling the coach of performance problems or difficult situations that cause barriers to their success.

Here are some guidelines for managers and remote workers for distance coaching using electronic media:

- Use a variety of modes of communication (one-on-one telephone calls, teleconferencing, video conferencing, collaboration software, instant messaging, online chat sessions, e-mail, fax and face-to-face).
- Engage in collaborative goal setting and agenda creation by faxing or e-mailing a draft agenda prior to a coaching call.
- Establish your role as facilitator/coach not expert by effectively directing the remote worker electronically to solutions and problem solving resources (other experts, knowledge basis, materials, etc.).
- Encourage follow-through after all communication.
- Establish mutual respect and build a trusting relationship by using modes that include voice early in the coaching process.
- Share personal information (hobbies, activities) that the relationship can build on (include logo of favorite sports team, prize winning orchid, etc., in your e-mail).
- Send a digital photo if you have not previously met each other.
- Allow the mentee an opportunity to modify the electronic agenda.
- Be aware of tone and clarity in written communication.
- Determine the best use of technology when balancing the need to address a difficult situation versus the need to maintain a good working relationship.
- Plan your communication and use of technology ahead of time, to ensure messages are clear, effective and succinct.
- Use technology to ask questions that develops the remote worker's self-sufficiency (build their own skills/solve their own problems).
- Establish ways of working together by planning collaboratively how you are going to stay connected (e.g.; phone call at the beginning or end of week; weekly e-mail status report or action plan etc.).
- Use open, thought provoking questions when supporting versus dictating direction and solutions, in all e-mails and voice messages.
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- Establish ways of working together by planning collaboratively how you are going to stay connected (e.g., phone call at the beginning or end of week; weekly e-mail status report/action plan).
- Determine how each of you will be accessible.
- Be clear about how to contact each other.
- Don't invade your mentee's time; exchanges need to be mutually planned.
- Don't avoid phone calls because you may feel they take more effort than e-mail (phone conversations often deepen the trust level).
- Follow up an e-mail containing detailed information with a clarifying phone call.
- Don't leave overly long messages (voice mail or e-mail).
- Summarize and reinforce important points in writing by fax or e-mail after a phone call.
- Encourage follow-through after all communication.
- Schedule regular phone calls.
- Create a sense of continuity and affiliation by setting up the time for the next call at the end of each coaching session.
- Schedule occasional face-to-face meetings to reinforce the relationship and enhance communication.
- Always respond promptly to mentee's voice or e-mails to minimize the sense of isolation and disconnection.
- Help the mentee organize his/her off-site surroundings to support the work process.
- Be aware of tone, volume and inflection during coaching phone calls.
- Place emphasis on active listening when using voice technology.
- Continue to get reaction from the remote worker by asking effective questions (i.e., How do you feel about this? What do you think?).
- Edit all written communication to ensure the intent of the message is in line with the affect it will have on the remote worker.
- Call, or meet in person when possible, to clarify the intended written message.
- Do not always use e-mails to give constructive feedback.
- Use a combination of voice, written and face-to-face coaching to clearly explain how and why a mentee's inappropriate or ineffective behavior must change.
- Use a combination of voice, written and face-to-face coaching to explain the implication and importance if the mentee's inappropriate or ineffective behavior does not change.
- Use the most appropriate technology that allows feedback to be timely, specific, focused on behavior and its consequences, and is motivated by a sincere desire to help the mentee.
- Keep track of action items when using all modes of communication.
- Follow up, review and track progress on assignments in real time utilizing shared web-based data bases.
- Facilitate coaching sessions with routine pauses when using teleconferencing or collaboration software.
- Ask for feedback on the topic synchronously or asynchronously.
- Ask the remote worker throughout the conference call, teleconference or online chat session if you are on track with the agenda.
- Ensure all mentees are engaged and involved if this is a group/team coaching session.
- Keep remote mentees aligned with the business goals and values.
- Act as a key liaison by sharing information about the organization and the team.
- Ensure remote workers receive up-to-date information about changes in organizational policy and structure.
- Keep them in the loop and registered on appropriate listservs and e-mails.
- Encourage remote workers to maintain regular contact with other team members.
- Include the remote workers in staff meetings using collaboration software.