

# Best Practices For Managing Remote Employees

# Presenters

**Peggy Burgess** has been with Magellan nearly 33 years, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Certified Employee Assistance Professional. She has worked in disaster relief, served military families and veterans with the American Red Cross and has provided in-patient psychiatric case management. Peggy has had many roles in her long career at Magellan including intake, EAP affiliate management, Quality Improvement and Workplace Support Services.

**Clark Burton** has been with Magellan for 25 years. He is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Certified Employee Assistance Professional and Substance Abuse Professional. He has worked as a counselor in community mental health, as a school social worker in special education, and as a social work supervisor in an inpatient psychiatric setting. Clark has spent most of his years at Magellan on Workplace Support Services.

# Objectives

Review the “Fast Forward” experience of the remote workforce pre-pandemic and where we have landed now

Benefits and Challenges of working remotely

Best practices for managers

Supporting and managing when there is, or may be, a problem

Helpful guidelines and tips

# The initial shock

The World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020.

In a matter of days, companies across the globe were shutting their offices and many had little or no time to prepare their employees for getting work done entirely outside of office walls.



# Working remotely

## Statistics pre-pandemic and now

The coronavirus pandemic dramatically accelerated remote work.

Pre-pandemic, most Americans did not work remotely

38% of those who moved to remote working state it's easier to balance work with family responsibilities.

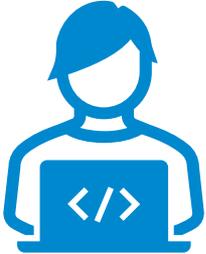
54% of employees say they would want to work from home after the pandemic ends.

Half of parents with kids under age 18 who work at home, all or most of the time report difficulty getting work done without interruptions.

65% of current full-time remote workers were not remote workers before.

81% of remote employees say they use video calling or services like Zoom or WebEx.

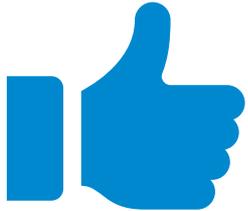
# Remote working benefits



Research from Stanford found a 13% improvement in performance for teams who were working from home.

People are actually working their full shifts (no traffic delays, leaving early to let a repair person in).

People concentrate better without distractions.



Resignations dropped 50% when employees were allowed to work from home.

January 2021 survey shows remote work has been a success for employees and employers.

83% of employers say the shift to remote work has been successful for their company compared to 73% in a June 2020 survey.



Compared with the June survey more employees say they are more productive now than they were pre-pandemic (34% vs 28%). More executives agree: 52% say average employee productivity has improved vs 44% from the prior survey.

# What are we learning from the remote workforce?



PRODUCTIVITY WENT UP

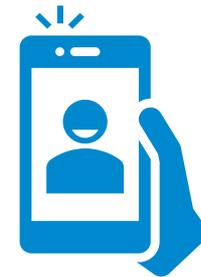


COST WENT DOWN

# Acclimating to rapid change and how benefits changed

To help employees cope with the changes and uncertainties of the pandemic, some companies enhanced their benefits, offering things like free counseling, stipends for childcare, office set-ups, and increased days off.

Employers have sought and included behavioral health support that can be delivered remotely such as telehealth or counseling support by phone and even text.



# What Does Remote Working Look Like Now?

When it comes to the workforce post-pandemic, remote work may no longer be considered a special perk.

"It's no longer: 'Do you offer remote work?' but, do you offer it with enough organizational support so I can be as successful as the people who work in the office?"

It is expected about 60% of companies will offer a hybrid work model, while 30% of companies will be back in the office and 10% will be fully remote.

# Challenges

The transition to a remote work environment has been difficult in these unprecedented times and has forced both businesses and employees to adapt to a new normal.

## Common HR Complaints During the Pandemic

In a survey of 1000 employees and HR professionals, 48 % of employees have reported a work issue to their HR since the onset of the pandemic. 55% of the HR professionals reported issues being reported had increased since the pandemic began. 44.6 % report fewer complaints or the same as before the pandemic.

<https://www.paychex.com/articles/human-resources/covid-19-hr-issues>



# Most common challenges

## Employee Disputes

52 % of HR complaints were associated with employee disputes (most often being denied time off work).

## Employee Benefits

Scheduling flexibility adjusting to having children at home, Counseling support such as EAP, flexibility with the use of PTO, and other leave time.

## Workplace Safety Issues

more difficult to assess workstation needs to mitigate risk and injury, including ergonomic issues, work-related stress, fire hazards

## Work from home equipment issues

Companies navigating shipping equipment, strain on IT helpdesk staff assisting employees getting set up, employees with less technological skills having to rapidly adjust

# Negative aspects of telecommuting

- **A lack of employer supervision**
  - A potential loss of productivity due to distractions
  - Security of company information
  - Lack of "face time" with others
  - Difficulty holding meetings
  - Safety and legal issues
- **Spending most of the day attending to personal matters and don't get much work done.**
- **Employees who don't know when to "turn it off" and end up working overtime frequently.**

# Management challenges

## Micromanaging

Research shows there may be an urge to get more involved.

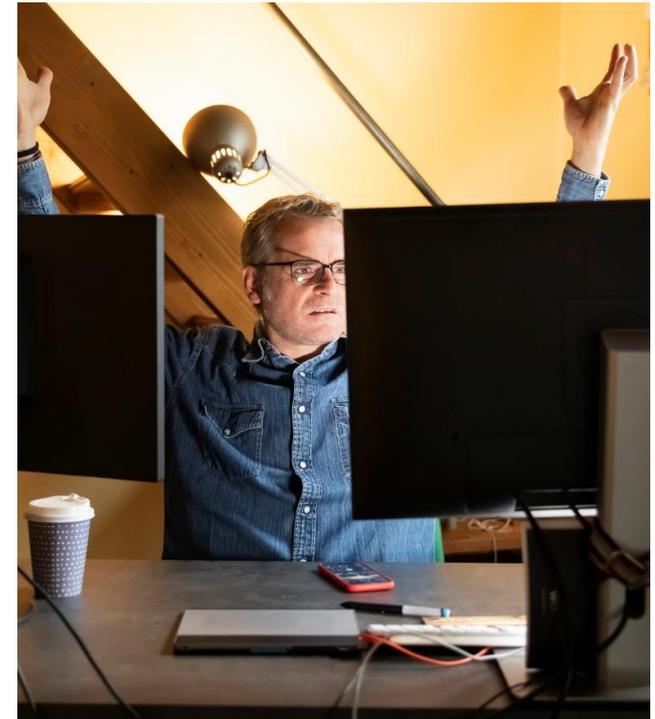
69 % of employees have considered leaving a job due to micromanaging.

Employers must improve communications with employees and consider flexible work arrangements.

Talent retention

Supervision strategies

Not all employees are suitable for remote working.



# Planning ahead for the new normal

Remote workers pose unique challenges. For example, how does the company make sure remote workers are on task, on schedule, and performing up to par? These types of issues almost always come down to communication.

Training managers on how to equally incorporate remote and in-person workers in meetings and decision making as well as how they communicate is a critical step for a hybrid.

As things begin to move to a new normal and services as daycare reopen regularly, employers may tighten up their remote working requirements.

# Best practices for managers

# Good communication is the key

Establish a clear plan for communicating with each member of the team

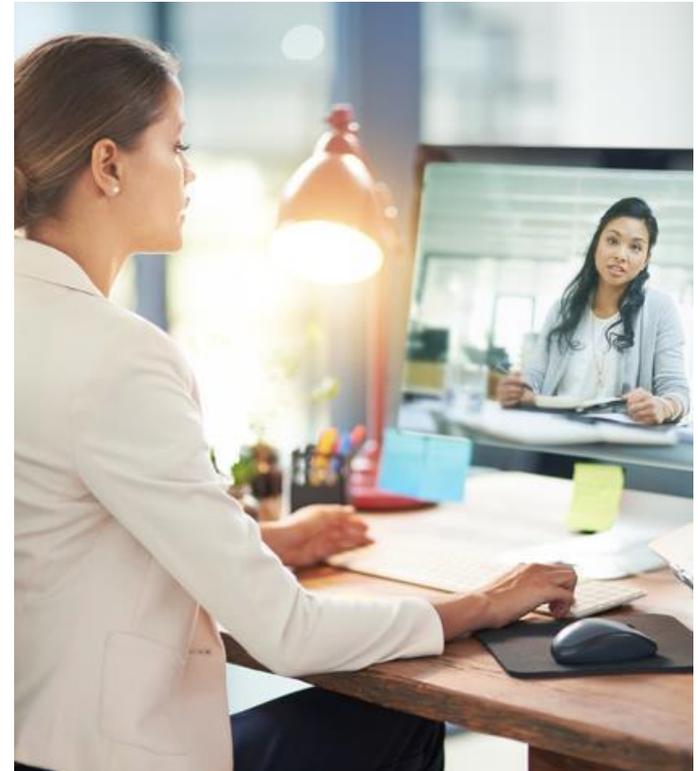
Determine the best mode of communication. (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.)

Make sure everyone knows how to use the selected platform.

Set a schedule for regular communication that works for everyone.

Have regular one-on-ones.

Be available and responsive throughout the day.



# Establish a plan and goals for each task identified

Clearly communicate priorities and expectations to hold employees accountable.

Set appropriate deadlines.

Maintain communication regarding the status of projects.

Ask employees for feedback on areas where they need support.

Set periodic deadlines for extended projects to help keep everyone on pace.

Set check-in milestones regularly, but don't micro-manage.

# Focus on goals and results rather than on hours worked

Most leaders struggle with doubting that their team is efficient and productive enough.

Key question: Does it really matter what hours your remote team is working if they are getting the job done?

Switching to a more results-oriented culture can help you ease your own anxieties.

Focusing on goals and results shows your team members that you trust them to do their work.

# Build trust by communicating with transparency

Be honest about expectations for team productivity.

Share your intentions of being available to support their work.

Be sure that employees know what your goals are.

Touch base on whether your expectations are realistic.

Be aware that some employees may unintentionally work longer hours when not confined to a typical work schedule.

# Stay a team

Encourage employees to share their concerns with you and be forthcoming about your own concerns.

Stay positive that all concerns can be addressed.

Consider how your team can still enjoy each other's company. What fun can you build into your virtual meetings or communications? Get creative. Ask team members for suggestions.



# Virtual team building

Allow remote employees to share details about their cultures and geographic regions. This helps reduce cultural-related misunderstanding, and it strengthens bonds among team members.

Establishing and nurturing relationships among team members helps retain employees and increases productivity and job satisfaction.

Reach out to employees that you're having a harder time relating to. They'll appreciate the effort, and you'll be investing in their satisfaction in working with you.

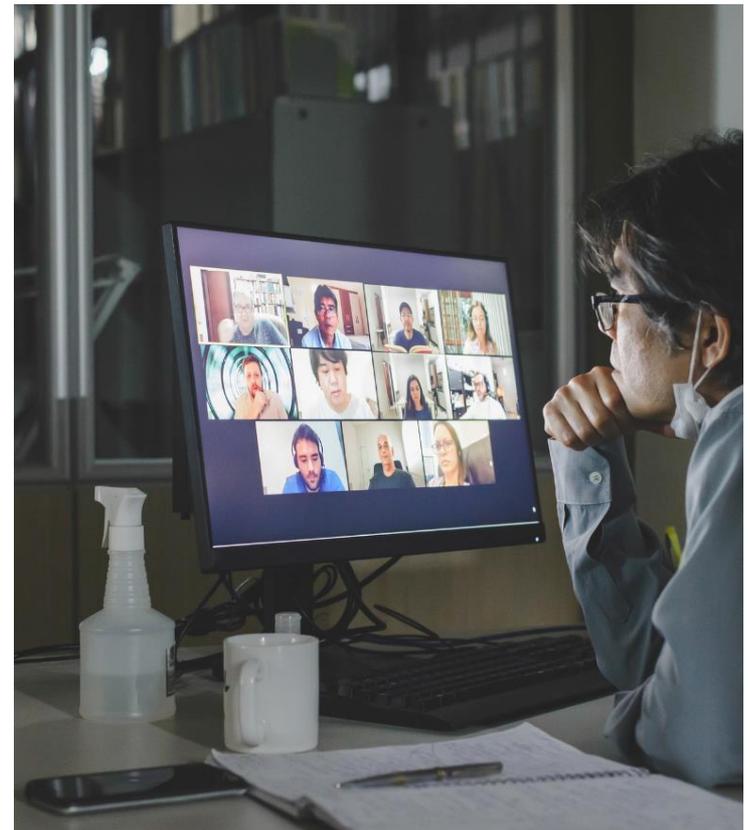
# Virtual team building continued

Consider having a few in-person obligations for your remote workers if feasible.

This can strengthen connections to the company.

It increases the likelihood that remote workers stay engaged and communicative.

If you do require an in-person obligation, be clear about expectations and logistics such as who will cover the cost of transportation.



# Team building

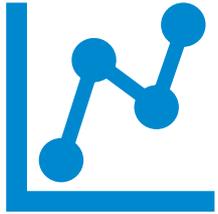
Build relationships between employees by encouraging them to team up for wellness challenges and events

Counter feelings of isolation by creating team activities like tracking steps per day or minutes of mindfulness PER DAY.

Employees can take virtual walks together, share a meditation break, or check-in at regular intervals regarding wellness successes and challenges.

Supporting and managing where there is or may  
be a problem

# Tracking time



If you are truly worried about hours worked, consider implementing a time tracking tool (Hubstaff, Time Doctor, etc.)

It could help you ensure that employees are making effective use of their hours.



It could empower employees to understand where their time is going.

It could help employees eliminate distractions or boost productivity.



# Suspected abuse

## **Take necessary steps if you do have suspicions that an employee is abusing remote work**

Reiterate or clarify your productivity expectations.

Request that the employee sends work in progress at set milestones.

If improvement is not seen, discuss your concerns with the employee.

If necessary, reach out to Employee and Labor Relations.

# Productivity

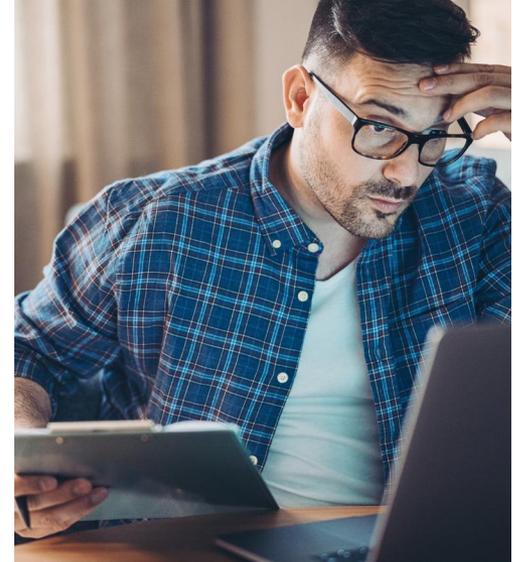
Watch not only for those working too little but also for those working too much.

Working remotely can lead to blurred boundaries between work and personal time.

Working too much can lead to burnout, loneliness, and depression.

Watch out for people working much longer hours than they should.

Offer support and structure, i.e., clarify and reinforce boundaries between work and personal time.



# Conflict resolution

## How to resolve conflicts in a remote team

Seek out signs of conflict (changes in tonality or expression in instant messages and emails, team members going out of their way to avoid mentioning or engaging others in group threads).

Once conflict is identified, get proactive and solve the problem before it escalates.

Set up a meeting to deal with remote team conflict.

Set an agenda: State objectives and relevant background information.

# Conflict resolution continued

## **How to resolve conflicts in a remote team**

State the problem: Give the facts without passing judgment.

Allow each person to share his or her perspective: This is a time for each to be heard, not a time to agree or disagree.

Create an action plan: Take more time if you need it to come up with a solution and be clear about the next steps.

Gain buy-in: Whatever the solution, everyone needs to get on board.

Check progress: Have a follow-up meeting to see how things are going.

# Substance use issues

This woman is enjoying a “quarantini” – that’s a regular martini that is consumed alone in the privacy of one’s own home.

With the added flexibility and privacy of remote work, it is not uncommon for some employees to over-imbibe.



# Signs of substance use issues

Studies have shown misuse of alcohol and drugs has significantly increased during the pandemic.

Many employees are using alcohol and drugs to “self-medicate” for isolation and depression.

It’s easier to hide substance use issues while working at home, but the primary signs will eventually surface:

- Increased absenteeism

- Decreased productivity

- Slurred, inappropriate or incoherent speech

- Increased emotional outbursts



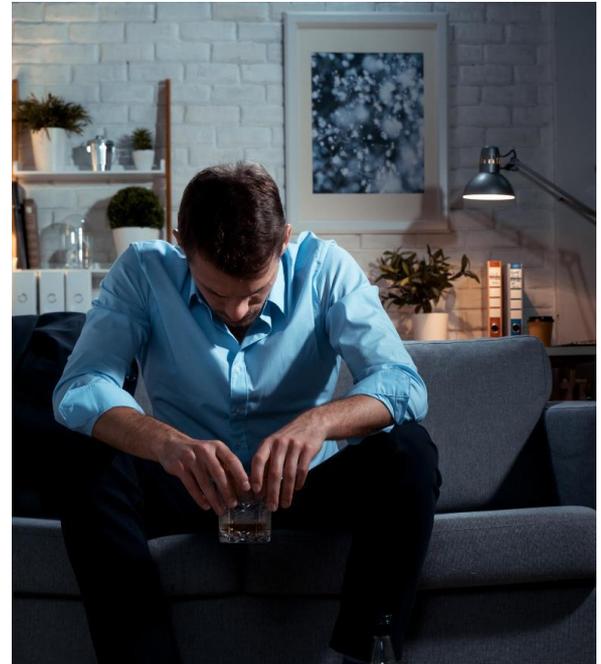
# What to do when you suspect substance use issues

Call your Employee Assistance Program and ask for a Workplace Support consultation.

Master's level EAP consultants are available 24/7 for management consultations on all kinds of employee problems.

EAP consultants can provide coaching on how to do constructive confrontation with employees.

You may want to refer your employee to the EAP for professional help.



# Referral options

## Informal Referral

- Management makes suggestion

- Employee's participation is voluntary

- No feedback given to company

## Formal Referral\*

- Management formalizes the process

- Employee's participation is voluntary

- Company receives feedback with proper release the employee called and attended one appointment

## Mandatory Referral\*

- Management calls in referral to the EAP

- Employee's participation is required to avoid company-determined consequences.

- Company receives feedback on compliance with all recommendations throughout entire referral until clinically indicated for closure

**\*Note: Formal and Mandatory referrals are available with some company benefits**

# Your Employee Assistance Program

**Call toll-free or visit us on the web**

**24 hours a day/7 days a week**

**Thank you!**

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## References/resources

**[Click here for COVID-19 Pandemic: Supervisors' Guide to Managing Remote Workers](#)**

**[Click here for 5 Challenges of Managing Remote Employees \(and How to Overcome Them\)](#)**

**[Click here for Views Strategies to encourage remote employees to use wellness benefits](#)**

**[Click here for 5 Common Virtual Team Challenges \(and How to Overcome Them\)](#)**

**[Click here for Top 5 Problems When Managing Remote Workers](#)**