



Supervising

Engaged

Employees

Remotely

Best Practices for Supervising Remotely

LEAP 2020 Solution Team Business Plan

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Mission Statement

College of the Canyons is dedicated to being a leading two-year college, recognized locally, regionally, statewide and nationally for technical advancement, institutional effectiveness, student support, model academic and professional programs, excellence in teaching and learning, fostering a broad range of community partnerships, maximizing student access, and for the sense of community that we provide to our students and staff. In the Spring of 2020, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, our community of over 2,000 employees transitioned to a remote modality in approximately one week. We continued to serve our students and faculty, supporting successful completion for thousands of students, while many other institutions canceled numerous courses and programs.

As a leading institution in Higher Education, and as a result of our experiences during Covid-19, we at COC seek to develop a set of guidelines, protocols, and ultimately a handbook which promotes success through remote engagement and encourages empathy/support to enhance productivity of employees. The Supervising Engaged Employees Remotely (SEER) resource will be significant in providing supervisors with the guidance and tools to establish and maintain a healthy work culture in a remote environment.

Inspiration

During times of crisis and emergency, swift and effective responses are necessary in order to navigate any evolving disruption such as the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. With new health and safety guidelines, the transition of employees to a

remote working environment is critical while keeping them engaged professionally and personally is paramount to maintaining stable operations during challenging times. Providing supervisors with resources to utilize in a remote working environment is beneficial in ensuring uninterrupted operations and successful relationships with staff.

We developed a set of research questions and interviewed employees across various departments within the College to learn more about their experiences during the transition to a remote working environment. Our participants included part-time staff, full-time staff, and both educational and classified administrators. This cross-section of our institutional landscape was specifically selected in order to ensure that we included representative voices from as many constituents across campus as possible. We were eager to learn more about how each employee described the challenges they faced, resources provided (or needed), how work assignments could be best documented, ways in which supervisors kept employees engaged, and examples of what worked well (and perhaps even better) while working remotely.

While we continue to be inspired by the truly outstanding work that College of the Canyons employees continue to do – consistently demonstrating extraordinary flexibility, innovative practice, and commitment to students – we acknowledge that this unprecedented circumstance calls for institutional self-reflection and analysis of how we can better support our colleagues in this new environment.

Market Analysis/Data

Market Analysis

College of the Canyons is known for being “innovative and creative” by promoting forward thinking and creativity. This concept is also applied to COC prioritizing the health and safety of its students and employees in times of emergency and crisis. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), many employees are working remotely and an analysis of how employees are affected is beneficial to understanding the steps supervisors can take to keep their staff engaged.

According to Flex Jobs & Global Workplace Analytics, trends in remote work growth show that there has been an increase in remote work of 159% over the last 12 years and this is prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. 42% of employees with a remote work option plan to work remotely more often in the next five years. If available, 99% of people would choose to work remotely, at least part of the time. Due to COVID-19, causing an exponential increase in growth of remote workers, it is important to retrain supervisors and provide resources/tools on how to improve leadership skills through the art of empathy.

Trends in Remote Work Growth



44% = Growth in **remote work**
over the last 5 yrs



91% = Growth in **remote work**
over the last 10 yrs



159% = Growth in **remote work**
over the last 12 yrs



Flex Jobs & Global Workplace Analytics Report

<https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/remote-work-statistics/#:~:text=A%20special%20analysis%20done%20by,10%20years%20it%20grew%2091%25.>

Generational Differences

A supervisor will encounter generational differences when it comes to learning to work remotely. For this reason, it is important to understand how each generation succeeds in a workplace.

Remote work isn't ideal for everyone, so communication is key. There is no playbook. Be open, communicative and creative. Individuals view and experience the work from different perspectives based on life events; therefore, supervisors need to understand what each generation is looking for.

Traditionalists - Year Born 1934-1945

They believe they should be rewarded for their tenure and in working within the established systems. They pride themselves on being stable, thorough and detail-oriented, but not change driven and they are uncomfortable with conflict and disagreements, owing to their reliance on tenure and hierarchy.

Supervisors must be able to show them loyalty and a commitment to utilizing established protocols to address issues.

Baby Boomers - Year Born 1946-1964

They are workaholics and as a result they have difficulty balancing their lives. They are competitively obsessed and constantly in a comparison mode. Due to their upbringing, they are not budget-minded and for them long hours are a hallmark of their commitment to their roles and responsibilities. They just want everybody to "get along," while being sensitive to feedback.

When engaging with Boomers we need to understand that Boomers are not technology averse, but they do see problems with it. They prefer to be in an environment that helps them reach a balanced life and they look for self-

improvement as a means to advancement. They are individualistic, so identifying customized approaches that address their issues is important to them and they are motivated by appearing successful -- meaning they seek the trappings and material possessions associated with success.

Generation X - Year Born 1965-1977

They want control of self, their time and future. They are loyal to people they meet in the course of their careers and not necessarily to any specific employer. They also like technology and want an informal work environment.

Connecting with Gen X'ers requires that we create authentic and sincere dialogue with them, as they pride themselves on spotting phoniness. Additionally, given their fondness for technology, we must ensure there are products and service offerings in our workplace that provide up to date options for them to utilize.

Further, given the fact that they are not impressed by authority, we need to ensure an environment exists where they can connect with their peers on a regular basis.

Millennials - Year Born 1978-1997

This group wants "flexibility." This generation also craves praise.

The best way to communicate and engage with Millennials is to provide them with customizable solutions and include technology in the workplace as an essential tool. They also have a need to be recognized as equals because they are not bound by prior conceptions of past generations, meaning we need to show them how their views fit into the bigger picture

Generation Z - Year Born 1998-Present

They are especially independent and have a desire for financial success, which means they are highly motivated and willing to work hard to achieve their goals.

As they like a fast-paced environment, keep things moving. They enjoy seeing things being addressed in a speedy, expeditious manner. They are more easily communicated with and engaged when they are provided with visuals over text, so

your internal communications should evolve to meet these needs. Like their millennial predecessors, they also want workplace flexibility.

<https://blog.neogov.com/how-to-make-a-multi-generational-workforce-an-opportunity-for-success>

Feedback from College of the Canyons Employees

We asked for feedback from various COC employees, including classified staff and managers, regarding their experiences with working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their responses helped guide our research and focus our attention on the issues that were most important to our colleagues. Below are the five questions that were asked and the themes that were identified in the responses.

1. What are some challenges you faced in the transition to working remotely?
 - a. Technology/Software Issues
 - b. Communication/Interaction with Colleagues
 - c. Workspace/Ergonomic Issues
 - d. Loss of Efficiency/Need for New Procedures
 - e. Work-Life Balance
2. What resources were available to you or that you felt you needed?
 - a. Laptops and other Hardware Provided
 - b. Training for Zoom and other New Procedures
 - c. Access to Software and VPN
 - d. Access to Computer Support
3. How do you think your assignments should be documented and reported?
 - a. Work is Documented as Usual/It is Already Well Documented
 - b. Weekly summary via Email or Online Submission
 - c. Outlook Calendar
 - d. Shared Google Doc (or similar) with Department

4. How is your supervisor helping to keep you engaged? Give examples.
 - a. Frequent (Weekly or Biweekly) Zoom Meetings
 - b. Individual Communication with Staff (phone calls, texts, or emails)
 - c. Trusting Staff to Work Independently
 - d. Encouraging Participation in Professional Development
 - e. Finding a Balance Between Open Communication and “Information Overload”
5. What worked well for you that you would like to continue?
 - a. Flexibility to Work from Home When Needed
 - b. Continuing Electronic Submission of Certain Documents
 - c. Continuing to Provide Expanded Online Services for Students
 - d. Ability to Attend Meetings via Zoom

These responses revealed not only the challenges that come with remote work, but also positive developments that have been made. Many survey respondents mentioned difficulties with maintaining communication between supervisors and team members as one of their main challenges. As we worked to overcome this obstacle, some employees found that their departments were overcompensating for the lack of face-to-face interaction and sharing too much information across too many different platforms which lead to a feeling of “information overload”. As time went on, we learned to find a balance between maintaining open communication and allowing time for independent work. A weekly or bi-weekly department Zoom meeting was a popular choice for many respondents, combined with email and phone communication as needed throughout the week.

When asked how work assignments should be documented and reported, many supervisors and staff members felt that there was no need to change their protocol

because work was already well documented through email and evidenced by the uninterrupted service provided to students. In other situations, utilizing a shared spreadsheet in Google Docs or a similar program allowed team members to update each other on what tasks had been accomplished throughout the week and the status of ongoing assignments. Another option that has worked for some departments is submitting a weekly summary to the supervisor either via email or through an online submission. Regardless of the preferred method of documentation, supervisors and staff agreed that trust and confidence in employees' ability to work independently have been essential for success in a work from home environment.

Impact/Implementation

Under circumstances that will require the campus community to work mainly in a remote environment, it is important that COC provides training and resources on best practices for supervisors to manage their remote teams. The areas to cover should include but are not limited to: leading with empathy, who to contact on campus should their staff need mental health assistance, workstation items, a handbook or written guide on how their staff can report assignments (weekly report, share outlook calendar), how to keep staff involved, and hold one on one meetings.

Tips for Supervising Remotely

Communication is important between a supervisor and support staff when transitioning to a remote workforce. A supervisor must keep in mind that a home

workspace may not be designed to be an office and there is a different mindset when working from home.

The tone is set at the top so there needs to be buy in from leadership. Support will help staff feel secure. A leadership team should be created to assist with challenges. Supervisors should document challenges in real time, be receptive and should assign people to find solutions. Supervisors should be evaluated on these skills. A common supervising pitfall is miscommunication. An important trait for a remote supervisor to create an efficient system is the ability to facilitate communication with detail and precision to ensure all employees are as successful as possible.

Here are 8 tips for a supervisor:

- 1. Establish a handbook.** Important processes and changes should be documented such as updating common questions and noting important tools and accessing equipment. Documenting important areas will provide remote employees with something to reference.
- 2. Be clear on objectives.** Make sure you are clear on what is being asked such as due dates for assignments and what tasks take priority. One way you can do this is by writing down metrics. Keep in mind that your expectations have to change.
- 3. Set immediate and clear expectations.** Ensure all employees know exactly what you expect. For example, let them know how and when you want them to check in or how you would like them to track their times or provide you with updates. By letting your team know what you want from them, you can make sure everyone is synchronized.

- 4. Know your team.** Find out the preference of communication from each of your team members such as how much contact time do they need or do they prefer voice over video. Schedule regular team meetings to foster a sense of unity and help employees bond. Through team meetings employees will build connections and feel more inclined to cooperate and communicate with each other. Also, team meetings give employees a chance to contribute their ideas and clear up any miscommunications regarding project details and expectations. Be creative with timing when holding meetings depending on what is to be discussed. On days when there is a tight schedule, keep meetings brief and to the point so that pressing matters are highlighted. For times when longer meeting can be made, take the time to check on how each employee is doing.
- 5. Don't stop engaging with people.** Communication is important in managing a remote team. Be creative when holding videoconferencing. It's crucial to take a moment to engage with remote employees. The longer you go without reaching out to these employees, the more likely they are to feel left out and become disengaged with their work, which may lead to poor performance and turnover. Consistent interaction with each member will ensure they feel included and valued.
- 6. Lead with Empathy.** Remember we are humans first and colleagues second. Start a meeting by asking how folks are doing instead of just starting with work. Show compassion with a quick 5-minute call to get a feel of what staff may be going through personally. Reassure them that you are in it together. Find some positive news to share. Build a strong rapport with each team member by taking the time to chat with them about their family or weekend plans. This can help them become more comfortable with you and engaged in their work.

- 7. Don't micromanage.** It's easy to assume that when you do not see your employees, they are not working or sticking to the tasks assigned. This can develop into micromanaging behavior where supervisors bombard remote employees with communications and continuously ask for progress reports. This can be stressful for both parties and make employees feel they're not trusted. Instead, focus on outcomes and goals rather than activity. So long as the employee is getting their work done well and on time, their work style is irrelevant. However, it is important remote employees are not taking advantage of the autonomy by wasting time and ignoring their workload. Some employees may not have the self-discipline for remote work, and it is critical that this behavior is recognized quickly before it affects the overall team productivity.
- 8. Be open to change.** Learn to embrace transition. Working remotely is a process and you can't expect everyone to adjust easily. It is important to remember that not everyone has the same peak hours of energy. A supervisor should allow staff to find structure and balance with a routine that aligns with one on campus. Find humor where you can and always remember to be helpful, friendly and respectful.

Follow up on Employees

30-60-90 Day Remote Work Checklist for Supervisors

30 Days

- Ensure all employees have resources needed to work remotely.
- Assess technology needs: Physical resources, VPN access, program needs.
 - Make time for testing technology to ensure all hardware and software assets are functioning properly.

- ❑ Identify which documents need to be wet signed or e-signed, create plan for sharing and storage of electronic documentation. (Develop contingency plan for working remote if needed.)
- ❑ Develop schedules for each employee for the next three months: remote, campus, or hybrid.
- ❑ Communicate openly and often: Schedule daily or weekly meetings with your staff via Zoom/Teams or other tool to enforce clarity, communication, connection, and contributions (the 4 Cs).
 - ❑ Be available and respond to employees' feelings or concerns regarding the changes taking place.
- ❑ Create a plan for expectations:
 - ❑ What are work hours?
 - ❑ What are the expectations around when are you at your desk?
 - ❑ Do you have a dedicated workspace?
- ❑ Consider creating a team site on Microsoft Teams (if you do not have one already) and walk your staff through how to access and use this site for communication and daily conversation exchanges.
- ❑ Have employees write an end of day email to you identifying positive outcomes, challenges, support needed, and potential recommendations.
- ❑ Observe day to day activities and evaluate how they affect deliverables.
- ❑ Identify ways to measure performance that could inform broader change.
- ❑ Identify opportunities for training, learning & development. Learning to create training plans specific to employees' roles and goals.
- ❑ For roles experiencing decreased workloads, encourage a process improvement projects, business process documentation or other classification appropriate project work.

- ❑ Identify a process, analyze it, and determine if there are ways to make the process more efficient.
- ❑ Trust employees to be productive.

60 days

- ❑ Communicate openly and often: Schedule daily or weekly meetings with your staff via Zoom/Teams or other collaboration tool to enforce clarity, communication, connection, and contributions (the 4 Cs).
- ❑ Initiate a collaboration between cross-functional teams of the organization
 - ❑ How can your department support another department and vice versa.
 - ❑ Example: We all support student employees. Are there ways you are leveraging student assistants that might be helpful for other departments to hear about?
- ❑ Cultivate and reinforce psychological safety: Provide role clarity, peer support, open communication, and recognize milestones.
 - ❑ Identify what recognition should look like.
- ❑ Assess independently what worked or what didn't work, in the first 30 days, why?
- ❑ Assess as a team what worked or what didn't work, in the first 30 and why?
- ❑ Identify gaps that need filling and measure impact.
 - ❑ Collaborate and create solutions to those gaps.
 - ❑ Schedule and conduct a weekly team meeting with an agenda and regular cadence of topics.
- ❑ Hold your team members accountable with weekly check-ins on their goal progress
 - ❑ Document best practices and processes.

- ❑ Assign or have employees choose professional development.
Employees can also choose professional development activities offered from HR. After completing their e-learning, have individuals document what they learned, how they plan to apply it, and share best practices with others.
- ❑ Empower team members to take the lead in learning about resources you or others may be unfamiliar with.
- ❑ Hold your team members accountable with check ins as needed.

90 days

- ❑ Communicate openly and often: Schedule daily or weekly meetings with your staff via Zoom/Teams or Skype to enforce clarity, communication, connection, and contributions (the 4 Cs).
- ❑ Have clear goals and objectives and be able to present goals and outcomes to leadership.
- ❑ Contribute to the broader University strategy: As an individual and as a team.
- ❑ Assess what worked or what didn't work, in the first 60 days, why?
- ❑ Identify gaps and measure impact.
 - ❑ Collaborate and create solutions to those gaps.
 - ❑ Schedule and conduct a weekly team meeting, with a consistent agenda.
- ❑ Sustain relationships and professional growth.
 - ❑ Follow up on professional development activities. What were the take-aways?

Challenges of Working Remotely

Supervisors need to understand factors that can make remote work especially demanding. Failure to do so could result in high-performing employees experiencing a decline in job performance and lack of engagement when they begin to work remotely, especially in the absence of preparation and training. Some common challenges inherent in remote work include:

Lack of face-to-face supervision. Lack of face-to-face interaction can be a concern for both manager and employee. Managers worry that employees will not work as hard or as efficiently, while employees may struggle with reduced access to managerial support and communication. Employees may feel that remote managers are out of touch with employee needs and are thereby not supportive or helpful in getting their work done.

Lack of access to information. When new to working remotely obstacles in obtaining information or access to information can exist as employees and managers learn how to access information in a remote environment either from servers or from other employees. Even getting answers to what seem like simple questions can feel like a large obstacle when working remotely.

Social Isolation. Loneliness is one of the most common complaints about remote work, with employees missing the informal social interaction of an office setting. It is thought that extraverts may suffer from isolation more in the short run, particularly if they do not have opportunities to connect with others in their remote-work environment. However, over a longer period-of-time, isolation can cause any employee to feel less “belonging” to their organization.

Distractions at Home. Sudden transition to remote work creates a greater change that employees will be dealing with a less than ideal remote work environment, including distractions such as children, and pets. Even in normal circumstances

family and home demands can impinge on working remotely but are greater during unplanned work-from-home transitions.

Here are 5 tips a supervisor can share with remote employees:

- 1. Carve out a dedicated workspace.** If one is not available, putting up a curtain to block off a workspace will work. This will help you get into the right mindset to work and also set boundaries with the rest of your family.
- 2. Separate work from personal life.** Without an office it is easy to work longer hours and sometimes blend personal time with work time. Friends and family should be made aware that just because you are working from home doesn't mean you are available.
- 3. Take breaks.** Step away from the computer screen and stretch, take deep breaths, meditate, snack on something healthy, keep hydrated with water, check in with colleagues.
- 4. Practice self-care while working remotely.** This will help reduce stress. Enjoy the simple joys in life such as walking your pet or watching a funny show.
- 5. Structure your day.** Create a routine similar to your workplace routine. A routine will help you be more productive, more focus, and will give some much-needed certainty to your life. A Schedule can promote calm, reduce stress, and help you to have something concrete to work around.

Tools for Working Remotely

No matter where employees work, finding the right tools to communicate is key. Since remote work means that supervisors are unable to just drop by an employee's

desk or have a team member in their office, finding other ways to communicate besides email will positively impact employee engagement, collaboration and boost productivity.

Here are a few well known platforms that supervisors can utilize with their team:

Google Hangouts

A unified communication platform which includes instant messaging, video, chat, SMS and VOIP features. Can be accessed through Gmail or Google+ websites and mobile apps.

GroupMe

A messaging app where users can send group or private messages from their computer or phone. Works through Windows, IOS, Android and the web.

Microsoft Teams

A chat-based collaboration platform complete with document sharing, online meetings, and many more useful features for business communications. Can be used on computer and mobile devices via Microsoft 365 application.

Webex

A tool that allows users to host or participate in video conferencing, online meetings, and screen sharing for up to 1,000 participants. Can be accessed through web and mobile apps.

Zoom

A web-based video conferencing tool that allows users to meet online, with or without video and screen sharing. Can be used with a local, desktop client and a mobile app.

Conclusion/Projection

In our continued effort to not only maintain, but also surpass, our continuously rising standards of excellence, College of the Canyons is well-positioned to become a leader in providing best practices for supervising staff remotely. What we have already accomplished (with almost no time to plan or coordinate) is impressive. This next chapter of reflection, idea-generation, and coordination will better prepare us for the future challenges we may face. The amalgamation of research from both inside and outside our institution affords us with incredibly rich and varied resources as we move forward. While we understand that this work will need to be reviewed by each department/division within COC and that there are likely to be unique conditions which may necessitate more specialized guidance for supervisors and employees within a given area of the College, we hope that this work serves as a foundational “leaping” off point for future work. Perhaps a committee or task force should be assembled to continue what has begun during this project. We also look forward to how other research efforts, such as the staff survey conducted by our Institutional Research office, will impact our collective strategies in the weeks, months and years to come. COC will undoubtedly carve an unprecedented path for adapting to unprecedented times. After all, that is what we are known for...and we look forward to watching this work evolve in effort to fully support each member of our community of truly remarkable employees!

RESOURCES

7 Things Nobody Told You About Working Remotely

<https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2017/06/16/working-remotely>

11 Tips to Effectively Manage Remote Employees

<https://www.indeed.com/hire/c/info/11-tips-to-effectively-manage-remote-employees>

COVID-19: Remote Work Guidelines for Employees

<https://hr.cornell.edu/covid-19-workplace-guidance/remote-work/covid-19-remote-work-guidelines-employees>

Forbes: Companies Leading the Work-from-Home Revolution

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2020/05/24/the-work-from-home-revolution-is-quickly-gaining-momentum/#2982a23c1848>

Forbes: The Art of Working Remotely

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/hvmacarthur/2020/03/12/the-art-of-working-remotely-how-to-ensure-productivity-vs-a-time-suck/#1e3253a433ee>

Getting the Most from Remote Management

<https://www.strengthscope.com/getting-the-most-from-remote-management/?ref=quuu>

Google: Working from Home? 4 Tips for Staying Productive

https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-resources/organizational-culture/work-from-home-tips/?utm_medium=cpc&utm_source=gsn&utm_team=twg-us&utm_campaign=2020h1-us-en-sem-twg-skws-wfh&gclid=Cj0KCQjwz4z3BRCgARIsAES_OVcNu3t0yZM9KdRr7DJa_baAaWobES9foCZFFeidqsYXHiNe53xemNgaArCNEALw_wcB

Harvard Business Review: Guide to Managing Your Newly Remote Employees

<https://hbr.org/2020/03/a-guide-to-managing-your-newly-remote-workers>

HERC: Being Productive While Working Remotely

<https://www.hercjobs.org/being-productive-while-working-remotely/>

HERC: Tips for Higher Education Professionals Working from Home

<https://www.hercjobs.org/tips-for-higher-education-professionals-working-from-home-during-coronavirus/>

How to Make a Multi-Generational Workforce an Opportunity for Success

<https://blog.neogov.com/how-to-make-a-multi-generational-workforce-an-opportunity-for-success>

Inside Higher Ed: Will Covid-19 Permanently Shift How Higher Ed Thinks About Remote Work?

<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/learning-innovation/will-covid-19-permanently-shift-how-higher-ed-thinks-about-remote-work>

LinkedIn: New to Working Remotely?

<https://learning.linkedin.com/blog/productivity-tips/new-to-working-remotely--these-resources-can-help>

LVAIC: Working Remotely for Faculty & Staff

<https://www.hercjobs.org/tips-for-higher-education-professionals-working-from-home-during-coronavirus/>

OwlLabs: How to Manage Remote Employees

<https://www.owlabs.com/how-to-manage-remote-employees>

OwlLabs: 2019 State of Remote Work

<https://www.owlabs.com/state-of-remote-work/2019>

Remote Leadership Institute

<https://www.remoteleadershipinstitute.com/>

Remote Q & A

<https://remote.co/qa-leading-remote-companies/do-you-have-remote-communication-protocol-for-your-remote-workers/>

Remote Work Statistics: Shifting Norms and Expectations

<https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/remote-work-statistics/#:~:text=A%20special%20analysis%20done%20by,10%20years%20it%20grew%2091%25.>

The Remote Playbook

<https://www.aa-isp.org/knowledge-center/download/public/1002>

Working Remotely: Numerous Campus Resources

<https://library.educause.edu/topics/information-technology-management-and-leadership/working-remotely>