



Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
August 2023

How to support the wellbeing of your remote employees

Adapted from Perkbox

Remote working can bring many benefits to people's lives. Remote staff skip the time-consuming and stress-inducing daily commute, save costs by working from home and have the advantage of added flexibility to their schedules. But remote working can also have its downsides.

By losing the office environment, those who work remotely may experience feelings of isolation and struggle to maintain a work-life balance – which can in turn, have a serious effect on wellbeing.

No matter where they're based, it's an employer's responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of their employees.

Healthy employees are not only happy employees, they're also more engaged and motivated. This ultimately results in fewer sick days and prevents a loss of productivity for the business too. The only difference is when employees are working remotely, it takes different measures to ensure you're supporting your teams in the right way.

How can remote working impact wellbeing?

Remote working can affect wellbeing in two main ways:

1. Loneliness and isolation – When separated from colleagues or a normal office/working environment, individuals can start to feel isolated and lonely. In particular, extroverted personalities may especially suffer from this as they are used to gaining their energy from those around them. These employees may heavily

suffer from these feelings if they are not supported in the right way.

Feelings of isolation can increase stress levels and bring a sense of disengagement to both an employee's work and the company itself, both of which negatively affect emotional wellbeing.

2. Burnout – When working remotely, it can be easy for work to seep into an employee's personal time. Remote employees can often work longer hours and feel that they have to contribute more because they aren't in the office. This lack of work-life balance can lead to high stress levels, which ultimately turns to burnout if left unresolved.

When your employees are based in an office, it's much easier to be aware of any habits or behaviours that may be affecting wellbeing. If your staff are remote – you need to keep a close eye on how they're feeling and work to maintain a structure which supports their wellbeing.

9 simple steps to support the wellbeing of remote workers

1. Establish boundaries between work and personal time. When you no longer have the physical break that is leaving the office and commuting home at the end of the working day – it can be difficult to separate work and personal time.

Technology means that work is always right there, and remote workers can often want to be responsive at any time to prove they are working just as hard at home. This lack of separation can lead to many remote workers feeling like they are always in work mode – adding further to any already existing stress levels.

Remote employees need to be encouraged to create boundaries between their work and their personal life. Managers can do this by showing that they trust their employees and encourage limits to their work. By

Continued on the next page

communicating how important this balance is – your employees will feel liberated to switch off at the end of the working day and take that all-important time for themselves to recharge. If you regularly see someone working or sending emails out of hours – check-in with them to ensure they aren't struggling to switch off and suffering with high-stress levels.

2. Set up regular one-to-ones and really listen. A vital benefit of working relationships is the ability to turn to someone for support, should you be experiencing any issues. When employees are remote, you need to work harder to maintain a strong employer-employee relationship so that if any problems do arise, staff feel comfortable to come to their managers for help.

If you don't already have one-to-ones with your remote employees, it's a good idea to schedule these in over call or video on at least a weekly or bi-weekly basis. If you already have one-to-ones, it could be a good idea to check in with your staff to see if they feel these are frequent enough to cover everything they are dealing with.

Within these chats, really listen – both to what's being said, and more importantly, what's behind the pauses in the conversation. Are they speaking positively about their work? Do they mention any feelings of pressures or anxieties? Are they avoiding a certain topic? By really listening to what's behind what is being said, you can find if anything is affecting their wellbeing.

You can also get some great insights into wellbeing through the discussion of goals and progress. If it seems that your staff may be falling behind on goals or aren't progressing at the rate you might expect, this could highlight high stress levels or burnout.

Ultimately, these one-to-ones help to build trust so your employees will feel more comfortable and reassured to speak openly. This allows you to work together to find solutions to any issues and lighten their stress load.

3. Set a good example. It can be all too easy to adapt to unhealthy ways of working if that's how you see those around you operating.

As a manager of remote employees, it's important that you set a good example and make wellbeing your own priority – so your teams will follow.

You can do this through a number of ways, for example show that you hold your work-life balance as a priority and make it clear that you don't check any non-urgent emails during the evening and weekend, or that you

take a full lunch break and won't be contactable over that time. This allows your employees to follow lead and enjoy uninterrupted personal time. As a result, both you and the team will be re-energised and more productive during the working day.

4. Promote the Employee Assistance Program.

When it comes to remote workers, it can be easy to suffer in silence and not reach out to others for help, as they feel that they can put on a brave face to co-workers and managers over videos and calls. To ensure that no one suffers alone, employers should remind their workforce that the EAP offers confidential services to help employees with any personal or workplace issues that may be impacting their wellbeing, mental or physical health or performance.

The EAP isn't limited in how they can assist employees and cover a broad range of issues, including child care, financial troubles or legal problems.

5. Remember breaks are important. When you don't have the 12 o'clock buzz in the office to announce that it's lunch time and your colleague isn't calling you over for a quick chat at 3pm, you can easily sit and work at home for 8 hours straight without a break.

Working for long periods without breaks leads to increased stress levels, decreased productivity and it can quickly take a toll on physical health too.

Encourage employees to take time for themselves throughout the day and introduce a system that lets teammates know when this is happening. When someone is taking a break, they could mark it in their calendar, change their status on their instant messenger or send a message to their team to let them know they'll be unavailable.

After a break employees will feel refreshed and ready to tackle their tasks. By making regular breaks an important part of the working day, mental and physical wellbeing will greatly benefit too.

6. Set goals but make sure they're realistic. When your employees are remote, it can be harder to keep track of their workloads. This means that employees may be working harder and longer hours to keep up with difficult goals they have been given and experiencing greater stress levels as a result. But on the other hand, if your remote employees don't have any goals to work to – they'll be lacking motivation and feeling disengaged.

Work with your team members to set achievable goals

Continued on the next page

to work towards. By basing goals on past performance, you can give your employees a boost in motivation but take away unrealistic pressures that they may have found themselves working overtime to hit.

It's important to keep checking back with your employees to see how they're progressing so you can alter any goals or make adjustments to ensure healthy stress levels.

7. Offer free or discounted fitness and wellbeing activities. Without the daily commute and running around from A-to-B in the office, it can be difficult for remote workers to stay active. This can not only impact physical health but can also have a huge effect on mental wellbeing, as exercise has been proven to reduce anxiety and depression.

Employers can offer employees access to free online fitness classes or wellbeing sessions, discounted or free gym memberships or activity monitors, or even desk assessments to ensure the remote working set up is as conducive to good health as possible.

By offering these activities at a discounted or free rate, you make these accessible to all employees, no matter their situation. Employers can ensure that they are doing everything they can to help keep employees in the best health, both physically and mentally, as possible.

8. Offer mental health days. Your employees might be working from home – but they still need a break from time to time. Remote employees may be feeling under the weather or going through a period of lowered mental wellbeing, but feel like a sick day isn't justified as they're already at home.

Offering employees the option of a certain number of mental health days to take a year can be a great way for employees to take a guilt-free, but much-needed break from work. By having this option, they can take some personal time to relax and recharge, and come back to work more energised and motivated. They will also feel trusted and valued by their company which can lead to higher retention rates and boosted employee engagement.

9. Check-in on how your employees are feeling. Many employees may be reluctant to say if they feel that the business is operating in a way that is negatively affecting their wellbeing.

Using confidential surveys is a great way to check-in with your people and find out what they think your organisation is doing well, and what they think could be improved. An automated pulse survey tool can help you

send frequent, short pulse surveys to see how employees are feeling about all areas of your business. This way you can identify any problems that may be impacting the wellbeing of your employees and allows you to implement solutions quickly and effectively.

References:

<https://www.perkbox.com/au/resources/blog/support-wellbeing-of-remote-employees>