**Maintaining motivation for remote teams**

# Purpose

Working from home can impact a team’s morale. Staff can feel disconnected, isolated and out of touch. Maintaining morale is important for maintaining engagement and commitment. This document provides tips for managers to help team members feel motivated and able to contribute constructively.

# Tips for maintaining team and individual morale

**Reiterate ground rules and expectations**

Once you have agreed clear protocols for remote working (including work hours, availability, communication, meetings, key priorities and deadlines, and managing emails) stick to them and where necessary revisit them with the team.

It is vital each team member understands their key accountabilities and the outputs and behaviours expected of them. When you have agreed clear objectives and discussed how their work contributes to the team’s priorities ensure these are discussed in regular catch-ups and updated where appropriate.

**Communicate frequently and effectively**

Regular communication is central to successful people management and is particularly important for teams working remotely. A culture of strong communication is one of the main ways to motivate employees. Effective communication avoids ambiguity and equips employees with the information and resources necessary to undertake their work.

Remote workers may feel rather disconnected from progress and goals. Make sure to keep them informed of team (or Department) updates and progress. Find a way to include them in any meetings or presentations and forward relevant information as appropriate

**Offer encouragement and support**

It is important to acknowledge stress, listen to employees’ anxieties and concerns, and empathise with their challenges. If you feel a remote employee is struggling but not communicating stress or anxiety, ask them how they are doing. Even a general question such as “How is this remote work working out for you?” can elicit important information that you might not otherwise hear. Once you ask the question, listen carefully to the response, and briefly restate it back to the employee, to ensure you understood correctly. Let the employee’s stress or concerns (rather than your own) be the focus of the conversation.

Familiarise yourself with the resources on the [Employee Health, Safety and Wellbeing HRWeb page](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/safetyhw/Pages/employeeservices.aspx) and share them with your team.

**Offer recognition and positive feedback**

Feeling kept out of the loop regarding positive results can be extremely demotivating. Remote working can mean that we are not thinking of recognition when we don’t see the work our staff are doing. Because of that, we need to be more mindful, and more focused on finding those opportunities where we can step in and provide acknowledgement and appreciation for the efforts our staff are making, or for a job well done.

It is particularly important to maintain the momentum and connection to the Executive Board’s three priorities for 2020: *High Quality Public Administration*, *Distributed Leadership*, and *Supporting the front line*. How are our staff overcoming the challenges of remote working to pull together and continue to implement our reforms? How are they sharing the accountability and leadership of ensuring we continue to ‘stay our course’ despite everything, and how, above all, are they ensuring that our front-line services continue to be maintained at the level and quality Victorians expect. The decisions, actions and behaviours that support these priorities are worth celebrating and showcasing so that our staff continue to feel proud and committed to the work we do.

You must be deliberate about offering positive feedback and praise for the value and impact they are having. It helps them feel like they are doing something that is worthwhile, important and purposeful.

Avoid only contacting your employees when something is wrong because this lack of positive communication crushes morale.

Review the [Recognition at DET guide](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/Documents/RecognitionToolkit.pdf) and share it with your team to consider how you can embed a culture of recognition. Other resources and ideas are also available on the [Recognition page](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/workm/Pages/RecognitionDET.aspx) in HR Web.

**Performance and development discussions**

It is important that you continue to focus on your team’s performance and development. The purpose of performance discussions is to clarify expectations, gauge whether people are on track to meet objectives and help each person to thrive and excel.

In addition to the formal Performance and Development Plan (PDP) discussions, build regular performance discussions into your schedule. Use these to identify opportunities to grow and build capabilities. Knowing there are opportunities to continue to develop will engage and motivate your team. In the performance discussion consider:

* the virtual working context - what is your team member challenged by or where have they come up against roadblocks?
* their development goals and how they are aligned with organisational and team objectives
* encouraging them to identify their strengths which can be turned into assets
* focusing on a few goals to focus on meaningful development and make sure it is achievable
* recent PDP discussions and feedback you have provided or they may have received from others
* the development opportunities available in a virtual working context that suit their learning style.

Explore the Department’s [Online Learning & Development Resources](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edrms/keyprocess/PDEV/Pages/online-resources.aspx) page for a wide range of online learning resources.

**DET’s Values**

Performance discussions are not limited to outputs and outcomes and should also include how people work and aligning the expected behaviours with [DET’s Values](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/workm/Pages/Public-Sector-Values.aspx). Living the values shows us at our best and helps achieve Department and team outcomes. It is essential to proactively discuss what the values look like for your team in a remote working context.

**Provide opportunities for social interaction**

We are social beings and wired to thrive in collaborative networks of people. It is important that teams stay connected on a professional level but as their manager you should also structure ways for employees to interact socially while working remotely. By building this in to how you interact with each other it will avoid people feeling isolated and lonely. This is true for all remote workers, but particularly so for workers who have been abruptly transitioned out of the office.

The easiest way to establish basic social interaction is to leave time at the beginning or end of team calls for non-work items. Other options include virtual coffee breaks, lunches or office parties. Virtual events help reduce feelings of isolation and promote a sense of belonging. Ensure the approaches you take are inclusive for everyone in your team.