

# Randall Peterson: Remote working has changed the rules of motivating employees

2nd March 2021 6:00 am



Think back to a time not so long ago when working from home felt like a real privilege. If an employee had the right type of job, and the trust of the boss, they were granted the opportunity. The great 2020 pandemic changed all of that and employers the world over were forced into facilitating their employees to work from home. The simple part was providing the right equipment, making work logistically possible. The harder part was, and is, the psychology of **managing people remotely**. Now we need to supervise people in jobs that were co-located for a reason: to facilitate learning, best practice, and networking. Here is some advice for the new reality.

Building trust is more important than ever: critical parts of what managers do in the office is historically done through observation. When someone is feeling **disengaged** they can see it in the way they conduct themselves. Technology allows us to see our remote employees and ensure they are not forgotten, but the camera only sees what the person wants it to see. How will a manager know if someone is struggling with mental health issues? Every manager needs to ask whether their people trust them enough to share such personal information with them. They should start by 'checking-in' with their people at least once a week.

Support teams to avoid 24/7 working: we know from a century of research that too many hours at work makes for tired and unfocused performance. Employers need to facilitate and support their teams having time away from work by doing things like dedicated work and personal hours where the entire group/organisation is expected to refrain from email and other forms of intrusion.

Don't assume working from home is easy: employers do not always know what the space constraints are for their team – do they have dedicated space? Are others also at home trying to work or small children at home? Employers can facilitate work in ways that make it easier for the employee. They should have the conversation with employees about hours and availability. Does it really matter that the work is done at 9am or 9pm?

Facilitate learning and networking: established workers can almost always operate remotely because they have the existing network and information to accomplish their work, but new employees will find it bewildering to know where to turn for help. For example, we know from research that call centres work better when newcomers can ask the person seated next to them for informal advice, which is impossible when working remotely. To help newcomers learn, network and integrate, employers could have nominated mentors for each new employee to call. They could also share contact details across the team so newcomers can engage in informal side conversations, and plan **social events** for people to get to know each other as people.

**Randall Peterson is professor of organisational behaviour and academic director, leadership institute at London Business School**