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Communicating Effectively While Working Virtually- Tips for Success

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Communicating Effectively While Working Virtually- Tips for Success

Working virtually undoubtedly has its benefits, but owners and employees alike face many challenges in creating a successful business environment in this unique field. As a virtual team— a project assistant working closely with a mother and president of a small business— we have found an effective manner to manage the VA relationship. We share several tips for success below.

Before listing these suggestions, however, it is important to understand just what benefits and challenges arise in a virtual business setting.

Benefits of a Virtual Company

Virtual companies create many advantages for their employees: relocation is unnecessary, work schedules are more flexible and managing and balancing a full life is easier. Employees have a great sense of autonomy, making decisions and meeting challenges at a steady, comfortable pace while juggling a busy personal life. Additionally, communication between the employer and employees tends to improve, as the minute but vital details of virtual interaction receive more focus and attention.

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Overall, without office space expenses, capital costs are less, and everyone, especially the environment, benefits from decreased fuel usage. There are challenges in this work environment, like most, making tips for fostering a stable VA/management relationship even more essential.

Challenges of a Virtual Company

Without an office, it is difficult to monitor employee productivity, progress, or customer interaction. Communication can be difficult when relying on technology, and employee availability is often unpredictable. With this lack of face-to-face communication, misunderstanding and duplication risks arise. Virtual employees may feel isolated and disconnected from their coworkers or become distracted in their homes. Together, as an owner and her employees who have faced such challenges, we can offer the following tips to overcome these common challenges:

- **Clarify availability**
Spell out flexible, preferable schedule, work days/hours and be accessible during these times by phone and email.
- **Offer formal training for all virtual employees and their managers**
Explain various communication techniques and technologies available (e-mail, conference calls, online chatting, etc.) and ensure familiarity with each.
- **Communicate openly and consistently**
Send company-wide e-mails detailing announcements, organizational changes, schedule complications, or any other pertinent information. Such communication will foster a “team” feeling for those who are in a virtual office.
- **Highlight the boundaries of specific work assignments**
This will help avoid duplication and allow different employees to work together more efficiently.
- **Create ground rules**
Clearly state deadlines, response times, and goals.
- **Make Lists and prioritize tasks**
With calls and instant messages coming from several directions, it's important to take notes and record details to avoid overlooking assignments or deadlines.
- **Segment Employee's work**
Try to avoid piling on one huge assignment upfront. Instead, break up the work load and encourage timely updates rather than intimidating the employee.
- **Monitor performance**
Once you've defined the work environment, it's important to enforce rules and evaluate work efforts and output.
Proving weekly reports or updates on assigned tasks helps keep all team members on the same page and aware of progress and complications with a particular project.
- **Establish routines**
Each day, greet employees and offer support—whether this is an uplifting quote or link to a great news report, this will foster a connected,

productive work force.

- Stay in contact

Do not be afraid to pick up the phone to touch base or clarify any questions about the project or tasks you are working on.

This is particularly vital in the absence of an office. Responsiveness to employees needs is key; and providing constructive feedback keeps motivation and work ethic levels high. Scheduling conference calls or on-line chats is a great way to do this.

Conclusion

With an increasing number of women balancing life and a career, along with a growing global economy, company flexibility and employee accessibility are vital, and these characteristics attract, develop, and retain loyal, productive workers. By using the above tips and working from the “virtual ground” up, anyone can build a work environment and communication level that meets and rivals those of your everyday office.

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