A Guide to Supervising Remote Employees During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Introduction

In the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, Rhodes is committed to promoting health, safety and well-being among our community and also to ensuring the continuity of our academic programs and essential business functions. As such, all Rhodes employees should work remotely where possible until further notice, if doing so does not disrupt essential College operations. Recognizing that remote work practices are new for most members of the College community, the following guide was created to assist supervisors in managing employees remotely.

In an ideal situation, remote work arrangements require careful planning *prior to* the start of the remote work arrangement. The immediacy and potential far-reaching impact of the spread of the coronavirus disease may necessitate flexibility and adjustments *after* off-site working arrangements have begun.

What Exactly is Remote Work?

At Rhodes, remote working entails an arrangement between an employee and employer to work from an off-campus location such as one's home. These arrangements are approved on a case-by-case basis, considering the business needs of the College and must be approved by the divisional Vice President.

Are All Positions Eligible?

Not all positions lend themselves to remote work arrangements. Divisional Vice Presidents, in consultation with Human Resources and other administrators, have given careful consideration to whether the job or aspects of it could be performed remotely without decreasing the quality of the work, business services, student learning outcomes, customer service, or other essential measures of productivity for your office. Please contact the Office of Human Resources or your Vice President to obtain a list of positions and staff employees who have already been identified as needing to come to work each day during the pandemic. Both supervisors and employees are advised to consult their job descriptions on People Admin to clarify the essential functions of the position. If you need help with accessing the job description through People Admin, please review the guides on the Human Resources department or website.

What If It Is Not So Clear-Cut?

In some instances, flexibility and creativity will be essential in finding the ideal solution when managing employees who work remotely. Your style and interactions with employees may differ from those occurring on site. Additionally, your interactions with employees may differ based on a number of factors.
Some examples might include:
- There may be some positions that consist both of duties that can be performed remotely and those that must be done on-site.
- Your team might include seasoned employees who are quite familiar with their job responsibilities as well as those who might be new to Rhodes and to their positions.
- You may have employees who have thrived in face-to-face situations but who struggle in remote situations.

- You may have an employee with performance issues and who might require closer supervision.

Here are some questions you might consider when determining the best strategies for supervising remote staff members.[*]
- Has the employee demonstrated the ability to work well with minimal supervision?
- Does the employee thoroughly understand their job responsibilities?
- Is the employee considered successful and reliable when it comes to fulfilling their job duties?
- Does the employee effectively manage their time and prioritize their work responsibilities?

How Do We Establish A Work Agreement?

Ideally, remote work arrangements should be guided by a formal work agreement between the employer and employee. Unfortunately, the urgency of the pandemic crisis has shortened the amount of time supervisors and staff members have to establish work agreements. Therefore, supervisors are encouraged, to the extent possible, to be flexible when outlining the expectations for remote working arrangements.

Please refer to the employee's job description and the College's performance management system to outline performance expectations. Supervisors should establish a clear work agreement with each staff member. This agreement should include several key elements:
1. An acknowledgement that this an unprecedented event resulting from certain extenuating circumstances
2. An acknowledgement that employees may be asked to perform other duties that fall within their knowledge, skills and abilities. (At Rhodes, each person's job description includes "other duties as assigned" language.)
3. The employee's work schedule (assumed to be the same as their on-site schedule)
4. The employee's work location and contact information
5. How communications among the employee, supervisors, colleagues and others will be maintained
6. Clear expectations regarding how to be reached or contacted and the employee's availability by phone or e-mail within a reasonable time period during the agreed upon work schedule
7. Clear expectations for performance, deadlines, etc.
8. A list of projects, tasks, deliverables, duties, etc. that the employee will be expected to complete
9. An inventory of any College property that the employee will be permitted to use during the remote work arrangement

Are There Special Arrangements that Need to Be Made During This Transition?

During this transition, supervisors will undoubtedly need to consider technology and equipment needs. Supervisors may find it useful to consult with the following offices to determine whether special arrangements are necessary.

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[*] **Please contact Claire Shapiro at shapiro@rhodes.edu or 901-843-3757 with any questions or challenges you may face in supervising staff or in understanding how these suggestions relate to established College policy in the Handbook.**

- Information Services
- Human Resources
- Rhodes Express
- Bursar's Office

Some other considerations are included in the table below.

Technology-Related Considerations	Non-Technology-Related Considerations
Software, hardware, passwords, etc.	Office phone and voicemail (RingCentral)
Computer, laptop, tablet, camera	Cell phones
Virtual desktop	Rhodes Credit Cards
External monitor	Home contact info for entire office
Work Day, Banner Web considerations	Paper/ Office Supplies
Internet connectivity/ Wi-Fi hotspot	FOB/Key Access
Instant messaging	Emergency contact information
Zoom/ Video conferencing	Expectations regarding attire, decorum, etc.
Firewalls	Staff meeting schedule
Work order, equipment, space requests,	Processes for reporting accessibility issues, bias incidents, and/or violations of College policy

Based on needs within offices or departments, individuals may have to report to their offices to process mail, use office equipment, or perform other duties. No one is prohibited from coming to campus. Everyone is required to observe the 6' to 10' social-distancing practice and to limit the size of gatherings to 10 or fewer people.

What About Costs Associated with Employees Working Remotely?

Rhodes will make every reasonable effort to ensure continuity of business operations during this period of uncertainty. Supervisors should consult with their Vice President and with Information Services to assess their employees' technology needs. Important considerations include:
- Whether they have access to the Internet in their remote environment
- Whether they already have a computer to use
- The type of work they are doing and the type of software that is required

The response to these questions will be used to prioritize technology needs and the specific solutions (which might include equipment loans or referrals to free or other available resources).

Supervisors should obtain pre-approval from their Vice Presidents regarding reimbursement of costs incurred by employees for long-distance, cell-phone, data fees, FedEx office services or other charges that are necessary for and directly attributable to working remotely.

What Conversations Should I Have with Staff Members?

When speaking with employees about remote work arrangements, there are three important topics to approach.

- Conversations about physical space and working conditions include topics such as whether the employee has a work environment that is quiet and free from distractions or has the appropriate internet connection for the job.
- Conversations about expectations include topics such as what the employee is expected to accomplish and how they will be evaluated or how the employee will be expected to provide good customer service during regular work hours.
- Conversations about team goals include topics such as how the team will monitor its progress, maintain its focus, stay in communication and accomplish its goals if no longer in the same location.

How Should I Evaluate and Monitor Work Performance?

As stated above, the employee's job description and the College's performance management system may be used to help monitor work performance and to outline performance expectations. When supervising remote work, supervisors should be careful to pay attention to outcomes and deliverables as well as hours worked.

Other Important Recommendations and Tips

Supervisors play an important role in shaping the work environment for Rhodes employees. Supervisors can help create either an environment in which employees feel motivated and a sense of belonging or one in which employees feel devalued and disengaged. During these challenging times, a healthy and positive work climate is as important as ever! Some important tips for maintaining a good work environment are included below.
- Allow ample time for the transition to remote working. In addition to physically setting up their work space, many Rhodes employees are also dealing with the need to learn new technology, to adapt to rapid change, to figure out child-care and family responsibilities and to allay their concerns about the virus and other issues.
- Build in time for your team to adjust to new ways of interacting with each other and of working together.
- Communicate priorities and expectations effectively: *"If we can't do it all, what order should we be doing it in?"*
- Be aware of the many ways in which diversity, equity and inclusion issues may influence members of your team.
- Keep dialogue open and provide feedback.
- Recognize and reward great performance.
- Coach employees and help them improve poor performance, when necessary.
- Consider discussions on how your team members can better balance the demands of work and family.
- Consider strategies for helping your team members remain productive while working from home.
- Consider strategies for ensuring that your team members stay connected and engaged.
- Be optimistic. Ultimately, we're doing this work to support our students!
- Have as much fun as possible… it's stress relieving and motivating.

Things to Do and Know

- Forward phones from office to cell or home phone.
  1. Login to RingCentral online at https://login.ringcentral.com then click Single Sign-On to login with your Rhodes login (NOTE: On the Mac, do not use Safari).
  2. Click **Settings**, then click **Call Handling & Forwarding** and enter the phone number you'd like it to forward to.
  3. If have a smartphone, you can Download Ring Central app to answer calls, place calls, and listen to voice messages on your mobile device.
  4. To learn more: https://support.ringcentral.com/s/article/9758?language=en_US
  5. If you have any issues navigating the RingCentral app, please reach out to Information Services at help@rhodes.edu.
- Get appropriate office supplies
- Save appropriate files to Box or other locations
- Confirm schedules and logistics for staff meetings
- All departments are responsible for ensuring adequate office and phone coverage and appropriate levels of customer service.

Resources

Questions about Technology	https://sites.rhodes.edu/barret/resources/remote-learning-faqs
Social Distancing Recommendations	https://www.rhodes.edu/coronavirus-updates/Social-Distancing-Recommendations
Job Descriptions and Performance Management	https://jobs.rhodes.edu/hr/shibboleth
Human Resources	https://sites.rhodes.edu/hr or 901-843-3750
Remote Healthcare	TelaDoc
Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	CONCERN 24/7 at (901) 458-4000 or 800-445-5011

Tips for Managing Work-Life Balance

- https://www.aestheticsofjoy.com/2020/03/9-ways-to-make-working-from-home-more-joyful/
- https://www.npr.org/2020/03/15/815549926/8-tips-to-make-working-from-home-work-for-you
- https://time.com/5801725/work-from-home-remote-tips/
- https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2020/03/14/9-tips-to-be-productive-when-working-at-home-during-covid-19/#2d53529f5a38
- https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/career/a31436581/working-from-home-tips/