managing a distributed team
by guest contributor Anne-Marie Lowery

A bit about Anne-Marie, she is a senior HR business leader in the tech industry and also runs a truly innovative coaching company called 'The Inside Out Coach' utilising the power of nature, the outdoors to connect, breakthrough and build new habits. Anne-Marie is a certified Executive and Life Coach and hold qualifications in Fitness Instruction and Personal Training. In addition, she holds a Degree in Communications Studies, a Masters in Human Resource Management and certified through the British Psychology Society for Psychometric Assessments.

Having difficult conversations & managing underperformance remotely :

[Please note, always follow your organizational processes and if in any doubt reach out to your HR team or Manager for advice/support]

Having difficult conversations in the office environment can be a challenge for leaders and managers. The easier option can be to avoid the conversation and hope that things just get better. Spoiler alert - nothing good comes from this approach!

In a remote environment, managing underperforming employees and having difficult conversations adds to an already difficult challenge.

If you are noticing that someone is falling behind or struggling with the expectations of their roles, be proactive. Look for clues or hints - is this out of character for them? Are they quieter on calls/emails> Have you noticed a shift in their behaviour etc?

If you have noticed a dip in performance, it's time to step-up as a leader and begin the conversation with your team member. Don't wait for the next 1-1 meeting, it's time to address it now, regardless of working remotely or not!

Tips to having difficult conversations and managing underperformance remotely:

1. There is no time like the present - get in touch with the person and ask if they're free to catch up
2. Have the expectations of the role changed since moving to a remote environment?
   a. If no, then proceed as normal on setting expectations required from the role.
   b. If yes, what are the new expectations? And, have you shared these with your team? It's important that everyone is on the same page!

3. Share what you've noticed in terms of performance. *Hint : this always should be based in facts. Be aware of your unconscious bias here!*

4. Give the individual an opportunity to respond. By doing this it will allow you to get an understanding of how they view their performance

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5. Ask what can you do to support?

    Hints on questions to ask:
    - *Is there anything that you need from me?*
    - *How can I best support you as we navigate through this 'new normal' of remote working?*

6. Ultimately, performance sits first and foremost with the individual. Use coaching questions to encourage them to take ownership of this

    Hints on questions to ask:
    - *What's within your control to improve your performance?*
    - *What's the real challenge here for you?*
    - *What's your next step?*
    - *What are you going to do?*

7. Agree on an improvement plan with regular 1-1s to check in on performance