Update on Coronavirus

Remote Working and Well-Being

With the added restrictions announced by the Government in place for over a week and most Employees being confined to their homes (unless the work is part of the essential service), everyone around the country awaits further information from the Government on whether the restrictions will be lifted or indeed extended. While exceptions to the restrictions exist in terms of accessing groceries, medical or pharmaceutical services, or exercise within a two-kilometre distance, now more than ever Employers need to be attuned to the well-being of their Employees working remotely. Those Employees whose wellbeing thrives, perform better and are more engaged, but the limits to social contact owing to Covid-19 and a depletion of regular routines can impact negatively on Employees, so particular care should be taken. In order to facilitate greater impact for all Employees working remotely three key considerations should be to the fore;

1. Communication Management
2. Work Planning
3. Well-being Management

Communication Management

Increased communications are paramount to ensuring each Employee feels and stays connected to the business or Organisation. The availability of an array of technological platforms means Employees and Employers can maintain contact through virtual face to face meetings and communications on a daily basis. However, important to managing the well-being of Employees is ensuring the right communications are being used.

In the current landscape the right communication includes Employers putting the right structures in place such as scheduled video/ conference calls and regular team-building meetups to build and maintain rapport. Walking meetings could be arranged as well, within the context of the restrictions, as long as the correct software has been correctly downloaded to mobile devices, which could have the added impact of creating greater collaborative thinking as well as maintaining a focus on health. Done correctly, all of these can create a culture where Employees feel valued and well informed. Line Managers should also ensure daily contact is maintained with their teams to go through work plans and to understand any challenges that might be faced by the Employees.

Management of communications is not just at the commission of Employers. Employees must also be responsible for communicating effectively especially when in need of support. Employees may not always reach out, so management must encourage daily interactions and follow up with those who are withdrawn. Outside of internal communications is an opportunity to grow your professional network and Employees can be encouraged to build professional connections within their Linkedin network.

Top 3 Tips for Communication Management

- Have a clear and structured plan in relation to communicating with Employees in the short, medium and long term.

- Use technological platforms that encourage virtual face to face meetings arranged daily to maintain rapport with Employees.

- Support Employees by having nominated contacts within your Organisation that Employees can reach out to if they are in need of virtual interactions outside the planned communications.

Work Planning

The changes made to daily routines may have an impact on work plans but this does not mean that resources should be underutilised. Congruent to maintaining productivity and morale is the requirement to identify the daily and weekly work plans. With the move to remote working, for most Employees activities may have changed. It is therefore essential to ensure agility in the current environment by using the resources you have as an Employer to match the current needs and presumably the activities that fall from that. Where focus has changed, ensure that work plans are developed to fit into the new focus. This should be completed daily or weekly and can support productivity by providing a control on the working day for each Employee.

Employees should be encouraged to define work and rest time so it is important that management communicate effectively in relation to this so that unhealthy habits are not developed by skewing the lines between the working day and the personal and private life.

Ensure that all Employees have access to a designated workspace and all the resources that are required to carry out their work function (as much as can be provided at this time).

Finally consider proportioning time over the course of the working week for Employees to focus on professional development. Whether your Organisation already has a training directory or not, now is the time to avail of online training facilities to upskill your Employees whilst also providing a new focus on personal and professional development.

Top 3 Tips for Work Planning

- Ensure Line Managers and Employees set out agreed work activities and priorities on a weekly or bi-weekly basis so that expectations on both sides are clear to encourage productivity.

- Support the maintenance of work boundaries so that remote working Employees have clear differentiation in their working day between work hours and break and rest times.

- Develop a training directory that encourages upskilling and provides a renewed focus for Employees.

Well-being Management

With the prospect of additional weeks of working remotely and with the added burden of the restrictions in place, Employers and Employees alike must ensure health and well-being are a priority. Daily exercise and a healthy diet are essential to maintaining a healthy work life balance. An Employer can promote this by developing and creating a resource for inter-company challenges such as a steps challenge (as long as the steps remain within 2km of the Employees home) and a healthy eating challenge with points awarded for both, leading to weekly and monthly winners. When the temporary need of remote working ends, these

challenges could continue and evolve, placing health and well-being at centre stage for your business, thus demonstrating an investment in your Employees and creating value. Other areas that could be explored during this remote working phase is upskilling and online training both in resilience and mindfulness. Again, this demonstrates a willingness to invest in your Employees as well as supporting them at this time in managing change to their daily routine.

Encouraging separation between work and personal life will also ensure that remote workers are not working beyond their contractual hours. It falls to Employers to communicate expectations in maintaining the status quo when it comes to start and finishing times as well as breaks throughout the day. Remind Employees to close down the laptop and switch off for time to focus on their personal and family lives.

The impact on social isolation from remote working for Employees may lead to issues such as stress related sick leave, therefore Employers must ensure that connections between Employees are continuously facilitated to mitigate against this. Where an Employer has an Employee Assistance Programme in place this should be promoted so that all Employees have access to other supports while working remotely from home.

Top 3 Tips for Well-being Management

- Create a resource for health and well-being within your Organisation promoting the creation of goals that each Employee can identify with.
- Set clear expectations when it comes to working remotely and the importance of taking regular breaks and maintaining boundaries between work and private life.
- Promote the use of the Organisations Employee Assistance Service and the support that is available to Employees.

Disclaimer - The information in this section is provided to assist Employers on the implementation of the Government Restrictions and is not intended to be a legal interpretation of any of the information provided.

**For further information or advice, please contact the experienced HR and Employment Law team in
Adare Human Resource Management – 01 561 3594
or** ipihrhelpdesk@adarehrm.ie