Leading Across the Distance

A presentation from the
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Your Career Management Team

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  ▫ Assessment
  ▫ Exploration/Research
  ▫ Personal Branding
  ▫ Networking/Job Search
  ▫ Professional Development
Agenda

• Navigating the “New Normal”

• Common challenges for (new) remote workers

• Keys to successfully leading a geographically diverse team

• Q&A
COVID-19 is rapidly changing all aspects of our world, including how we work.

• In 2019, one in ten Americans worked remotely at least once per week.

• Today, one in four Americans work remotely – many full time!

• Experts recommend we continue working remotely for at least one year.

Source: Psychology Today
Welcome to the New Normal

Businesses are seeing many benefits to increased remote work, including:

• Cost reductions in operating expenses (including real estate expenditures, utilities, etc.)

• Increased productivity and general sense of satisfaction among employees

• Larger pools of potential employees (as talent can be sourced without geographical restrictions)
Although many workers enjoy the flexibility of remote work, not everyone adapts well. Some common challenges for remote workers include:

- Lack of face-to-face supervision
- Lack of access to information
- Social isolation
- Distractions at home
Keys to Successfully Managing a Geographically Diverse Team

Whether remote work is a temporary situation or a permanent move for your company and team, the following are critical to effectively leading this kind of group:

1. Establish a routine
2. Streamline communication channels
3. Establish clear deliverables and expectations for team members
4. Be flexible to employee needs and work styles
5. Build trust and boundaries simultaneously
6. Manage work loads
Establishing a Routine

- Set up standing meeting times for team/staff meetings

- Implement 1:1 check-ins with direct reports that recur on a regular basis (weekly or biweekly is best)

- Define work systems to ensure everyone is on the same page
The key to creating well-defined work systems is to set standards for your team, and clearly outline procedures that can be easily repeated.

Example: Weekly productivity updates

1. Create a Google Form populated with desired/required metrics for reporting.
2. Provide each member a link to connect to and complete the form.
3. Form automatically populates a spreadsheet for easy analysis by management.

Bonus: This kind of system works well for teams regardless of size of technological skill.
Streamlining Communication Channels

Communication can be a challenge in remote work situations – managers often have to juggle team members who either over-communicate or don’t communicate enough.

In order to maintain strong, effective communication, managers should:

• Establish methods of communication through multiple channels

• Standardize technology used for common occurrences (meetings, conference calls, etc.)

• Ensure team members know which channels are appropriate for various situations
Streamlining Communication Channels – Mastering Technology

Technology is a necessary part of our daily communications now – establishing ground rules with your team will help to make that communication more effective for all.

• Ensure that team members not only know which platforms are used for different activities, but also have a basic working knowledge of the platforms.

• Avoid email clutter on group projects by taking advantage of cloud solutions (Drop Box, Microsoft Teams, Google Drive).

• Designate someone to be immediately available to address escalating concerns via phone or instant message.
The most successful remote managers are those that establish “rules of engagement” for their teams early on, and hold team members accountable for deliverables.

- Set expectations for the frequency, means, and ideal timing of communication with one another
- Establish deadlines for projects and other outputs
- Encourage employees to take ownership of their positions
- Provide detailed descriptions of what positive results look like, but leave room for interpretation on execution
Empowering Your Remote Workers

When employees transition to working remotely, they often either see a significant boost in productivity, or a noticeable drop. Good leaders avoid those drops in output by empowering remote workers to take ownership of their positions and embrace the flexibility that comes with their new work environment.

- Encourage creativity in rethinking processes, or developing new ideas and projects
- Avoid becoming a “babysitter” — push for employees to independently accomplish tasks without needing to check in every few minutes
- Give consistent feedback (both positive and negative)
- Track milestones to show progress toward goals
Alleviate stress and support your team by recognizing the need for flexibility in work styles—this includes:

- Be willing to accommodate workers with competing obligations (childcare, family needs, etc.) not previously present
- Shift mindset from a strict “8-5” routine to one that allows for working at intervals, so long as targets are met
- Don’t be married to a single work location
Research shows that employees look at their immediate supervisors for cues on navigating shifts and crises in the workplace. It is critical to build a relationship of mutual trust with employees to retain them and maintain a cohesive team experience.

- Assume positive intent
- Communicate honestly and often
- Be an active and empathetic listener
- Lead by example
- Hold team members accountable in equal measure
- Encourage individual accountability
- Create opportunities to socialize (virtually) outside of team meetings
Boundaries are also important in maintaining a positive relationship with employees. Remote workers tend to live among the blurred lines between home and work life – help your team maintain their own boundaries and respect yours by:

- Designating specific times of day/evening when you are not to be contacted unless an emergency has happened
- Making sure no one feels pressured to answer emails or requests outside of their “office hours”
- Encouraging team members to take breaks daily, including a lunch break
- Taking days off seriously
- Saying, “No” when boundaries are pushed
Delegation is key to keeping the train moving and getting tasks done on time and within constraints. In order to properly (and fairly) divide work loads among your teams, you should:

- Create a plan, taking into consideration strengths of team members
- Clarify the roles that each team member plays in specific projects
- Set expectations and hold everyone accountable
- Have individual conversations with team members
Communicating 1:1 with Varying Team Members

Use 1:1 conversations as an opportunity to gain insight about professional goals, team dynamics, and budding problems you may not be aware of.

For high achievers:
• Be transparent about priorities, and the need to evenly distribute work.
• Have a conversation about what else is on their plate, and suggest giving someone else an opportunity to excel in a new/untested role.

For slackers:
• Remember that it is your obligation as a manager to deal with those who don’t pull their weight
• Have a frank discussion outlining how their lack of effort has consequences in terms of promotions, financial incentives, and choice in assignments.
Questions?

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