

Leading a Virtual Team

Working on a virtual team can be both exciting and challenging. The way a team interacts, collaborates, and problem solves while in the office is different when working remotely. Incorporate these principles to build an engaged and effective virtual team.

1. Build and Maintain Relationships

Face-to-face communication is essential to build relationships and foster trust among team members. When in-person interaction is not possible build in virtual connection:

- Make time for **virtual team-building** and allow time for members to connect with one another- **personally & professionally**
- Create a **virtual break room** that allows team members to have informal interactions (exp. start meetings with an “icebreaker” question check-in, create a TEAMS channel share information and updates, etc.)
- **Turn on the camera** to maintain connection between team members, gain contextual clues, and gauge engagement. While this can be difficult while working from home it can be helpful to view nonverbal cues and gauge engagement. Lead by example and encourage employees to do so when they can.

What have you been doing to help your team build and maintain relationships? What can you try in the next 30 days? Who can help?

2. Clarify Tasks and Processes

Coordinating work can be challenging in a virtual environment. It’s important for leaders to provide clarity about the work processes, deliverables, and ownership. While clarity is critical it is also important not to fall into the “micro-management trap” which can be demotivating and lead to a disengaged team.

- Focus on the details of **task design** and the **processes** used to complete the work at hand
- **Simplify** work as much as possible so tasks can be assigned to sub-groups
- **Clarify, specify, and track-** Clarify processes and expectations, specify who is responsible, and track progress. Avoid “micro-managing” and demotivating your team by involving them in the process.
- Revisit as needed to identify **process adjustments** and **training needs**

What have you been doing to clarify processes, deliverables, and ownership to your team? What can you try in the next 30 days? Who can help?

3. Foster Shared Leadership

Providing clarity around tasks and process provides a “push” to keep your team productive. Fostering shared leadership creates a “pull” and can increase team engagement while providing development opportunities.

- **Involve others in leading the team** by identify opportunities for other to lead such as leading virtual team building; mentoring new hires; sharing best practices; rotating team meeting leaders; etc.

How do you currently foster shared leadership? What can you try in the next 30 days? Who can help?

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4. Commit to Communicate

Virtual communication tends to be less frequent and susceptible to misunderstanding. To navigate these challenges, it is important to be clear and disciplined about how the team will communicate.

- Create **shared vision** and **guiding principles** for how the team will work in a virtual environment
- Be **specific** about how and when team will communicate
- As a team, establish **norms of behavior for virtual meetings** (i.e. mute when not speaking, limit side conversations, listen attentively, turn on camera if available, etc.)
- **Provide guidance** on what type of communication should be used when (i.e. when to send a TEAMS message vs. email vs. call a colleague). This guidance can minimize ambiguity and frustration and increase team effectiveness.

What are you currently doing to ensure your team is communicating effectively? Have you provided clear guidance on how your team should communicate? What can you try in the next 30 days? Who can help?

5. Embrace Technology

Technology allows us to work virtually but it can become a barrier if it is not reliable or doesn't support the type of work your team does.

- Select the GT approved technology that is both **easy to use** and offers the **features your team needs** (i.e. file sharing, breakout rooms, etc.)
- Ensure all team members use the same technology
- Identify training opportunities for team members to leverage technology effectively

Is your team using collaboration technology effectively? What can you try in the next 30 days? Who can help?

6. Rhythm (no blues)

When team members are working separately in different locations it is easy to become disconnected from rhythms of work life. To combat this challenge:

- **Schedule regular team meetings and 1:1s with direct reports.**
- **Share agenda** in advance
- Clarify meeting communication protocols (i.e. submit questions via chat vs. unmute to ask questions)
- Start/Stop on time
- Rotate meeting times to equitably spread "burden" based on time zones, school schedules, etc.

What are you currently doing to create a regular "rhythm" for your team? What can you try in the next 30 days? Who can help?
