

Leading and Managing a Virtual Team During COVID-19



Leading a remote team may be new for you as increasing tension around COVID-19 (Coronavirus) urges businesses to send their employees home. How can you mindfully and effectively guide others as you navigate through this unknown territory?

First, Check in with Yourself

Before diving into the logistics of managing a remote team, it's important to take stock of your well-being first. Take a moment to pause. Notice the thoughts and emotions that are arising right now. Notice sensations in the body. Acknowledge and be present with whatever it is you're experiencing.

It can be helpful to give language to the emotions you're feeling. There might be a sense of unease or of being overwhelmed. It might feel exciting or terrifying – or both.

Consider beginning each day with a few minutes of mindfulness – a foundational practise that allows you to shore yourself up so that you can begin each day feeling more centred and clear.

Practise Compassion

Self-compassion means accepting your thoughts and feelings with openness and without judgement. It also includes recognising our common humanity – knowing that whatever you are experiencing, you are not alone.

We're all thrown off balance right now due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and are stepping up to this higher purpose: to protect one another. In addition to minimising our own exposure, we are acting on behalf of the greater good. Working remotely is a compassionate act.

Many employees appreciate the opportunity to work remotely. This is a chance for them to do their best work individually and collectively – a chance for them to really shine.

And, in this time of unease and uncertainty, your team needs your mindful leadership. They need your calm presence and a sense of clarity and focus. As you shift into working remotely, your team needs to feel connected to you and to one another.

“Uncertainty is a permanent part of the leadership landscape. It never goes away.” – Andy Stanley

Ten Tips to Consider when Managing a Remote Team

1. Connect with your staff one-on-one on a regular basis. Ask how they're doing and what kind of support they need.
2. Eliminate distractions so that you can be fully present to listen, empathise and offer compassion.
3. Connect as a team. Team members need one another. They need to feel unified towards a common aim.
4. Be honest even if uncertain. Allow yourself to be vulnerable, sharing your own uncertainty or unease as a way to engender trust and build connection.
5. Be clear about expectations and stay on track with projects.
5. Remember that your team is innovative and capable of rising to this challenge. Their diverse talents and strengths are invaluable right now.
7. Communicate more than ever via email, texts, phone calls and video chats. Match the technology to the task. Consider handwritten messages of appreciation sent by post.
8. Bring in resources as needed – for example, someone from IT support who can offer guidance along the way as team members shift to working remotely.
9. Create a culture of continual learning. John F. Kennedy said “Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.” Learning agility means being open to new ideas and systems, and viewing mistakes as opportunities for learning.
10. Attend to yourself. By nurturing your own well-being, you'll be more present and better able to lead those who are counting on you.

Practise the STOP Method for Reducing Feelings of Being Overwhelmed

This mindfulness technique, known as STOP, takes only a minute. It's especially useful when you're feeling reactive or overwhelmed – helping you make decisions and move forward with greater calmness and clarity.

STOP and take a moment to pause.

TAKE a breath.

OBSERVE your experience without judging.

PROCEED with the action most needed in that moment.

High-Performing Teams

High-performing teams are clear about their shared purpose. They trust one another and their leader and feel free to express feelings and ideas.

The best leaders bring people together, inspiring and supporting their teams. Your caring, compassionate, and skillful leadership will support your team's highest performance – allowing them to really shine through this transition, and this uncertain and challenging time.

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