TOP TIPS FOR LEADING REMOTE TEAMS.

Leading and managing a team at a distance is predominantly about leadership and management – the principles haven't changed. What has changed is that people are working in different places and possibly even on different shift patterns. Given those changes, how we apply the timeless principles of good leadership and management in this new world, matters a great deal – for your team members, for you and for our organisation.

The following tool kit aims to give you a series of guiding principles and some hints and tips to help you do this.

The seven guiding principles for leading remote teams successfully

1. Focus on great leadership and management first, and location second

If you commit to excellence in leadership and management, the difficulties of having a remote team will become less over time. Work on developing your own capability with remote teams in mind.

2. Accept the fact that leading remotely will require you to lead differently

Working remotely changes the interpersonal dynamics (even if you don't want it to), as you won't get the same opportunities for informal communication, so seek these out where you can.

3. Leading remotely needs a focus on outcomes – for others and for ourselves

Work with your team to ensure that you focus on achieving goals – not just setting them.

4. Learn how to coach all your team effectively, regardless of where they work

Understand what your team are thinking, not just what they are doing. Building trust won't happen by accident so you need to work hard on keeping promises or explaining why you are unable to.

5. Use technology as a tool not a barrier or an excuse

Identify the results you need, then select the communication tool rather than the other way around, and make the very best use of the tools you choose by understanding what they can do.

6. Seek feedback from remote team members at every opportunity

Don't just 'push' information out to remote teams but ask for their views and opinions, understanding your own style and preferences so that you can better understand your team's responses.

7. Accept that you can't do everything single-handed

You need to empower team members to make decisions for themselves – being very clear about your priorities and sharing these with your team, will help them to make the right decisions.

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Key considerations to help you

Time and space

Virtual teams are affected by time in that due to different shift patterns, or work commitments, team members are unable to meet together to communicate. If team members work in different buildings, cities or countries, then it is the space between them that causes issues. However, in many ways, both time and space issues manifest themselves in the same way – team members find it difficult to communicate with each other and as a result, the team dynamics are greatly emphasised.

Common virtual team leadership myths

There are a number of common myths associated with leadership within virtual teams:

- Virtual team members can be left alone because they're self directed
- Virtual team members can't be trusted
- I can't lead what I can't see
- Technology is there to challenge me
- Building trust is less important and less possible in virtual teams than face-to-face
- I'll never get to really "know" the people who work for me.

Good practice in leading virtual teams

- Ensure that members who are not co-located with the team leader are made to feel part of the team
- Provide timely and specific feedback to all team members
- Make sure that team processes do not favour members who are co-located with the leader (such as sign off procedures for expenses, etc)
- Review reward and recognition processes to ensure that they are consistent for all team members, regardless of location
- Establish personal contact with team members early on through face-to-face meetings
- Arrange calendars to participate in team calls and meetings
- Recommend a review of the process for completing work on time to ensure adequate collaboration/review is provided due to time differences and in the absence of face-to-face meetings
- Review update/status process for reviewing progress on deliverables/milestones to ensure adequate checkpoints are set up and agreed upon.

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Team processes within virtual teams

PROCESS	AFFECT OF VIRTUAL TEAM	LEADERSHIP ACTIONS
Purpose and Identity	Common purpose is difficult to establish and easily eroded. Identity from external factors (local site colleagues, national or local identity, etc.), can overpower the identity of the virtual team.	Plan face-to-face time wherever possible to establish rapport. Maintain regular team two-way communication with time for fun and informality.
Structure	Structure can be blurred with "perceived" structures being different from intended.	Ensure communication media reinforce the intended structure rather than undermining it.
Interaction and Communication	Interaction is limited. Communication is increasingly asynchronous (email, phone messages)	See communication as part of the work that the team does, rather than in addition to it. Build agreed rules into communication processes.
Power and Authority	Power is eroded over time and space.	Recognise that communication is the key source of power. Trust and empower as much as possible, but communicate frequently.
Climate and cohesion	Cohesion is difficult to establish. Climate is heavily influenced at local level.	Be aware of individual's circumstances. Do as much as possible to establish trust and interdependence within the virtual team to aid cohesion.
Values, Rules and Norms	Heavily influenced at local level and therefore, difficult to establish team norms.	Agree communication rules and norms at the earliest opportunity, from which others can be built.
Decision Making	Slowed, delayed.	Provide structure/process to decisions with clarity on timings (when a decision is to be made, by when contributions should have been received) and what part team members play in making the decision.

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