



Thrive as You Work from
Home

How To Be a Leader from Home

Coaching and Support for you and your
business leaders



Leading from Home – part 2

We know and understand that the last few weeks have been challenging to say the least but as we progress it would be wise to connect with the facts that this could be the norm for some weeks to come.

In our previous article (Leading from Home – Part 1) we offered some suggestions for how you can lead during this period of 'containedness'.

It included:

- Be Self-Aware
- Set Clear Intentions
- Listen
- Participation
- Objective Achievement

The above points all support the question "How do we establish effective and relational connections with our team members in the absence of frequent face-to-face communications?"

In this article we discuss

"how we maintain social contact and ensure our teams develop through virtual leadership".

It takes a look at the following topics

- **Creating Social Contact**
- **Time Vortex**
- **Trust**
- **Team and Individual Development**

The approach to **virtual leadership** has been around for some time due to the evolution of online technology. Now more than ever we need to tap into perspectives, approaches and attitudes of those who already lead virtually and have learnt the lessons we can adopt.

As with face-to-face teams, leadership of virtual teams is a crucial element in the effectiveness of the team, and delivery of business results.

However, compared to leaders of face-to-face teams, virtual team leaders face the following additional challenges:

(a) logistical problems, including coordinating work across different time zones and physical distances.





(b) technological difficulties, including finding and learning to use appropriate technology. In global virtual teams, there is the added dimension of cultural differences which impact on a virtual team's functioning.

and

(c) interpersonal issues, including an ability to establish effective working relationships in the absence of frequent face-to-face communication



For the purpose of this article we will continue to focus on the latter point (c) and ask the question:

How do we establish effective and relational connections in the absence of frequent face-to-face communications by creating social contact and maintain focus that ensures team members are developed?

Following on from Leading from Home – Part 1, and assuming that all the elements of self-awareness, listening and encouraging participation are in place, the next steps take us up a level.

Why focus on social contact at all?

As a face-face leader we may not appreciate all the incidental moments we have when we work in the same place as a team member or colleague. The water cooler moment where we share our views on the latest box-set release, or the 'pre-meeting' meeting as we wait to enter the meeting room. The opportunities for lunch together, or post work drinks. So how do we establish social contact when we are living in a virtual world.

Several years ago (2012) Harvard Business Review (HBR) released the following article. <https://hbr.org/2012/04/the-new-science-of-building-great-teams>

The article uncovers how energy, engagement and exploration are the key to building great teams, with energy being pivotal. The research concluded that

“Social time turns out to be deeply critical to team performance, often accounting for more than 50% of positive changes in communication patterns”

The behaviours observed during this research, included the following:

1. Everyone on the team talks and listens in roughly equal measure, keeping contributions short and sweet.
2. Members face one another, and their conversations and gestures are energetic.
3. Members connect directly with one another—not just with the team leader.
4. Members carry on back-channel or side conversations within the team.
5. Members periodically break, go exploring outside the team, and bring information back.

It also concluded that:

“The most valuable form of communication is face-to-face. E-mail and texting are the least valuable”.

So how do we transfer our face to face learnings to virtual face to face?





Creating Social Contact

Each contact point in a virtual team holds increased importance. Below are some suggestions of ways to create social contact for your teams.

- When a meeting starts, create time to allow the team to 'transition' into the virtual space.
 - Create the **chitchat corridor** that would undeniably happen as we enter a meeting room space in the physical world.
 - Find your own ways to help them move into the virtual meeting room.
 - Discuss the weather. Invite them to bring their tea/coffee etc.
 - **Create a pause, a mindful connection to the moment they are in.**
 - Ask them to put mobile phones and distractions to one side. i.e close outlook, the document they are working on that's not relevant to the meeting.
- Give permission to the team so that they can create separate virtual huddles to bounce ideas and chitchat. Insist that these happen as a priority over '**text overload**'. Recognise that included in the phrase 'text' will be virtual chatrooms – Whats App etc.
- Encourage team members to dial up the energy during online meetings. This may mean some physical movement for some individuals, getting closer to the screen etc.
- Consider how you may create time to socialise using show and tell, quizzes etc.
 - Ask each team member to give scores out of 10 for how the meeting made them feel before the meeting is drawn to a close. Ask for ways to improve the connection.
 - Use your creativity and be open to mistake making through innovation.
 - **Role model and show how you are bringing energy. Stay mindful to being present.**
- Encourage team members to meet outside the team gathering. To create time for brainstorming, co-creation, and of course, social time. Check in that this has happened.

Co-create meeting rules with the team and ask everyone to hold each other accountable. How will then ensure the time is used to the best of the task and the team.

Time vortex

Time doesn't move in the same way when we are virtually connected. It is easier to get distracted or day dream when you are the only one in the room! As a leader you are able to maintain attention much easier if you are 1:1 virtually than in groups. Therefore, **less is more** when hosting a team meeting.

- Reduced agenda items are a necessity.
 - **Don't expect to be able to host 3-hour meetings and cover the same amount of content as a physical face to face meeting!**





- Allow for time to conclude the meeting. It will take more time than face to face.
 - This occurs because non-verbal communication is less powerful during virtual meetings and you will need to check in with your team members to ensure all the salient points have been received.
 - Referring to a point earlier in this article, we daydream easier because it's harder for others to notice when we are virtual.
- Breaks are essential during longer meetings. Encourage movement, comfort breaks, coffee refresh etc. Leaving the meeting room open also creates additional conversation time for those who remain online.

Trust

A virtual leader must nurture a feeling of trust among all team members – something team members also have an influence on and must be aware of.

However, the leader is responsible for this in the first place. Leaders must ensure a sense of psychological safety within a team by allowing all members to speak honestly and directly but respectfully to each other.

Research uncovered distrust, personality differences, generational differences in views, scheduling issues and technology difficulties as the top five inhibitors for virtual team creativity and success.

“Concept of trust-based open communication was identified as one of the important strategies when teams actively use virtual communication tools”

- Allocation of work and actions.
 - **The team need to feel that as leader you are allocating work and actions fairly.**
- Emphasis wins
 - Taking time to be clear and explicit that activity has taken place and that actions have been completed is highlighted as one way to demonstrate that all team members are “pulling their weight”, therefore creating a trust-bond.
- Individual ownership and responsibility
 - **Team members may choose to work at different times of the day.** Often with agreement of the leader, occasionally as a flexible way of working to suit the broader team or their work-life balance.
 - When operating as a virtual team it would be unwise to expect a 9-5 mentality. Working remotely requires different strategies to keep mental and physical focus. Each team member will learn and recognise what works for them. Core hours may want to be agreed depending on the activity the team is there to achieve.

As a leader, building trust on a 1:1 basis may also come in the allocation of tasks to a team member that provides opportunity for personal development.





Team and Individual Development

Recognise that as task, projects and innovation opportunities come through the team that this will also provide an opportunity for team and personal development.

- New skill to team.
 - The introduction of new processes, procedures, software and legalities provide you with an opportunity to collect the team together for development.
 - Be clear on expectations for the session.
 - How they will bring themselves to the session ready to learn.
 - Offer pre-reading that can get them up to speed and prepared to ask questions.
- New skill to individual
 - Be prepared to create space with an individual to development them should the opportunity arise. This can often be overlooked when working virtually.
 - When allocating actions, pause to reflective if that is within the skill set of the individual.
 - Recognise that there is a difference in the approach of developing someone online. Take time to create ways of work together and clarity on the approach that will work best.

Use some of your learnings from Leading from Home – Part 1. Pay particular attention on how to get clear on intentions and objectives.

Leading from Home – Part 2

In this article we have offered some suggestions for how you can lead during this period of 'containedness'. This included:

- **Creating Social Contact**
- **Time Vortex**
- **Trust**
- **Team and Individual Development**

These all support the question “How do we establish effective and relational connections in the absence of frequent face-to-face communications by creating social contact and maintain focus that ensures team members are developed”?

Throughout the discussion points in both articles the predominant focus point which a leader can do to build effective teams and communication online, is **know-self**.

- Notice how you are being present.
- Notice how you are contributing to the team culture.
- Notice what you are thinking and curious about.
- Notice how you are feeling about being in the team, and the energy when you are all together. As leader you will be contributing to that.





Be open to noticing, reflecting, adjusting and realigning. Time and patience are the partners in becoming an effective virtual leader.

Further reading and research

https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_reffkin_5_ways_to_create_stronger_connections#t-173251

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/EJTD-10-2016-0073/full/html>

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