



leading remotely in times of uncertainty.

Follow these top 10 tips for leading virtual teams during challenging times.

Business disruption is a constant in today's world, whether from technology impacts or market forces. The worldwide COVID-19 outbreak, however, has created disruption like we have not seen in modern times. The situation has challenged many companies to rethink the way they operate and quickly create work from home options for employees.

Future disruptions may come in other forms that keep people away from their offices and regular routines. Now is the time to understand what it takes to lead in times of uncertainty, when you can't be with your team in person.

“The range of possible futures confronting business is great. Companies that nurture flexibility, awareness, and resiliency are more likely to survive the crisis, and even to prosper.”

— The McKinsey Quarterly

Here are our top 10 tips for leaders who are seeking to keep their people safe, guide teams wisely, build a culture of loyalty and trust, and maintain business continuity as much as possible — all while working remotely.

01. Lead with calmness.

First and foremost, know that your team is looking to you for cues. They want to understand how they should feel about or react to the situation at hand. This is your opportunity to avoid panic by using calm, yet definitive, language.

Be clear on what you stand for and share your message without creating an emotional impact. It is especially important to avoid labeling things or people as being “wrong.”

02. Put trust first.

In a remote leadership scenario, it is key to trust that your people can manage themselves and their workloads. This is especially true when virtual work is new to a team. Believe that your people want to be successful and continue to achieve their goals even though the day-to-day situation has changed.

You can help foster feelings of trust by focusing on results (versus tasks), assigning responsibility to the appropriate team members, and distributing decision-making to help avoid bottlenecks. The goal is to create a culture of shared accountability, where people step up to the challenge and are eager to help each other out.

03. Practice 'radical transparency.'

Transparency is vital to being a successful leader. Whether you are virtual or in person, the same principles apply. Start by clearly articulating why decisions – such as the decision to work remotely – are being made. Get ahead of the difficult questions by communicating an accurate view of the reality that your people and the business are facing.

That means sharing whatever knowledge you have, while also admitting that you might not have all the answers. Be honest about tough news and, again, avoid placing blame. Most of all, be transparent with news about business results, impact and team performance.

“Radical transparency” is creating a culture that is direct and honest in communication and sharing of company strategies so that all people are trusting and loyal to the continuous evolution of the organization. For leaders, radical transparency is a way to build trust with their employees.

— Gene Hammett

04. Strategically over-communicate.

Communicate, communicate and then communicate again. There's no other way to say it. Effective communication is essential when people are working virtually, especially in times of business disruption and distraction. You can create virtual community platforms – either on your company intranet or via a third-party app – and share messages that can be easily accessed by all.

Deploy video chat (encourage everyone to turn their cameras on) and web share options that encourage two-way participation and appeal to people who learn visually. And be sure to increase your one-on-one meetings to ensure alignment and support while your teams are apart.

05. Stick to the facts.

In times of uncertainty, facts rise to the top. It's important during times of uncertainty that you're making decisions based on fact, not perception. Use credible sources to keep informed and educate your team as concerns arise. Considering that there is still so much unknown, the human brain will naturally want to fill in the missing pieces with assumptions.

Anxiety can be quelled with evidence and data. That's why leaders must be informed by credible sources and engage in fact-based decision-making. If panic begins to ensue, step back for a moment and ask yourself (or your team), “What do we know for sure? And how do we know that?”

06. Practice your leadership agility.

Different leadership styles come into play at different times every day in normal business operations. When leading remotely, these same styles can play an important role in building confidence among teams.

Leadership styles include:

- **affiliative:** makes people feel heard and increase feelings of belonging in times of uncertainty
- **pace-setting:** ensures that there is structure and progress towards common goals
- **directive:** leads through uncertainty by being clear on what you know
- **coaching:** helps people create meaningful goals that will drive motivation when working remotely
- **visionary:** supports engagement and team building; makes people feel like a cohesive team working towards a common goal

07. Create 'safe spaces.'

Safe spaces are built on trust and understanding. Give your people the psychological safety to express their feelings, either during meetings or one-on-one conversations. Practice active listening and be curious about what people are saying. Acknowledge the range of emotions that may arise without the need to judge or fix anyone's feelings.

You also want to avoid a “business as usual” tone when uncertainty reigns. It can be distracting and unproductive if your team believes that you have unspoken fears. Instead find ways to increase sharing through virtual coffee dates or working lunches.



08. Leverage technology.

There are more virtual communication and collaboration tools available than ever before. Chances are that you are already using some of them in your work.

Increase the use of shared calendars, Google documents and project trackers to help teams collaborate in real time. Create virtual communities for informal communication, along with centralized depositories for information sharing and visibility into team goals. Also encourage employees to keep their webcams on for face-to-face interaction. It will help your team feel connected, present and accountable.

09. Structure meetings to be effective in a virtual environment.

Virtual meetings can be just as effective as those that take place in person. Start by always having an agenda and ensuring that all who attend can play a role in the meeting. Ask team-building questions to encourage social interaction and invite other departments to avoid potential silos.

Provide frequent updates on overall business trends and corporate strategy, just like you would normally. Also be sure to celebrate successes and acknowledge good work. Look for ways to create rituals for your virtual team, like recognizing special occasions or always ending the meeting with a good news story.

Finally, when the meeting is over, provide a shared document that outlines everything you talked about in terms of insights, commitments and actions.

10. Set clear expectations and structure.

Leading remotely will demand more documentation and structure to ensure success. It goes back to over-communicating and ensuring that everyone has a shared understanding of their goals and roles.

Set concrete deadlines and notate them where everyone has access. Define each team member's responsibilities and set a formal reporting cadence on goals, with actions delegated in writing. Create a schedule for regular team and individual meetings. Above all, be intentional when you give feedback, as it will be harder to circle back around like you might normally do in person.

Prepare for what's next.

We hope that you will find these 10 tips for leading remote teams during uncertainty to be valuable as you find new ways to work in today's business environment. They can help you get through the immediate challenges and be prepared for whatever comes next.



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