Long-Distance Leadership:
A Manager's Guide to Leading their Remote Team

You're not used to having someone on your team work remotely. And maybe now, some (if not all) suddenly are. How can you make sure they're just as successful in their jobs while at home, as they are in the office? Read some best practices for setting up your team for success while they work remotely – and how you can shift your own managerial style too.

1. **First and foremost, make sure your team has reliable collaboration tools.**
   As most of us know, no one likes being on a conference call when the connection is bad, and people are cutting in and out. It's frustrating. In order to make this transition as smooth as possible, make sure everyone is aware of all the collaboration tools available to them, like Microsoft Teams, Webex, and Skype for Business – and encourage them to do a test ahead time!

   - [7 Ways Microsoft Teams Allows You to Communicate Better than Outlook](#)

2. **Establish clear expectations.**
   From the start, it is important to work with your team to agree on day-to-day expectations and ground rules in order to lessen some of the uncertainty of transitioning to a work from home environment. Here are a few questions ([Link to Forbes Article Here](#)) to get your dialogue started:
   - What are the *normal* working hours for the team? When will the workday begin, and when will it end?
   - How long will it take to get back to each other? If we reach out with a question, should I expect an answer immediately? Within the hour? By the end of the day? And will this change based on communication channel? Do I need to get an email back to you by the end of the day, but a phone call indicates that I need to speak with you urgently?
   - How will we notify each other when we will be unavailable and unable to meet these expectations (e.g. doctor's appointment)? Do we just let the boss know? Or do we send a team email? Or use a shared calendar?

   KEY WATCH OUT – While it is easy to expect great things from your people – and you should – be mindful of your own expectations and be willing to be flexible when what your employee says they are capable of in a day does not align with your opinion. Remember to stay focused on your team goals, and not the day-to-day activity. Trust your team to get done what they say they will get done and show you are supportive of their success by using inquiry to help them achieve their goals rather than check on their progress and numbers.

3. **Create a cadence of communication.**
   Perhaps one of the more disconcerting factors of COVID-19 is the amount of ambiguity regarding the future it brings and working from home can worsen those anxieties with feelings of being cut off from the resources they are accustomed to. By engaging with your team on a regular and predictable basis, you can establish a feeling of "closeness" between yourself, your employees, and your employees and their co-workers. Establish a weekly one-on-one meeting and give every direct report 30-minutes to build a relationship, ask questions, give ideas and feedback, and review priorities. Next, set up a weekly team meeting that should take no longer than 30 – 50 minutes. This is an opportunity to share and sync up on their weekly priorities and problems.

4. **Establish a video-first culture.**
   A video-first culture is one that places importance on video conferencing tools, as opposed to audio only conference calls. Benefits of this practice include the ability to use and observe non-verbal communication as well as the lessening of external distractions because it encourages people to participate from a professional, quiet location (as opposed to driving in their car). By using video-first communication methods, not only will you and your team process information better but turning on the camera helps avoid the temptation to multitask. Before implementing, talk to your employees about this idea and discuss the potential impacts it would have on their remote experience.

5. **Keep it personal.**
Relationships are a critical part to a high performing team, and personal relationships go a long way to building trust and reducing unproductive conflict. While in a traditional office, water cooler conversations and lunch time chatter happens naturally as employees go about their day, in a work from home environment, this needs to be intentionally cultivated. Here are a few tips and tricks to keep remote teams' fun and person:
   - Use the first few minutes of your one-on-one or group meetings to ask about their weekend, or similar personal interest.
   - Make sure to recognize team members for the effort and achievements. Share to the whole team positive feedback from customers, or internal customers.

6. **Remember your employees are individuals with different work styles.**
Some remote workers feel isolated by working alone, while others feel liberated. Some love 24/7 access to work; others need to have a real boundary between office and home. Some do their best work in the middle of the night, while others keep strict office hours. Accepting a remote worker's method and reasoning helps managers coach to the individual on behalf of the company, promoting the corporate benefits that characterize off-site work. Individualization helps remote workers "feel cared for as a person," which is a fundamental element of engagement.

Sources:
   - [Forbes (1)](#)
   - [Forbes (2)](#)
   - [Fast Company](#)
   - [Harvard Business Review](#)
   - [Gallup (1)](#)
   - [Gallup (2)](#)
   - [British Broadcasting Company (BBC)](#)
   - [CNBC](#)