

How to Lead a Remote Team

No matter where your workers are, lead them to success with these tactics.

By Chris Dyer

The movement is growing: More and more organizations are going partially or fully virtual. It's a move that requires two different mindsets to handle two major initiatives:

- **paying attention** to internal policies and systems
- **honing** a style of leadership that's at once hands-on and hands-off.

Here's how to sustain this balance:

Get Your Systems in Place

Effective leadership hinges on each member of the team being treated equally. That means having systems that work seamlessly, no matter where workers are located. Follow these guidelines:

Establish workflow processes so workers know what success looks like in their roles. Before each project, customize these templates, and let people discuss the new blueprint. They'll thus have a map of where to begin, where to end, and how to get there.

Standardize information by installing a few communication and computer-network technologies. Comprehensive

programs like Slack, for instance, offer communication options you can adjust for your team, project, or data needs.

Use online video technology so people can meet when they're in different locations. Some people swear by Skype. This and other interactive tools like Zoom, Webex, and GoToMeeting provide audio and video connections for groups of all sizes. Such online tools facilitate collaboration and record-keeping with features that include computer screen sharing, meeting recording, transcription, and even voice translation services.

Share documents using online systems such as Dropbox, Google Drive, and other cloud storage services, which allow multiple users to view, edit, and exchange digital files.

Train People to Communicate Effectively

Boost communication for remote workers (and everyone else) with these tips:

Make the organization's communication policy known to all.

Survey staff to find out the way they prefer to be contacted. Some gravitate toward voice calls, some toward text or e-mail. When there's a choice, and when individual



preferences are made public, employees know the quickest route to contacting coworkers.

Train people to listen well. You can do so formally, through workshops or role playing, or less formally, by demonstrating and insisting on thoughtful listening during meetings and other interactions.

Hone your own listening skills, too. Listening comes first; effective speaking comes second. Information is less open to interpretation when everybody knows how to listen, ask clarifying questions, and confirm that what they heard was what the speaker meant to say.

Create a Healthy Feedback Loop

Feedback is the key to success for employees, especially when they're working outside the office:


Have a system to give and receive feedback.

Offer feedback on a continual basis rather than holding annual reviews or closed-door sessions.

Check in with people daily or weekly, using their preferred method of contact.

Consider sending quick questionnaires weekly to receive input.

Hold a group debriefing after every project.

Make it fun. When conducting surveys or gaining feedback in other ways, throw in a trivia question or anecdote. Share personal stories, and ask others to do so. Make warm, human connections as often as possible. 

Chris Dyer is a performance expert, speaker, and consultant. He has channeled what he has learned in his research and as founder and CEO of PeopleG2, a leading background-check company, into his best-selling book, The Power of Company Culture (koganpage.com).

Lead Your Team, Near & Far

No matter where your employees are, lead them with articles such as these at NonprofitWorld.org:

Are You Equipped to Lead in a World of Great Complexity? (Vol. 37, No. 1)

Why Feedback Is the Key to Your Success (Vol. 35, No. 3)

Rate Yourself as a Servant Leader (Vol. 31, No. 1)

Productive Employees: Two Crucial Ingredients (Vol. 37, No. 2)

What Makes a Great Team? (Vol. 32, No. 6)

Be a Better Leader by Being a Careful Listener (Vol. 37, No. 1)

Cloud Communication: A Go-To Strategy to Keep Connected, Cut Costs, & Achieve Your Goals (Vol. 32, No. 4)

Does Your Organization Have a Culture of Great Communication?

A tenet of good remote teams is great communication, and that begins with the right culture. In his thorough, cutting-edge book *The Power of Company Culture*, Chris Dyer explains how to build a culture that improves communication, performance, and success. Here, in simplified form, are some of his pillars of a successful culture – and questions you can use to assess your own organization's culture:

TRANSPARENCY

Is everyone empowered to raise concerns and ask questions – with confidence that they'll get honest responses?

If you keep any information secret, why? What might the benefits be if you released this information?

POSITIVITY

Do you consider saying "Yes" before you respond with "No"? Are you careful to say "Yes and . . ." rather than "Yes but . . ."?

Do you encourage people to laugh, share, have fun, and be spontaneous?

MEASUREMENT

Do you know what key performance indicators (KPIs) predict success for your organization?

Do you conduct surveys and market the results?

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Do you thank people often in as many ways as possible – with words that praise specific things they've done and with actions such as spending time with them, inviting them to lunch, or just asking them how things are going and listening to what they have to say?

Do you have a system to make sure all donors are thanked within 48 hours of receiving their gifts?

LISTENING

Do you listen to understand, rather than to reply?

Do you have a process in place to ask employees for their suggestions – and do you listen and respond to those ideas?

MISTAKES

Do you share your own mistakes and encourage others to share theirs without fear of reprisal?

Do you record information learned from mistakes in a searchable database for later use?