

Remote Leadership Can Bring Out Your Best

Depending on the situation, many employees are able to work remotely these days. If you find yourself managing such teams, be sure to create the right atmosphere.

Sooner or later you'll find yourself leading a team where one or more of your people work remotely. You can turn this situation into an advantage by leveraging diverse backgrounds and highly motivated employees. To do this, you'll need to avoid the possible communication and effectiveness pitfalls and make sure you're making use of all the means at your disposal to operate effectively from a distance. Interestingly enough, my experiences in P&G as both a remote manager and a remote employee have made me a more disciplined manager.

Various situations, be it with remote teams who work from their homes or international employees in different time zones, bring unique characteristics to which you'll need to adjust your management style. That said, the basics for any manager remain the same—you just have to do them better. Do them well, and you'll have a highly energized and driven work team. The consequences of not doing so are twice as disastrous with remote teams.

What You Can Do

Let me share some of my favorite must-do items for any remote leader.

1. Energize your team with a vision. To win as a team and as an organization, it's critical to involve your remote group in the creation and deployment of a common vision. Ask yourself what your most important breakthrough will be, and set this as the direction that propels your people and your action plan. If it isn't possible to do this face to face, take time to have a brainstorming forum, group chats, and calls with video where you come to a clear, meaningful statement of the accomplishment your team will be known for.

2. Engage them with a robust action plan. This is probably one of the most critical aspects of remote leadership. Each team member needs to feel engaged and have a clear understanding about what will be requested from them or their teams, how it will be measured, and when you will expect it. To do this well is to set a solid foundation and clear the way for what will come. Draft an action plan with a clear link to your vision, and engage each team member individually with the objectives assigned to them. Align

on the way updates will be presented and on key milestones. Give examples of the way you like updates to be presented and the data you expect to see in them.

3. Be in touch with your team. You need to be disciplined about having periodic touchpoints in order to stay connected. Watch out for overly independent employees who think they don't need direction and allow the distance to grow. It's important to align priorities, review action-plan progress, and talk about career development. It also doesn't hurt to build a personal relationship that fosters trust and open communication. Though there are various constraints, mostly financial, make sure to schedule face-to-face time as much as possible, and, again, make use of the vast array of available videoconferencing technologies. It isn't a requirement, but a leader with a personal touch is very effective and builds trust. I remember Bud Kulesza, former IMA Chair and leader of an IMA volunteer group to which I belonged, being aware when my father passed away and also congratulating me when I told him my wife was pregnant. We made it a point to try to meet up once a year to have a beer and a laugh. He is

one of the leaders I most admire, and he has impacted my own style.

4. Celebrate success. As action-plan goals and objectives are accomplished, make sure to take time to recognize your team. Involve your immediate supervisor in periodic updates, and get the right exposure for your team or individuals. Pay special attention to communicating effectively and celebrating breakthrough results and contributions. Above and beyond shouldn't be invisible. Make sure your immediate supervisor is aware of what you're doing, is involved, and knows your team. He or she needs to be able to represent them well during performance appraisals or promotion recommendations.

5. Build a team identity. Schedule regular team meetings where you discuss and review relevant topics with team members. Encourage them to create sub-teams to work on organizational development items that benefit the group and, if possible, the entire organization, such as training, Web information-sharing portals, process improvements, network, etc.

6. It isn't for everybody. The advantages of having a remote team are possible only if the individuals have strong ethical values and principles. Micromanaging is much harder and rather unproductive in these situations. Monitoring when an employee logs in or out, if he or she is connected from a certain place or another, or simply monitoring daily productivity just isn't effective in many businesses. Having the right people and behavior is crucial, so take time to provide honest and effective feedback. You need to point out behaviors that aren't acceptable, and be espe-

cially careful when people are falling behind. This might require a strong intervention.

Contrary to common beliefs, people working remotely often end up putting in more hours than those who are in the office. Make sure you stay aware of this situation, and avoid overloading the person who is out of sight. A good work/life balance is as important here as anywhere else. Stay on top of career interests and morale to ensure you maximize productivity and minimize costs.

Setting a Good Example

One of the best remote managers I have seen in P&G was managing a small team of financial analysts out of Cincinnati while many of his peers were doing so locally. Tom Kennedy was adored by his group. He was on top of their development plans, engaged in career and progression discussions, and always had time to set direction and follow up with his people. It wasn't unexpected for him to drop by my desk when he was in the country to chat about his team, recognize them in local events, and have some face time together. It was no accident that he came out on top of all his peers during our annual coaching assessments. He used to tell me how happy he was with his group and how lucky he was to have them. He showed genuine interest and cared for his people, which was quite an inspiration.

As many of you have already experienced, being an effective leader and setting direction is very hard work that takes skill, time, and dedication. It's also one of the most rewarding things you can do.

You have a unique opportunity to make a difference in people's lives, and, if you are truly dedicated, you'll earn their respect as a real leader. Remote leadership isn't a new art—it's the perfection of an art you already know and have practiced. If you can do it, it will bring out the best in you! **SF**

Esteban Quiros, CMA, is the North America Supply Chain F&A manager, Procter and Gamble, San Jose Service Center, San Jose, Costa Rica. You can reach him at +1150622041167 or quiros.e@pg.com.

Perspectives

continued from page 6

I believe we've laid a firm foundation for the future growth of our organization, which, starting July 1, will be guided by a new Chair (I'll be moving into the Chair-Emeritus role). This marks my final column in these pages, so I want to thank all of the volunteers and staff who have made this past year such a remarkable one of learning and service for me. Thanks to all members, too, for giving me this opportunity to enjoy a small part in shaping the future of our organization. I wish the very best of luck to incoming Chair John Macaulay, a long-time IMA member who embraces a strong commitment to service, as well as to Chair-Elect William Knese, another devoted IMA member and former ICMA Board of Regents Chair.

As always, I remain eager to hear your thoughts on this or any other topic. Please share them with me at bmcguire@imanet.org. **SF**