

Leading Remote Teams

Moving to remote working during the current crisis is a challenge for everyone, not least our people managers whose leadership is critical in making this work. Drawing on Positive Psychology here are some suggestions on areas to consider as you lead your team from a distance.

<p>Clarify the focus</p>	<p>One of the most important pieces of information you can instil in any team, but especially a virtual team, is the clarity of their purpose and their goals. Your team need to know exactly <u>what</u> they are accountable for, when you want them to deliver it and what good looks like. Frequent reminders of how they are contributing to the bigger picture are important for motivation. It's also important to make sure every team member is clear about <u>how</u> you will work together remotely, how you keep each other updated, and how frequently.</p>
<p>Extend Trust</p>	<p>Managers who have newly formed virtual teams may have concerns such as: "I don't know what's going on. I don't know if my team are working." A better question to ask is "Is the work getting done?" Managers need to be flexible around when and how employees are working e.g. if team members at home also have caring responsibilities they may need to work as and when they can. Focus on outcomes and objectives rather than working hours and invite your team to develop work patterns that are practical and effective in delivering objectives.</p> <p>Another facet of trust is communication. In the office, we use a lot of nonverbal communication and can often visually see if someone is available to talk. In a remote setting, we need to be more intentional about our efforts to connect and engage. Managers need to communicate their expectations explicitly and make sure they are understood. If someone on your team doesn't respond as expected, don't make assumptions. Instead, check if there has been a communication glitch or misunderstanding. Making your calendar available to team members is also important at this time so they know when you have availability.</p>
<p>Create space for meaningful connections</p>	<p>The most difficult part of working from home for many can be the isolation. People need feedback, interaction and idea exchange with others to support their wellbeing at work – even when that work is taking place remotely! Keep the rhythm of regular 1:1s and team meetings. At team meetings managers should try to follow the 80/20 rule – listen 80% of the time and speak 20% of the time. Build some time into online meetings to check in on how each team member is doing outside of their work responsibilities. Maybe even schedule 1 session a week which is purely social, a virtual coffee morning to catch up with</p>

	colleagues. Technology allows us to continue to function as a team but it's the conversations we have once there that matter.
Empathise	Recognise that we have not simply moved business as usual to an online environment - everybody is dealing with upheaval, stress and uncertainty in their personal lives too. Your teams will have a range of home working setups some of which are less than ideal due to living arrangements, caring responsibilities etc. Let your teams know that you recognise these challenges and talk about how best you can support them.
Look for and recognise the good	<p>Working remotely is new for many people and transitioning to a virtual team brings its own challenges but it also gives you a great opportunity as a people leader to focus on and amplify what's going well. Teams will undoubtedly find innovative and unexpected ways to solve problems and get work done. You should intentionally 'look for the good', acknowledge and highlight when things are going well.</p> <p>Recognition is more critical when people are under pressure and out of their comfort zone and routine. Say thank you more often than you usually do. We sometimes take for granted that people know they are valued and appreciated but managers need to be even more explicit about this when working remotely.</p>
Prioritise information sharing	Without unscheduled opportunities to chat with colleagues, it becomes more challenging to pick up information in passing. Share appropriate updates or learnings from other meetings and projects and invite your team to do the same.
Find a sustainable pace	Finding a sustainable pace for you and your team is important to avoid burn out and support sustained team performance. Lead by example by scheduling clear lunch breaks and finish times. Alternate technology to maintain energy – every meeting doesn't have to be a video call! Consider ending meetings at 10 minutes to the hour to avoid hours of back to back meetings with no opportunity to stretch and move. Role model and reinforce resilience – be present, visible and approachable.
Keep listening	<p>Not being in the same room means you don't have extra information from body language or tone to get the sense of what people are thinking or feeling, particularly in more difficult conversations. Listen for what's not being said and ask questions to clarify your interpretation. Notice who isn't engaging or contributing and follow up with them separately.</p> <p>Your HR partner is a source of support and guidance to you during this time and the Spectrum.life Employee Assistance Programme is available to you and your team. They provide free confidential professional counselling and information services to all RCSI staff and their family anytime. Their services are available 24/7 on Freephone ROI: 1800 903 542 or</p>

	WhatsApp: Text 'Hi' to 087 369 0010. More information on the EAP service can be found here .
Keep Learning	This is a period of stretch, challenge and learning for every leader. Consider keeping a reflective journal for yourself during this unprecedented time. What are you learning about your own leadership abilities? Where are you being challenged? What are you noticing about your team's behaviour? What can you take from this to build a stronger team in the future?

Please note: HR Partners are running 'Schwarz Rounds' sessions to support our people managers at this time and 1:1 coaching sessions are available to any leader who would like to avail of additional support and a reflective space. Please contact catrionacampbell@rcsi.ie to arrange.