Ways to Connect Your Team at a Distance

**CONNECTION** • **COMMUNICATION** • **COLLABORATION**

**Lead intentionally with purpose to connect**
- Touch base regularly with individual team members.
- Include team members when having one-off conversations.
- Formally schedule team meetings via WebEx to touch base and get status inputs.
- While on the telephone, if you sense hesitation or concern, then consider what people are saying or not saying.
- During virtual meetings, check in with each person to ask if he or she has additional thoughts, or questions; ensure everyone has the opportunity to speak.
- Post meeting debriefs in a central location.
- Use webcams as much as possible.
- Set up spontaneous meetings—virtual hallway meetings—via telephone or WebEx.
- Maintain a “virtual open door” policy. For example, managers provide a specific time for team members to call in and talk about whatever is on their mind.
- Provide team access to your calendar—mark things private if needed. Seeing your calendar allows team members to “walk by your office,” so to speak.

**Handle conflict within virtual teams**
- Bridge the gap with communication by having sidebars or one-on-one meetings with team members who are having a conflict.
- Seek understanding using one-on-one meetings. Do not procrastinate.
- When listening to and acting on concerns, assume all parties have good intentions.
- Create an opportunity to discuss or resolve concerns in a team setting. Remind team of higher goals and principals to keep conversation constructive when appropriate.
- Do not let conflict fester. Prevent conflict escalation by having regular check-ins with everybody.
- Lead from below by initiating a webcam to discuss the conflict.
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Create a virtual environment where everyone feels included, involved, and responsible for the collective

- Use good facilitation skills during the meetings.
- Assign a meeting facilitator—not necessarily the leader—to ensure everyone is included. Rotate these duties to include everyone and develop their facilitation skills.
- Bring all team members into the discussion and avoid siding with anyone.
- Organize meetings with audience and geographic differences in mind.
- Work either all virtually or make a concerted effort to include all virtual team members via video or WebEx.

Build and nurture cohesive working relationships

- Build rapport with light and goofy moments to decrease stress.
- Recognize that some team members may attend meetings but are not ready to jump into the conversation.
- Begin meetings with some informal conversation or chit-chat.
- Use humor sometimes in your interactions.
- Celebrate your successes as a team.

Leverage technology

- Use a webcam or VTC to hold the virtual celebrations or virtual coffee break.
- Use Yammer.
- Have team watch testimony together via WebEx.
- Use technology in new ways.
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Build your facilitation skills to keep everyone engaged in discussions
- Leverage facilitation skills in all your conversations with your virtual teams by using one-on-one meetings or team meetings
- As a facilitator, remember to keep things moving and focused in your virtual meetings
- Encourage participation as a facilitator, make sure everyone is heard, and use questions to draw in the silent ones.
- Use your meeting agenda to stay on track.
- Attend training to develop your facilitation skills, that is, language, group dynamics, listening, and so on.
- Solicit feedback on your facilitation skills.

Communicate frequently, authentically, and transparently to establish trust
- Communicate openly and promote this behavior within your team; don’t make people guess your intentions.
- Say what you mean and mean what you say to avoid miscommunications.
- Follow through on your word; make sure people can count on you to do what you say you will do.

Use the appropriate method of communication so that your message is heard and understood
- Use tools in WebEx like the white board to enhance presentations and meeting discussions.
- Consider the best communication method for your message; don’t overly rely on email.
- Consider whether you need visual cues to communicate your message best.
Get to know your team’s work and personal styles to reduce misunderstandings

- Discuss your team’s various styles at your start-up meeting.
- Respect everyone’s various communication styles; remember that everyone differs in the way he or she prefers to communicate.
- Seek to understand each of your team member’s unique styles and adapt to his or her style if you can.

Create informal opportunities for your team to communicate and connect

- Create opportunities to connect with micro-meetings, check-ins, virtual hallway conversations, and virtual open-door times.
- Establish a virtual open door, which is time set aside for any team member to approach the leader.
- Create a “virtual hallway conversation” to debrief the meeting.
Establish and maintain trust
- At the start of your team, discuss what it means to have trust and why it’s important to your team’s success.
- Show courtesy and respect for others.
- Assume good intentions.
- Build some informal socializing time in your telephone conversations, meetings, and so on.
- Create a team culture where everyone is encouraged and free to share information.

Hold team members accountable
- Clearly communicate expectations and deadlines.
- Regularly report the progress of tasks and create a feedback loop for results like status or progress reports.
- If the work doesn’t get done, follow up consistently and find out why it did not get done.

Establish shared goals
- Hold initial start-up meeting to get acquainted and to establish shared goals as a team to establish a sense of collective purpose.
- Discuss and draft operating guidelines together as a team. Include things like meeting frequency, use of agendas, calendar sharing, communication preferences, and so on.
- Develop results-oriented—not process-oriented—metrics to track progress.
- Incorporate your shared goals into your team meeting agenda.
- Create a shared document of responsibilities.
- Revisit your shared goals document at key junctures.
- When you meet your milestones, credit your teams’ synergy as the reason for your success.
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Address the needs of new team members
  • Use webcams to introduce the new team member.
  • Review the team’s objective and guidelines.
  • Review the team’s communication protocols and preferences.
  • Provide the current status and history of the project.

Address the needs of new hires
  • Build in some face-to-face time with the team as soon as possible. If VTC or webcams are the only way for this to occur, use the available technology.
  • Discuss, in detail, the organization’s culture.
  • Hold regular talks to check the new hire’s progress.
  • Set aside enough time for the new hire to become familiar with the technologies that the team uses.
  • Ensure that the new hire has been assigned to a buddy.

Review reasons to refocus your team
  • Revisit and review - Ask yourself:
    • Do we have enough resources?
    • Are we focused on the right thing with the resources that we have?
    • Is the team working together effectively?
  • Realign - Ask yourself:
    • Are the team guidelines being followed?
    • Are the appropriate skills in place if the project goals change?
    • Does the team have the right skills?
    • Do you need to deal with team conflict?
  • Refresh and reflect - Ask yourself:
    • Have we acknowledged our accomplishments?
    • Are we acknowledging unavoidable challenges and stressors?
    • Are we learning from the past?