



Leading Remotely: Making the Best of It

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By Lawrence Hedblom

A Gallup poll on April 20th reported that given the choice, 41% of US workers would prefer to return to their office and 59% would prefer to work remotely as much as possible.

A current client with a global workforce conducted an in-house survey and echoed the same trend.

Some companies in the news are expecting employees to work from home indefinitely.

It looks like we're going to be living with the impact of this pandemic for a long time and leading remotely, at least some extent, may be the new normal.

While leading remotely is a big topic, I want to focus on just one dimension – communication.

Having excellent communication skills is an important competency for successful leadership and essential for trust.

Whenever there is a problem, I usually find communication is part of the issue. Sometimes it just isn't done well; and often, it is not clear or objective.

In the absence of sufficient communication, I've noticed a human compulsion to fill the void, and with information that is almost always negative.

One of the issues with remote working is managers think of their staff and ask themselves: How are they doing? *What* are they doing?

Without good communication, it's easy to see how and where minds can drift to negative imagining.

Of course, this same thought process can also happen with *your* boss thinking about their staff.

So, my edge is to communicate more rather than less – and in all directions.

Clients say they are maintaining or increasing the cadence of meetings with staff members. They're keeping the recurring weekly and monthly meetings and also adding regular happy hours and coffee breaks. Some are having short daily get togethers in the morning.

For team building and a shared sense of community, managers are also inviting staff to share pet pics, recipes for easy meals, and participate in fun contests.

Ask your staff how they would like to stay connected. They'll have ideas and if they're driving the initiative, it will feel more like theirs.

Starting meetings with a pause to celebrate good news sets an upbeat tone. Last year, my own weekly peer group shifted from wins for the week to sharing recent joys (with a tip of the hat to Marie Kondo). We always welcome the spirit of gratitude.

Whether during these touchpoints or additional times of connecting, it's important that employees feel like we're checking in and not checking up.

While there is a need for leaders (and their teams) to stay focused on long term strategy, there is a concurrent need to be action-oriented and focused on short term execution.

Further, studies have shown that Gen Y especially benefits from getting clear directions rather than just an end goal to accomplish.

Clarity is key -- for longer range goals and short-term milestones as well as the roles and responsibilities for each team member.

In the midst of such change, it may be worthwhile to review current job descriptions, make necessary adjustments, and then quickly and clearly share those changes – both down and up.

In the same way that your team will benefit from this refresh of their assignments, it would be smart to take inventory of your own responsibilities and look for similar updates.

It will likely be helpful to collaborate with your peers in this process and then check in with your boss.

This is also a time to be more intentional about our messages. When colleagues are not available for those ad hoc in person chats, more attention is required to cover the bases.

And, what about Zoom?

Some feel like they've been in an endless series of video chats and they're drained.

From someone who has attended their fair share of these sessions, I was interested to read a [recent article in the Wall Street Journal](#) about why we experience video meetings to be more tiring than those in person.

I would suggest experimenting with shorter meetings. It's hard to imagine many complaints about that.

And, I've even heard a rumor that there is a return to using phones – for phone calls!

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