3 steps to leading a remote team successfully

📅 AUGUST 26, 2020 | ☰ ARTICLES

Today, every leader needs to be an excellent remote manager. This is far from a simple task, especially if you have to learn everything "on the go." Here are three basic rules to lead effectively far away from the office.

Maintaining staff performance after switching to remote work is tough. And even if employees seem to be happy and meet their requirements at home, leaders must remain vigilant to keep the team focused and productive.

To be a successful remote team leader, you must conquer these three challenges:

1.   Close the distance

There are two crucial features leaders should work on if they wish to drive their remote team flawlessly: being responsive and accessible. A study by Oracle based on 5,000 employees globally shows that a leader's visibility and accessibility are correlated with confidence and performance of team members.

But how do you combine being responsive and accessible with work-life balance? Sleeping with your phone is not the answer. Tracy Brower from Forbes gives seven simple tips on how to deal with this dilemma. We have chosen four of these tips most useful from the perspective of IMSA Search:

- **Hold one-on-ones:** Working in an office has at least one advantage. You can see your staff in person every day. A quick, face-to-face meeting was an excellent opportunity to check up on work status and see if how your team members are doing. But when leading a remote team, you need to set up these meetings intentionally. As Brower wrote: "Having regular check-ins—in person or via video—is helpful because when things come up for you or team members, you know you have time coming up to discuss them."
- **Be on time:** No matter if it is an online or face-to-face meeting. Showing up on time, you demonstrate your respect for others. It is essential.
- **Confirm:** Many of us are tired of sending "thank you" emails all the time. Nevertheless, to provide effective online communication, this is necessary. Those short answers are a signal that you have received the information, and the sender can move onto a different task. It is also a clear signal that an assignment is done, and a person can turn off the computer, helping maintain a work-life balance.

2.   Empower your team

The crucial ingredient of a successful remote team is to empower its members. Sadly, in many cases, managers seeking to implement this leave their employees on their own with tasks they are not able to handle. To avoid this, leaders should consider empowerment as a process. As Jarret Jackson writes in Forbes: "It involves coaching or teaching team members to self-serve, to become adaptive, to make decisions, and to use less of their managers' time on things that really don't require their managers' attention."

Leaders should think more deeply about the empowerment process and introduce a high development culture. To meet this challenge, managers who want to have self-reliant employees should work on team members' engagement. Gallup's meta-analysis on team engagement and performance shows that, globally, 85% of employees are either not engaged or actively disengaged. And these figures came before COVID, which makes it even more alarming.

When this data was first shown, IMSA Search experts deeply considered the Gallup list of 12 steps to create a high-development culture in the company and discussed it at length. Here are four steps that are essential right now:

- **I know what is expected of me at work:** "Nothing is worse than not having an idea of what you are supposed to do at work. It leads to immense frustration, especially when it comes to a newly hired employee, who needs to deal with lousy management," says Alena Sanders, IMSA Czech Republic. This rule has the same value, no matter if a team works remotely or at the office.
- **At work, my opinions seem to count:** there is no empowerment without listening and being open for your employees' feedback, thoughts, and ideas. Good concepts always remain valuable, whether coming from the CEO or junior specialist.
- **There is someone at work who encourages my development:** "In the fast-paced environment that is constantly changing learning and development are essential. Having a leader who makes sure employees are raising their market value is invaluable," explains Alena Sanders, IMSA Czech Republic. It hasn't changed. When we all experience the COVID-19 uncertainty, having someone who invests in employee development and gives the impression of normality is crucial.
- **At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day:** Even though times are pretty tough, people want to develop their talent in a safe and friendly environment. A qualified manager allows each team member to grow.

3.   Look out for burnout

Burnout was a serious problem even before the pandemic. According to a 2019 Gallup study, 28% of full-time employees reported feeling burned out at work "very often" or "always". Another 48% felt burned out "sometimes." The data about the current situation is still not complete enough to describe the problem precisely, but suggest that remote work leads to rising burnout cases worldwide. So, to avoid burnout in your team, remember to:

- **Be very specific about what you need and when you'll need it:** Be clear, collaborative, and aligned in your expectations. If the case is not urgent, write it in email and set a specific deadline. Don't behave as all your request should be done ASAP.
- **Respect your employee free time and expect the same from them:** Because most of us are working from home, and we are never far away from the work computer, asking employees to perform after their working hours becomes easier. But how long can they do that? Even if it is a small favour, like sending a particular file, it can probably wait until tomorrow. Save after-hours calls for emergencies.
- **Engage and listen:** Many of us may feel lonely and emotional right now. One of Gallup studies shows that workplace isolation can derail productivity by up to 21%. As Adam Hickman wrote for Gallup: "Managers need to adjust their listening when they speak with their remote workers to hear when an employee is experiencing isolation and keep an eye on how they can remove it." Right now, this is a must.