

Leadership

Excellence



VIRTUAL TEAM LEADERS FOCUS MORE ON CONNECTIONS THAN CONNECTIVITY

5 key priorities

- Julie Winkle Giulioni,
Speaker, Author and Consultant

Themed
Edition on
**Virtual
Leadership**

09

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A Caring Remote Leader**

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- Rachel Grzeskowiak, BizLibrary



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the September issue of Leadership Excellence.

This month, the focus is on virtual leadership. With the unprecedented changes brought by the COVID-19 situation, things have been quite challenging. For leaders, the pandemic has been an ultimate leadership test. What type of leadership is needed to get through such a crisis? The articles included in this issue talk about various leadership traits required to help you become the leader, who can guide employees through times of great change and uncertainty.

Despite the ubiquitous nature of virtual teams, many organizations and leaders continue to struggle with the fundamentals of how to manage this permutation of a workgroup. Virtual leaders who have cracked the code and brought their distributed workers together into high-functioning teams know that connection in this environment doesn't happen by chance. It's incumbent upon leaders to intentionally nurture relationships, weave connections and transform mere groups into collective communities. To learn more about how virtual leaders can bridge time, space, and cultures to unleash unbeatable results, read the cover article by Julie Winkle Giulioni, ***Virtual Team Leaders Focus More On Connections Than Connectivity***.

Even while working virtually, there is still plenty that leaders can do to

create team connections. To know more about the actions you can take to create meaningful conversations in our new normal, read Andy Erickson's article, ***How To Build Relationships Remotely***.

You may be faced with a team of employees who feel deeply insecure about the changes happening all around them, bombarded by the latest news about the coronavirus spread. To know how to support your employees mentally and emotionally through this major shift, read Joel Garfinkle's article, ***7 Ways To Be A Better Virtual Leader***.

Are you really never supposed to experience uncertainty as a leader? You are a human being and hard-wired for struggle – stuff happens. You are comprised of all the good, bad, and ugly that comes with being a human, which is *not* the Hollywood version of leaders who ride into the scene to save the day. And with your humanness, you will sometimes—make that many times, feel uncertain about your abilities. For tips on dealing with uncertainty and vulnerability without going crazy, read Dr. Maria Church's

article, ***Five Steps To Deal With Leadership Uncertainty***.

As Dan Pontefract rightly puts it, "Rather than sticking your head in the sand, become a proactive "remote" leader, one that is ready to change the very nature of how leadership is conducted should COVID-19 cause your organization to alter course."

Who knows? Maybe some of the changes will become standard practice as you evolve your leadership to become one that is more caring and connected.

We hope you enjoy reading all the articles and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Last but not least, we believe that there is no better way to connect with people than by sharing your leadership story. If you have one, send it to us.

Happy Reading!

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Virtual Team Leaders Focus More On Connections Than Connectivity

I 5 key priorities

 By **Julie Winkle Giulioni**

Virtual teams – once an exotic novelty – have recently become the norm. Today a large portion of the population works remotely, with many employees (and employers) hoping to keep the work-from-home lifestyle going long after the current crisis has passed. And it makes good business sense. Removing geographical constraints allows businesses to source the best available talent. That talent is frequently more focused, engaged and productive than their co-located colleagues. And, given the volume of knowledge work to be done, a distributed workforce is often the most agile and cost-effective model available.

Yet, despite the ubiquitous nature of virtual teams, many organizations and leaders continue to struggle with the fundamentals of how to manage this permutation of a workgroup. Too frequently, they focus their efforts exclusively on the technology that enables connectivity and they fail to address what's actually most important to attaining the desired results: the human connection.

Anyone who's led or been part of one of these teams knows that the virtual setting changes the human dynamics. Distance can breed ambivalence,



assumptions, and misunderstandings that can be addressed more naturally and quickly by people who share a workspace day-in and day-out. And not working together in the same space can easily compromise the sense of cohesion, identity and community that flows naturally when a team is co-located.



Virtual leaders who have cracked the code and brought their distributed workers together into high-functioning teams know that connection in this environment doesn't happen by chance. It's incumbent upon leaders to intentionally nurture relationships, weave connections and transform mere groups into collective communities. Here are five key priorities for making this happen.

Turn Up the Trust

Trust – a cornerstone of positive relationships – is built over time and based upon the experiences that people have with one another. Unfortunately, there are fewer opportunities for this to happen in a virtual setting. For a team to operate optimally, members must trust each other's motives as well as their fundamental competency. Leaders can help make this happen by finding ways for each person to 'shine' and making strategic assignments to ensure that

trust builds through the shared experience of work and accomplishment.

Cultivate Effective Communication Practices

With so many available communication channels, it's important for leaders and members alike to be thoughtful and intentional in the selection of the best method for the message. And, in a virtual setting, everyone must compensate for the loss of cues that are picked up naturally by those who are co-located. In general, effective virtual leaders tend to over-communicate and over-document... to literally keep people on the same page. But this must be balanced with not overwhelming others and thus further contributing to information overload and communication fatigue. And, of course, the importance of active listening cannot be over-stated.



Invest in Shared Vision

Communities and teams are formed as people rally around a common interest. A clear, compelling, and engaging vision reminds everyone about what they're working toward together. A shared vision and values contribute to trust, leaving members feeling like 'these people are my tribe.' But, developing that vision is not enough. Leaders can't cross that off the list and hide it away; they must refer to it frequently and treat it as a living document, updating is as necessary.

Nurture Norms and Agreements

Shared agreements for how people will work together is important for any team. But, it becomes even more important when teams aren't co-located. When everyone understands the 'terms of engagement' or 'rules of the road', they can go about their work confident in the behaviors and performance they can expect from others. Allowing teams to play a role in creating norms and agreements goes a long way toward creating trust. As with shared vision, these can't be tucked away either. They must find their way into meetings, conversations and interactions with others to build a culture and connection.

Mine (and Mind) Your Meetings

Meetings are a primary vehicle for bringing virtual teams together and facilitating connections among members. While important in any setting, meetings take on greater significance for virtual teams. Regularly scheduled meetings create a cadence and predictable opportunities for people to connect. And impromptu meetings address evolving business needs and approximate the more casual way people might come together in co-located settings. Whatever the form, good physical meeting practices must be elevated to the next level when operating virtually with a clear purpose, outcomes, agenda, and roles as well as exemplary facilitation skills.

Effective virtual leaders focus less on the technology and details of connectivity and more on helping their teams create genuine, authentic connections. And when they do, they can bridge time, space, and cultures to unleash unbeatable results.

• • •



Julie Winkle Giulioni is passionate about ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to learn, grow and develop their potential – and works with organizations worldwide to make it happen. She's the co-author of the Amazon and Washington Post bestseller, *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go: Career Conversations Organizations Need and Employees Want* and has been identified by Inc. Magazine as one of the Top 100 Leadership Speakers.



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How To Become A Caring Remote Leader

| Six simple leadership tactics

 By **Dan Pontefract**

We are in the midst of one of the greatest eras of change; the “where” of work.

As tragic as it has been, the pandemic is forcing leaders not only to change where (and how) work is done in the immediate term; it is forcing a conversation about where (and how) work will be performed once a vaccine inoculates us from the terror of COVID-19.

Given there is as likely a chance for society to return to the old way of working as it is for a World Series parade in 2020—whatever the winner—leaders must adapt their leadership style. Now more than ever we need leaders to demonstrate proactive, collaborative and caring leadership.

Here are a few leadership strategies to consider assuming you and your team are working from home and will likely do so for the foreseeable future and that you’re not leading teams who manufacture goods, serve

at restaurants, cut hair or other service industry type roles.

Hold Virtual Open Office Hours

As a leader, employees need you; they need access to you. They need you not to disappear, but to lead. On top of your regular staff meeting and one-on-one meetings, consider holding open office hours on a conference call line or video-sharing platform. No agenda. No formalities. No hierarchy. Just you and a chance to be human with the team.

It’s merely an open forum for questions to be asked, ideas to be shared, and if needed, fears quelled. Make it accessible not just to your team, but however many are under your direction. (Sometimes called skip-level reports.) And while I’m not one for recommending more meetings, in a situation like this it’s highly recommended.

Keep Calm and Empathize

By holding virtual open office hours, you are tapping into the

“As a leader, you must remain calm, but also try to understand where your employee is coming from, both from how they are thinking and how they are feeling about the pandemic. It matters.”

concerns, stresses and issues of the team. Like with any abnormal or crisis scenario, employees need their leader not only to remain calm but to empathize with both their thoughts and feelings. While they may be *feeling* nervous or anxious, they could also be *thinking* about issues related to their role that may be impacted by coronavirus related matters.

Empathy is a multi-faceted concept. At its root is your ability to proactively—and sometimes reactively—consider the emotional feelings and intellectual thoughts of the other person. As a leader, you must remain calm, but also try to understand where your employee is coming from, both from how they are thinking and how they are feeling about the pandemic. It matters.

Establish Team Norms

With employees no longer in the office, the daily cadence immediately gets thrown off. The first step is to establish what I call, “team norms.” These norms are a set of practices that you agree to carry out while everyone is working from home. Consider the following questions:

- Do we meet more frequently as a team? When do we meet? How long?
- Do we use a conference call or an online meeting platform like Zoom or Teams?
- If we use an online meeting platform, does everyone turn on their video camera?
- How do we ensure people are present and not multitasking?
- What is the recommended response time to a text or email?
- Should we use the phone more and call each other?
- How will we share sensitive information? Email?
- Will we use online sharing platforms like Slack, Google Docs or Basecamp?



There are many more questions to ask, but it’s best to set up a conversation with the team to establish all team norm questions that need to be surfaced and answered. You need a new way of operating, and a “team norms” meeting is the best way to get this out in the open.

Conduct Morning Huddles

Imagine an employee who has commuted to work for several years. The routine has been consistent. Every morning started the same way. Their initial conversations with the security guard, the front desk assistant, even the coffee barista are now gone. The new normal is isolation. They’re alone. The routine has been upended.

To ameliorate any feelings of loneliness, I recommend a daily virtual huddle of 10 minutes. Now that employees are no longer commuting into work, start the day 10 minutes early with a 10-minute pep talk. Be open. Discuss what you’re up to for the day with your meetings, tasks,

projects, and so on. Publicly recognize someone. Provide updates on other organizational projects or changes. Share a personal story. It’s a perfect opportunity to be human in the face of uncertainty.

Frequent Check-ins

More than ever, your team members need to feel that you care. The easiest gift you can give is actually to care. You are equipped with a mobile phone, tablet and/or laptop. Use it. Send out-of-the-blue texts, emails and DMs to team members asking how they are doing. Maybe use it as an opportunity to thank them or recognize something you’ve noticed that day or week. Try an emoji! 😊

You could send them an article, a hilarious meme, or a TED Talk. (Maybe one of [mine](#)!) Receiving unexpected messages from “the boss” ends up becoming an excellent shot of adrenaline for employees. Please don’t overdo it, but don’t ignore this tactic either.



Discussion Forum

If you've never led a team of remote employees before, you're likely used to office collisions. They are the moments when team members—including yourself—bump into one another and magic occurs. Maybe it springs an idea. It could remind someone that a task is due. It could unlock a problem. The “water cooler” chat may even create a new network connection that leads to a sale or a new hire. It's serendipity at its finest.

Whatever the case, these collisions no longer happen when everyone is working remotely. How to mitigate? In part, set up an online discussion forum

where employees can rant, rave and discuss anything that pops into their mind. It's intended to be asynchronous—that means it's not a live conversation—such that people use it as a means to create some virtual collisions. Let anything go. It's the place to let loose and network.

In Summary

Rather than sticking your head in the sand, I recommend that you become a proactive “remote” leader, one that is ready to change the very nature of how leadership is conducted should COVID-19 cause your organization to alter course.

Who knows? Maybe some of the changes will become standard

practice as you evolve your leadership to become one that is more caring and connected.

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Dan Pontefract is a leadership strategist and the author of [LEAD. CARE. WIN. How to Become a Leader Who Matters.](#) He is the Founder and CEO of The Pontefract Group.



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Five Steps To Deal With Leadership Uncertainty

Dealing with uncertainty and vulnerability without going crazy

 By Dr. Maria Church

Leaders are often expected to have all the answers. Not only is this an expectation shared by many, it is regularly self-imposed. If you do not have the answer to a leadership challenge, you may possibly feel inadequate or uncertain and vulnerable. None of these emotions feels good, and are often frowned upon in the workplace—or so you may have been taught.

Really? Are you really never supposed to experience uncertainty as a leader? You are a human being and hard-wired for struggle – stuff happens. You are comprised of all the good, bad, and ugly that comes with being a human, which is *not* the Hollywood version of leaders who ride into the scene to save the day. And with your humanness, you will sometimes—make that many times, feel uncertain about your abilities.

How do you work with uncertainty and vulnerability without going crazy? Follow these five steps which will assist you during these times:

1. Embrace Uncertainty and Vulnerability

Reach into any doubts and fears you have and pull up and out all the anxieties and doubts. What do most leaders do with this uncertainty? Well, bury it of course. This strategy of burying and numbing may work for a while, that is until it shows up again as illness, ulcers, or worse. Why do you think people in leadership roles are so stressed, obese, and

addicted? It is because feelings get buried and numbed.

The interesting thing about the numbing strategy is that when you numb your “bad” feelings such as uncertainty, vulnerability, doubt, and fear you are also numbing your “good” feelings of joy, peace, and gratitude.

2. Stay Present

Do not worry about the future or live in the past. The only moment you have to live in is the present one, so why waste it? The nature of uncertainty is that the future is unknown. Time spent fretting about what might happen is just an exercise in fiction.

What does living and embracing the present moment bring? This moment of uncertainty and vulnerability is where creativity, joy, and beauty are found. Great art is created in a vulnerable state of uncertainty and presence at the moment. Walking through the door of uncertainty and vulnerability is full of endless possibilities because this is the location of your true, authentic self. Peace is found in authenticity.

3. Stay in Your Own Lane

When you start to compare yourself to others, you set yourself up for failure. It is not because you cannot be as successful as someone else can be, but because you cannot *be* anyone else. The only thing you can be is the best version of you – your best, authentic and true self.



This can be a challenge during times of uncertainty because you may see others who are dealing with uncertainty with more ease. Instead of going to a place of comparison, pull away and observe. Has this other person tapped into the present moment? Are the creative juices flowing for that other person? Are they peaceful because they are authentically in touch with their fears, concerns, or excitement about possibilities? Observe, learn, and know that you will find the most peace when you aren't pretending but are authentically you.

4. Practice Gratitude

Nothing else will bring you into the present moment faster than gratitude. When you practice gratitude, you are reminded of the blessings and opportunities that surround you right now. The funny thing about being in a state of gratitude is that when you focus upon that for which what you are grateful, you receive more. Yes, more.

That which occupies your mental and spiritual focus shows up in all aspects of your life. Therefore, if you are focusing on those factors that make you grateful, you will have more of those results showing up.

Remember that the converse is also true. If your focus is on worry, fear, and a scarcity mentality, get ready for more worry, fear, and lack showing up. Your thoughts are a powerful force, so be intentional and strategic about where you put your focus.

5. Be Loving and Truthful with Yourself and Others

Be gentle and graceful with yourself and others during times of uncertainty. All the feelings you are having in these times, just know that others are having them too. When you practice loving-kindness,, you will find patience, grace, and empathy. Tell yourself the truth about how you are feeling and be prepared for both positive and negative feelings and thoughts coming back to you. Honor and acknowledge all the responses you receive and intentionally shift to more supportive and loving feelings and thoughts. How do you shift? Do what gives you joy and be present to fully enjoy that activity. The only certainty we have is the present. What is certain is what gives you joy. It really can be that simple in what seems like great complexity.

Remember that uncertainty and vulnerability is the birthplace of truth, authenticity, creativity, and beauty. If you choose (yes, it is your choice) to step into and embrace the uncertainty, stay present in the moment with gratitude, and give yourself loving grace, you will find tremendous opportunities in uncertainty to help shape a future that you may not have otherwise dreamt possible.

• • •



Dr. Maria Church, CSP, CPC, is a speaker, consultant, and executive coach. As CEO of Dr. Maria Church International, including Government and Corporate divisions, and Leadership Development University, she specializes in organizational culture, change agility, and leadership development with over 25 years working for Fortune 500, local government, non-profit, and academia. Her 10th Anniversary Edition of *Love-Based Leadership* will be released in December 2020.



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7 Ways To Be A Better Virtual Leader

Support your employees mentally and emotionally through this major shift

 By Joel Garfinkle

We are going through an unprecedented time of transition as organizations around the world respond to COVID-19 by working from home. You might be reeling with the demands of making a fast and unplanned transition to working remotely, the stress of job insecurity, and fears about the future. Things aren't normal, and they won't be again for some time.

You may also be faced with a team of employees who feel deeply insecure about the changes happening all around them, bombarded by the latest news about the coronavirus spread. They're [stressed out and overwhelmed](#), and they need strong leadership that can help them stay grounded during these turbulent times. I am privy to the current challenges that industries from biotech and healthcare to technology and financial services are up against. Across the board, I am noticing how they are faced with similar issues. [Employees in all fields need a leader](#) who can keep them effective amid all the fears and distractions they may encounter, bolstering morale and productivity.

I am on the front line with my clients, hearing their stories of struggle, stress, anxiety, and panic. As an [executive coach](#), I am giving them guidance that helps them move through these challenges with confidence and grace. By mastering these seven key tactics for transitioning their whole team to working remotely, my clients are successfully navigating this major transition.



1. Set Up an Optimal Home Office

Encourage your direct reports to find a quiet room in their house where they can be alone (or where they can co-work with their spouse). Tidying it up, adding a good desk lamp, and placing key essentials to help make it an ideal space. If co-working with a spouse, they should set norms on how to communicate within their shared space, such as leaving the room for a phone check-in with their boss.

2. Minimize Distractions

If your employee is working from home while caring for young children, there are bound to be distractions. Encourage your employees to find solutions such as splitting up childcare duties with a spouse, enlisting the help of an older child, or working outside while the kids play in the backyard. Be understanding about these challenges as your employees strive to find solutions that work for them.

3. Use the Right Tools

Choose programs that maximize the effectiveness of your communications. Select video software that allows you to hold virtual meetings with as many staff members as needed. Employ project management software that will help keep everyone on the same page, ensuring a streamlined workflow.

4. Hold Daily Team Check-ins

Working remotely can feel very isolating, especially if the change happened swiftly. Stay connected and on the same page with coworkers by checking in as a team each morning. Creating this morning ritual will help you continue to feel like a cohesive unit and stay on top of any concerns. Use this [opportunity to clarify priorities](#) and workflow, so everyone knows what to focus on that day.

According to *Harvard Business Review*, figuring out who has the information you need can prove especially challenging for a remote team. Daily team check-ins can help everyone stay up-to-date on who to ask which questions about their current projects

As Gallup says, leave room for some socializing. Employees need to connect with one another as human beings, especially during times of dramatic change, so give them space to share about their daily lives.

5. Remain Task-Focused

When working from home, people often feel a lack of structure. Set a routine for yourself, and talk with each of your direct reports about creating their own routine. Stick as closely to each person's previous routine as possible.

As employees transition into working remotely, touch base with them one-on-one each day about their priorities and how they're [structuring their workload](#). Hold your one-on-ones by phone or video chat, at least until your team is fairly used to working remotely. As they grow more confident over time, you might check in by voice chat every several days and use a messaging app or email in between.

6. Over-Communicate

Remote teams need to [communicate even more clearly](#) than those working under the same roof. Be more explicit with your instructions than you think you need to be. Give important directives more than once, to make sure people understand you. You might fear coming across as micromanaging, but in this time of transition, they'll probably appreciate how you go out of your way to provide clear instructions.

7. Create Boundaries Around Work

When you work from home—especially if it's a new experience—it can be hard to set work aside when it's time to stop. Tell your people to determine what time their work ends, and to stop then. They need to learn to [create boundaries around work](#). It's vital to recharge and spend time with your loved ones. If you find yourself with extra time due to the skipped commute, try new recipes or start a gardening project with your kids.

Taking these steps will help you support your employees mentally and emotionally through this major shift. Make time to listen to their concerns and find solutions that work for each individual, to maximize success. By doing so, you'll prove yourself to be exactly the type of leader who can guide them through times of [great change and uncertainty](#). I'm witnessing my clients doing exactly that, and by taking these key steps, you'll also prove yourself exactly the leader your people need in this critical moment.

• • •



Joel Garfinkle is recognized as one of the top 50 coaches in the U.S., and the author of 9 books. Subscribe to his [Fulfillment at Work Newsletter](#) and receive the FREE e-book, 41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now! He is the owner of Garfinkle Executive Coaching.



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Seven Employee Behaviors That Predict Your Company's Odds Of Survival

| Beware of these red flags

By **Edward D. Hess**



The old way of working is dead. Its death throes began decades ago, and the COVID shake-up has slammed the lid on the coffin. In a world of flux, we *all* have to be 24/7 learners, innovators, and collaborators. Yet most companies continue to allow, encourage, or even force

workers to keep up their old rugged-individualistic, head-down, fear-driven, Industrial-Revolution-era ways.

Many leaders don't even realize these "old-school" dynamics are at play in their company. And if they do, they may not know how dangerous they are.

No business can compete for long in a marketplace that requires constant innovation when people show up to work in a way that squelches innovation. And it doesn't matter how much you insist your culture is innovative if the behaviors happening around you inhibit innovation.

What I call the "new way of working" requires employees to continuously learn, unlearn, and relearn so they can adapt to the reality of the world as it evolves. (This is the essence of Hyper-Learning.) And it requires leaders to lead in a way that encourages this to happen.

In my book, I have identified seven foundational behaviors that are necessary for people to be Hyper-Learners, which are a good yardstick for any organization.

If you don't see these seven behaviors in action, you don't have an innovative culture. The proof is in how people act, every day.

BEHAVIOR 1: Managing Self

The best thinkers, the best learners, the best collaborators, and the best listeners have learned how to manage their Inner World—their ego, mind, body, and emotions. This means people have a quiet ego and are open-minded and good at “not knowing.” They don't reflexively defend, deny, or deflect when someone challenges them. They are willing to change their position when they get better evidence. When talking to others, they have a quiet mind and are fully present and focused totally on listening and trying to understand what the other person is saying. They control their negative emotions and rarely fly off the handle.

Red Flags: A person who can't “manage self” has to always be right. Others may describe them as defensive, arrogant, judgmental, or super-opinionated. A person who frequently interrupts people or who multi-tasks while listening to others. A person who behaves in disrespectful ways or can't control their emotions. A person who raises their voice or who glares at people.

BEHAVIOR 2: “Otherness”

No one achieves success by themselves. In the Digital Age, their success will be highly

dependent upon their ability to build caring, trusting relationships at work that enable the highest levels of thinking and learning with others. Otherness is a mindset—a belief that they need the help of others to see what they don't see because of their tendencies to seek confirmation of what they believe. Otherness is a behavior—behaving in ways that show they respect the human dignity of the other person. Success in the Digital Age will require Otherness. A competitive survival-of-the-fittest mindset will be the quickest pathway to failure. Their biggest competition in the Digital Age will be themselves, not others.

Red Flags: A person who rarely asks others for help. A person who believes he is better than most people. A person who views each conversation as a win-lose, zero-sum game. A person who will not prevent someone from doing something wrong because they want them to fail. A person who gossips negatively about others. A know-it-all. A braggart.

BEHAVIOR 3: Emotionally Connecting in Positive Ways

The science is clear. Positive emotions enable better learning, better decision-making, and more willingness to explore, create, and innovate. A positive emotional work environment comes about because people bring their positive emotions to the conversation. They understand the power of slowing down to be fully in the moment, and they express their positivity by smiling, by their tone of voice, by their

calmness, and by the words they choose to use. They behave in respectful ways to others even if they disagree with what is being said. They express gratitude often (i.e., “thank you,” “I appreciate that,” “you are kind”). A positive emotional environment in a meeting liberates people in that people can sync their positivity with each other and be fully engaged without the limitations of worries, insecurities, and fears. People can be their Best Selves, so you have the opportunity to have high-quality conversations that can result in team flow that can lead to “wow” results.

Red Flags: People are rude to each other. People use body language that says, *I am not really listening to you* or *I am dominant*. People put down others. People are closed-minded or not engaged. People are constantly interrupting or raising their voices and moving forward, getting ready to attack verbally.

BEHAVIOR 4: Effective Collaboration

This begins with leaders: They know how to set up meetings so that people feel psychologically “safe” to join in. Leaders have created an environment where collaboration is not a competition—an environment where people care about each other and trust that no one will do them harm. During meetings, people are fully present, attentive, and connected to each other. Everyone gets to speak. People challenge the status quo and seek the best possible idea, regardless of the status or position of who suggested it.



Red Flags: The highest-ranking people dominate and aggressively push their views. Meetings are not genuine open discussions—the answer is predetermined, and the real goal is consent and compliance. Some people don't speak up at all. Too often, critiques get personal.

BEHAVIOR 5: Reflective Listening

People who exhibit this behavior allow others to talk. They reframe what they think the other person is saying, to make sure they understand. They ask clarifying questions before telling, advocating, or disagreeing. When they do disagree, they critique the idea, not the person.

Red Flags: People don't make eye contact. They interrupt. They multi-task during meetings. They are great "tellers," not listeners. Their egos are wrapped up in showing the speaker that they are the smartest person in the room

BEHAVIOR 6: Courage

In the Digital Age, everyone will have to excel at going into the unknown and figuring things out. That takes courage—the courage to try. A person with courage

is willing to experiment, even though they know they might fail. They also understand that most learning comes from having conversations with people who have different views. They don't mind having respectful difficult conversations. You'll find them volunteering for new projects, openly sharing their views, and asking for lots of feedback.

Red Flags: People are unwilling to take risks. They seem guarded and closed-lipped. Because they fear making mistakes or looking bad, they rarely step out of their comfort zone.

BEHAVIOR 7: Evidence-Based Decision-Making

When employees possess this behavior, they are not married to their ideas. They are more open-minded. They never assume. They are always seeking data, even if it will disconfirm their theory or even force a return to the drawing board. They seem to get the statement "I am not my ideas" on a deep level.

Red Flags: People defend their ideas even when there's no data to support them. They rarely ask for the input of others (and if it's

given, they don't listen to it). They are invested in being "right."

If you see most of these seven foundational behaviors in action, you're on the right track. If you see a lot of red flags, you're in trouble.

The good news is that people can change their behaviors. It takes a lot of intentional work. But as is always true, the first step is admitting you have a problem—and the second is realizing the upside of changing outweighs the downside of not changing.

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Edward D. Hess is professor of business administration, Batten Fellow, and Batten Executive-in-Residence at the Darden School of Business and the author of *Hyper-Learning: How to Adapt to the Speed of Change*. Professor Hess spent 20 years in the business world as a senior executive and has spent the last 18 years in academia. He is the author of 13 books, over 140 articles, and 60 Darden case studies. His recent books and research have focused on Human Excellence in the Digital Age: A New Way of Being; A New Way of Working; Humanizing the Workplace; and Hyper-Learning.



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How To Build Relationships Remotely

5 actions to create meaningful conversations in our new normal

 By **Andy Erickson**

Virtual work has been an adjustment for all of us, but many of the leaders I coach have been pleasantly surprised by their team's performance working remotely. Most say work is getting done as well (or better), meetings are more efficient, and team members appreciate the flexibility to integrate home and work responsibilities.

But a common concern they bring up is the loss of informal, unplanned, "serendipitous" interactions between team members. Situations such as the small talk with a new colleague that builds a relationship, the overheard conversation that leads to cross-pollination and innovation, or the small cues that a colleague is stressed in need of support.

Even working virtually, there is still plenty that leaders can do to create team connections. Here are five actions you can take with your remote employees to create meaningful conversations in our new normal.

1) Make "check-ins" part of every call and online meeting. Ask participants, "Please give us a sentence or two about the 'weather between your ears' and anything that might be distracting from the conversation we're about to have."

Pro-tip: Share first and model both openness and brevity in your check-in.

2) Include "breakouts" in at least one team call each week. Pose a question and then send people to discuss in small groups of two or three. For

example, one client ends the week with this conversation-starter: "What's a challenge you overcame this week—and which of your skills enabled you to do it?" Another leader takes 10 minutes of their Monday morning call for small group discussion: «What are your three biggest to-do's for this week—and how will you set yourself up for success?»

Pro-tip: These conversation prompts are great because they get people to share what they're doing and maintain a healthy perspective.

3) Put "open-door time" on your calendar and invite team members to "drop in". One of my clients has told her team that she's at her desk with Zoom up and running every Tuesday and Thursday from 3-430 p.m. and all are welcome to "stop by" for a chat.

Pro-tip: Our client reports that uptake on this was slow, but she's glad she's persevered; some days she gets four or five people on the line ... and on the other days she catches up on email!

4) Take time to "manage-by-walking-around" (MBWA). Several clients make it a goal to spend at least 15 minutes one-on-one with each of their direct reports each week. Some put these appointments on their calendars, others take a less structured approach.

Pro-tip: Sometimes other trusted, non-management colleagues will hear things people might not share with you. Consider asking one of these people to make their own MBWA calls from time to time.



5) Use text messages for “light-touch” connections and expressions of support. Several of my colleagues have made it a practice to reach out to three or four people each day by sending a brief text message. Simple expressions of support can go a long way for both the sender *and* the recipient.

Pro-tip: Messages of appreciation work best when they’re specific. “I’m glad you’re on the team” is nice and true, even, but “I’ve been thinking about that question you asked at the end of the meeting Tuesday. So glad you’re on the team” is better.

I look forward to the day when our teams can get back to face-to-face work, but the past several months have convinced me that there’s real value in remote-work, and at some level, working-from-home is here to stay. It’s up to us, as leaders of ‘remote’ or ‘virtual’ to invest a bit more time and effort to

re-create the accidental, but vital interactions that make teams so powerful.

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Andy Erickson is the Founder and Principal Consultant at Humanus Solutions. He is a motivational speaker and leadership coach who helps teams identify small actions they can take to make work better. He is known as “the conversation guy,” offering thoughtful questions that leaders can use to create connection and buyin among their teams.



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How Employers Can Combat COVID-19 Communication Fatigue

| Two key approaches

By **Keith Kitani**



It's no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented change to organizations – including both the move to a remote workforce for many companies, as well as an overnight digital transformation. While this has certainly made for key struggles across the economy, there are also pleasant surprises; some businesses are finding that [with good working habits, remote employees are actually more productive](#) in this digital landscape than they were pre-pandemic. Many businesses and employees are adapting faster than they ever thought possible – I was speaking to a CHRO recently, who

said he never thought his company would support a work-from-home policy, but due to the pandemic they implemented it in just 48 hours. Now, he's saying it'll likely stick in some form.

One of the core components of this new digital workplace is *internal communications*. This remote environment has pushed enterprises to quickly implement several communications-related improvements, including:

- **More transparency from leaders.** Many executive and c-suite leaders now address their employees regularly, such as in weekly updates.
- **New ways to digitally connect.** Employees are making more use of social channels like Slack or Microsoft Teams to communicate on a peer-to-peer level, creating what is essentially a virtual watercooler.
- **Shorter, more frequent meetings.** [At Microsoft, they've found an increase in overall number of meetings, but a decrease in length of those meetings](#) – a more productive approach to meetings that will likely stick around for the longer term.
- **Faster communications and updates.** Especially in times of crisis, the ability to keep your workforce up to date on global news as well as company changes has never been more valuable.



However, as part of this change and evolution, it's clear that the use of digital communications is increasing exponentially. According to an [infobrief released by IDC](#) prior to the pandemic, employees at U.S. companies were receiving 576 billion emails per year, and it has only become worse in this new era. Microsoft has [found a significant rise in instant messaging use during the pandemic](#), with 110% more messages sent from managers, and 50% more messages sent from employees. This increase, along with the [use of online collaboration tools spiking as much as 943%](#) in recent months, it's safe to say this trend isn't going away.

It's easy to understand, then, that employees are feeling the effects of this extreme increase in communications. "Zoom fatigue," is one example, becoming a common term after [the platform saw an increase of up to 200 million users daily](#) in March. While these new and existing communication tools have certainly helped organizations in their efforts to connect and drive productivity within a newly remote workforce, *communication fatigue* has emerged as a new obstacle.

However, even in such a noisy, overloaded environment, we still need to manage the growing list of priorities businesses are facing today: Handling the effects of COVID-19 on our organizations, aligning employees with evolving business strategies, and continuing to maintain company culture. On top of this, our core HR programs must still go on – onboarding, Open Enrollment, wellness programs, performance management, total rewards, compensation, HRIS implementations, and more. In the middle of all of this complexity, one thing is a clear common denominator – effective communication experiences will be critical to the success of *any* initiative.

Without successful communications, we won't be able to drive the business outcomes we need, which are only achievable through employee buy-in. So, how can we combat communication fatigue and ensure our messages get through and drive these important programs? As it remains unlikely that we can reduce the number of vital programs, we'll need to make our communications *more strategic and effective*. Here are two key approaches to reducing employee communication fatigue:



1. Create Targeted, Relevant Communications

Most communications today focus on simply hitting “send” – delivering information, but not necessarily focused on getting through to the intended audience. The result is many one-size-fits-all communications that flood employees with so much non-relevant information that they start to disengage. Prior to the pandemic, [IDC reported that 34 billion email messages were going straight to trash annually](#) – and it’s likely only gotten worse. And, if there’s a lack of engagement with the first message, another will inevitably be sent, creating a terrible cycle of more and more messages.

To combat this, it’s crucial to adopt a strategy that acknowledges the diverse employee population you’re engaging with. This means, essentially, that different groups will require different targeted approaches for your message to feel make it relevant and engaging. Here are a few ways to achieve this:

- **Personalize your message** – Use tone, style, and even employee names and data to make your

communications tailored to the employee, making it much more likely that they’ll absorb and engage with what you’re saying.

- **Target your communications** – Align your messaging with the groups of employees who most need the information. Think about your communications from a location-specific, team-specific, or department-specific point of view, and strategize accordingly.
- **Meet employees where they are** – The best way to reach an audience is through a channel they already use, especially when the message is time-sensitive. Gartner recently found that [more and more people prefer texting for urgent communications](#) – including in the workplace – with text open rates reaching 98%, versus an open rate of 20% with emails.
- **Measure your results** – Your employees are the best source of information as to what is and isn’t working with your communications. Use data to understand both engagement and sentiment so that you can sharpen and iterate your strategy as you go.

Most communications today focus on simply hitting “send” – delivering information, but not necessarily focused on getting through to the intended audience.

The result is many one-size-fits-all communications that flood employees with so much non-relevant information that they start to disengage.

2. More Engaging, Consumer-like Experiences

With this sudden lack of work-life balance, employers are competing for attention not just with other workplace communications, but with Instagram, Facebook, and other social platforms. In other words, employees live in an environment where content is always readily available. To keep up, workplace communications need to employ a consumer-grade



perspective to increase engagement, ultimately helping your audience to internalize key ideas and drive the outcomes you’re looking for. Follow these strategies for your communication experience:

- **Organize your message into short, clear ideas** – Your communication experience should be easily digestible; your employees are likely not interested in watching a “kitchen sink” video or reading a paragraphs-long email.
- **Put the focus on your audience** – Design communication journeys and experiences with your employees’ point of view in mind. By understanding what’s most important to them, you’re more likely to capture their attention.
- **Structure a multimedia campaign** – Structure your communication experience to carry your messaging over a strategic period of time, using different elements and media (e.g. videos, infographics, interactive storytelling) to truly engage your viewers.

As companies continue to deal with the complexities of COVID-19, and figure out how to operate in this new era, communication becomes truly imperative to keep the workforce aligned and productive. An effective communication experience will serve to strengthen the impact of any initiative or core program you need to implement, opening the door for the employee buy-in you need to drive your most crucial programs toward success – all while helping to reduce the communication fatigue that you and your employees are experiencing more and more each day.

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Keith Kitani is the CEO and Co-founder of GuideSpark, and brings over 20 years of digital communications and eLearning expertise to creating, building and leading GuideSpark as it transforms workplace communications.



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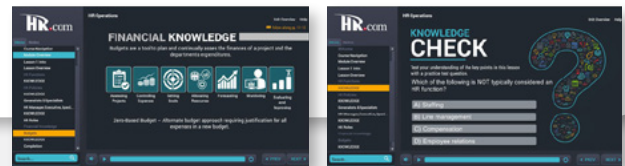
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Creating A Flexible And Effective Work Culture

Here's how to increase productivity, collaboration and employee engagement

 By David Windley

Prior to the onset of a global pandemic, the U.S. workforce was moving toward more flexible work arrangements. The coronavirus simply accelerated the progress. According to Global Workplace Analytics, [5 million](#) Americans were already working from home at least half the time prior to quarantine, an increase of 173% over the last decade. The challenge presented by the pandemic was that nearly every workplace had to adapt to this trend overnight.

Ideally, a well-thought-out plan would have been crafted, a timeline would have been mapped out and the change to flexible work would be implemented step by step. We did not have that luxury when we pivoted from in-office culture to remote work environments almost instantly.

But it's not too late. We can implement a plan for success and create a culture where flexible work arrangements offer increased productivity, better collaboration and more engaged employees.

What Is Flexible Work?

Flexible work is a blanket term for the ways in which employees have more control over when and where they work. Workplace flexibility can be broken down into several categories:

- **Telecommuting:** Telecommuting in this sense refers to a full-time job performed from the office only part of the time. Telecommuters often live locally and split their time between working in the office and from home.
- **Remote work:** An employee who works remotely performs their job entirely away from the office. These employees can typically live anywhere in the world as long as they perform and are available when a client or a colleague needs them.
- **Condensed workweek or flexible work hours:** These plans offer employees flexibility regarding their office hours. For example, they can come in and leave early, or work four long days and take a three-day weekend.

Who Will Thrive in Flexible Work Cultures?

Not every role can enjoy flexible work arrangements. We've learned through social distancing how to have school at home, see a doctor from home and order groceries from home, but in reality, positions like educators, most medical professionals, and retail or factory workers are not ideal for flexible work arrangements.

Professionals who will thrive with flexible work arrangements are those doing "knowledge" work. Software engineers, website developers, data scientists and graphic designers are examples of those who can be successful working from the comfort of a home office.

As technology advances, particularly around remote workplace collaboration, more roles will have the ability to be performed remotely, allowing for more employees to enjoy flexible work cultures.

What Conditions Are Needed for Successful Flexible Work Culture?

Creating a thriving flexible work culture will pay future dividends with increased employee morale and empowerment. Building a successful flexible work culture requires consideration of the following:

- **Manage outcomes and results, not inputs and processes.** Having a performance-driven culture will result in successful outcomes. Flex-work employees must know the level of performance expected and what metrics will be used to measure their work. The more information an employee has about expectations and key performance indicators (KPIs), the more they will flourish in a flexible environment.
- **Be specific about outcome expectations.** When are deadlines? When are check-in dates? How will the group collaborate? What does success look like? Praise successful performances, and focus on the end result, not how they arrived there.
- **Create a culture of accountability and personal responsibility.** Knowing they will be held accountable for the results of their work will motivate employees to apply themselves fully to their tasks, regardless of where their workstations are located. Each employee must accept responsibility for their specific job and know

that others on the team will expect they accomplish their part productively.

- **Hire the right people.** Before you can create a successful flexible work culture, you must have the right fit for the position. Employees who will thrive are self-starters and self-motivated. They have a desire to excel that comes from the inner drive, not just the need for a paycheck. Having a specific interview process with questions directed at these soft skills will aid in selecting the right candidates for flexible work arrangements.

Beware the Downside

While it seems that flexible work arrangements offer only positive outcomes, working from home can have its downsides.

Some employees enjoy a social work setting. Most appreciate flexibility, but it's important to have colleagues you enjoy socially. Workplace collaboration software and videoconferencing can help people feel more connected, but nothing replaces joining your co-workers for dinner and a drink after work.

People may think those with flexible work arrangements are not actually working. From neighbors to a child's teacher to a co-worker, those around you may question your work ethic or get offended if you turn down a personal request in the middle of the day. Along those same lines, the line between professional and

personal responsibilities can get blurred. If you are working from home, do you stop to pick up the kids from school or put a load of laundry in the dryer? Conversely, when does the workday end?

Flexible work arrangements can create workaholics; employees may feel like they are always on the clock. Encourage employees who work remotely to create schedules and enforce boundaries between personal time and work hours.

In a post-quarantine era, it's evident that flexible work is the way forward. It is the culture embraced by the future workforce, and it is the direction technology is progressing. By embracing the remote work trend and investing in the tools and people who will make it effective, you can be ahead of the curve and achieve a thriving flexible work culture that will attract the best people, promote growth and ensure the long-term success of your business.

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David Windley is a Veteran Human Resources Leader and CEO of [IQTalent Partners, Inc.](#)



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4 Vital Virtual Leadership Skills

You will be heading in the right direction if you focus on these essential skills

By Rachel Grzeskowiak

What does it mean to be a leader? In short, a leader is someone who inspires, guides, and coaches others to achieve their goals.

To take that question further, what does it mean to be a virtual leader? Well, it's not as different as you might think!

A significant component of being a successful leader centers around your interpersonal relationships. While connectivity is often associated with face-to-face interactions, you can accomplish this as a [long-distance leader](#) through an adjusted approach.

1. Communicating as a Virtual Leader

When you're leading remote teams, you lose that face-to-face interaction. This means your tone, instruction, and feedback can become lost in translation if you're not careful.

To avoid this, be clear and concise. Provide enough detail and direction to avoid being ambiguous and eliminate any confusion.

Use the appropriate cadence when communicating with employees. Too much communication can come across overbearing and untrustworthy, and too little you risk decreasing productivity and employee engagement.



As you already know being a leader, your calendar can fill up fast. Make sure you dedicate time and set up structured meetings with individuals and teams. The structure will allow everyone to fall into a routine, and it won't feel like you're micromanaging them with random check-ins.



It's just as important to schedule weekly one-on-one meetings with employees to make sure you're getting that necessary time together to discuss projects, build connections, and continue supporting their development journey. By offering availability, your employees will feel that you value the relationship.

When you lead a virtual team, it's quite possible not every individual resides in the same time zone. To maximize productivity, make sure there are a few hours of overlap for all employees on your team. This allows everyone to get that sense of team even when they are dispersed.

Use the appropriate channels for your communication and set expectations on how your various communication channels are to be used. Discuss when it's appropriate to use instant message, email, and webcam meetings. Understand when a meeting is necessary versus a quick announcement. No one likes attending hour-long meetings when the question could be addressed more efficiently in an email.

Encourage collaboration! It can be easy for remote team members to become withdrawn from the group

and push through tasks alone. You can promote teamwork by collaborating yourself. Leading by example is a great way to get your fellow team members onboard.

2. Developing Your Emotional Intelligence

A leader with high emotional intelligence develops stronger relationships with their employees and empowers their team to the highest degree.

Building strong relationships is one of the most important things you can do as a virtual leader. Stronger connections will improve culture, collaboration, and engagement levels in your organization.

Leaders who continually develop their emotional intelligence are better equipped to overcome challenging situations and inspire those around them to become the best versions of themselves.

Emotional intelligence is comprised of four major components: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship management. All components are equally as important and can benefit both leaders and team members.

3. Leading with Empathy

As we mentioned above, communication has its hurdles in a virtual environment. We lose that ability to read someone's intent through their body language, facial expression, and tone.

This means that when you conversate with your team, be sure to pay extra attention to verbal and non-verbal cues. When having conversations, encourage the use of a webcam to see the other person's facial expression and build that connection.

If one of your employees is having a hard time adjusting to a remote setting, or has challenges with time management, take the time to listen and understand how you can help. While the responsibility falls on the individual to perform at their job, you can set them up for success by providing resources to [improve on soft skills](#).



Another great way to support your employee's growth and development is by encouraging them to establish connections outside of your relationship.

[Try creating a mentoring program](#) within your organization by pairing up newer employees with more tenured individuals. By encouraging the mentor-mentee relationship, your employees can grow and develop in new ways.

4. Improving Organization With Online Tools

If you want to be an effective virtual leader, **you must prioritize organization**. With a variety of meetings and metrics to keep up with, it can be easy to get caught up in the never-ending to-do list.

The first thing you must do as a leader is set realistic expectations for yourself and your team.

You can do this by creating a schedule to track progress. Make sure everyone on your team understands the plan, and where to find the schedule. This will provide a sense of transparency among team members. When it comes time to delegate tasks, you have visibility to see who has time on their hands for an additional project.

Maximize your tools. Use the tools you already have! Whether that be a communication channel,

document sharing site, or project management tool, use these tools to your advantage. But this requires digital literacy – according to the [American Library Association](#), digital literacy can be defined as “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.”

Make sure you and the members of your team understand how to use the tools. You don't want this to become another hurdle, so [take some time for specific tools training](#) if you need it.

Whether you're new to leading remote teams or still searching to find the right balance, you'll be heading in the right direction if you focus on these essential skills.

This article was originally published [here](#)

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Rachel Grzeskowiak is Client Marketing Specialist at BizLibrary



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Inspiring A Healthier And More Productive Work Culture

I How gamification can do that

 By Josh Hart



Everyone loves playing games. Games grip the world and understanding why can offer fascinating insights that can make our lives happier, more fun, and more fulfilling. What if we could replicate the thrill of scoring a last-minute winner in a football match, beating your whole family at Scrabble, or emerging triumphant on Fortnite's

battle royale – and apply it to the real world? What if workplaces could tap into our natural competitive streaks to encourage us to feel like we're momentarily on top of the world?

Gamification – the application of gaming principles in non-game contexts – can do just that in the workplace, especially when allied to sophisticated technological

methods. Gamification can personalize the workplace, tailoring performance indicators to each individual employee, stimulating engagement between colleagues, and rewarding healthy and positive behaviour.

We know that people don't do what they need; they do what feels good to them. That's why people are more likely to play a computer game than to file their tax return – computer games are fun and enjoyable, whereas tax returns are just tedious. The games category in Apple's App Store is the most popular, accounting for [almost a quarter](#) of all downloads, more than education, lifestyle, and health apps combined. Games are effective because of two key concepts: control and creativity. On the one hand, games reinforce our feeling of control. There are rules, structure, and a clear premise. On the other hand, they engage our imaginations and spur us to think creatively.



These principles can and should be applied to the workplace, especially today, when technology is at the heart of everything we do. Not only games, but also social interactions, shopping, and banking – virtually everything can be done digitally. HR is no exception to this rule, and gamified, app-based employee incentive platforms can help to personalise the workplace, offering employees perks and benefits according to what best suits their needs.

For instance, employee apps can reward workers for putting time and effort into wellness activities, and use the data

they collect to benefit the user. An app can record whether someone has taken a 20-minute walk at lunchtime, which we should all be doing rather than staying glued to our desks, and convert that ‘achievement’ into a personalised reward. We can take this principle even further and drive up workplace performance through game-style challenges and tasks – whereby reaching goals or taking professional courses are seen through the lens of ‘levelling up’ with a clear reward of reaching the next level. By embracing gamification in these contexts, employees will be happier, healthier and far more

productive, creating a win-win across the board.

A gamified experience drives higher levels of engagement. It’s not enough simply to create an employee app; instead, employers must provide an app that employees love. In a successful model, a significant majority of employees at a company will have downloaded their app, around half will use it at least once per month, and up to a quarter will use it on a daily basis. There is no point having an employee app that workers download and immediately forget about; or, worse still, never download because they don’t consider it worthwhile.



A personalised app using gamification to reward healthy behaviour creates positive brand equity. Despite heavy spending on employee engagement (Deloitte [forecasts](#) that by 2021 the corporate wellbeing market in the U.S. alone will reach \$11.3 billion), according to research carried out by Gallup [only 13% of employees actually engage](#) with employers' programmes and schemes.

The reason why most engagement efforts fall short is because they are designed to cultivate commitment in a generic way. Naturally, a company where most employees are in their 20s and 30s should offer different benefits to a company where the age range is more diverse. A company based in London is different to a company based in North Wales. One-size-fits-all solutions are out of touch with the reality that every business has a different

ethos and workforces have different demographics.

Instead of providing generic, catch-all options, enterprises would benefit from taking into account that when employees can interact positively with services their HR managers provide for them, they are more likely to feel that their employer cares about them and values their wellbeing.

People respond better to personalised solutions, which in itself is a key component of gamification. People enjoy games because they feel as though they can determine the outcome through their own capabilities alone. In a football management sim, your favourite team is dependent only on your tactical prowess, and so – in theory at least – you can engineer an outcome far more favourable than what your players' real-life counterparts can achieve on the pitch. The same is true in the

workplace. People want to be able to control which benefits they can receive and how they go about accessing them. Products need to feel relevant to each employee's personality.

As a teenager, I spent a lot of time – probably too much time – playing the fantasy multiplayer online role-playing game World of Warcraft. In the game's parallel universe, players are always striving to level up, improve themselves and progress further. Moreover, in order to complete missions, you have to cooperate with other players and build relationships with them. These keys to success aren't so far removed from real-world settings. You can't go it alone at work, and managers want to see employees grow into better versions of themselves. Making work into a game is the natural thing to do if we are to see coming into the office as closer to starting a new round of Candy Crush than downloading forms from the HMRC website.

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Josh Hart is the Co-Founder and CTO of YuLife, the company pioneering a new type of life insurance by encouraging holders to live their best lives.



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How To Create Introvert-Friendly Workplaces During And Post Covid-19

| The pros and cons



 By **Jennifer B. Kahnweiler**

With people now working remotely, it's especially relevant for organizations to take into account the needs of introverts in their evolving work environments. Keeping talent engaged and

continuing to perform has become even more urgent in these challenging times of both the pandemic, and economic and social unrest.

Organizations can look at this time as an opportunity to make overdue workplace changes. They can strive to become exemplary leaders of introverts, to implement hiring and promotion practices that aren't biased against introverts and to create high performing remote work situations and flexible office spaces to ensure that everyone knows that they matter.

These seven key organizational practices will help to create more introvert-inclusive cultures and work practices:

1. Target great introvert talent. In a [2019 workplace survey](#) of mostly introverts, 38 percent of respondents said their organizations demonstrate a willingness to hire and promote introverts. Today, organizations can take advantage of technology such as YouTube videos that offer people prospective employees the chance to see what it's like to work for their company. Additionally, potential hires can now interview virtually without the pressure of in-person stressors.

2. Give introverts opportunities to share. In a typical group session, the ideas of quieter contributors rarely surface. One sales leader realized that none of the introverts shared during weekly conference calls and decided to give others a chance to speak. "I decided to wait for at least five comments before I spoke up. It was hard, but worth it because we heard many new voices."

3. Uncover any unconscious bias. This time out of the office provides an opportunity to focus on expanding your knowledge of unconscious bias. Without even realizing it, you may perceive introverts as meek, indecisive and anti-social. This could impact the types of opportunities and support you offer them.

4. Provide introverts a forum to share their work style preferences. In the work from home scenario, it's easy to become disconnected. Leaders need to provide safe environments where people can share.

Employee Resource Groups (ERG's) like [those established at 84.51°](#), provide forums where introverts can meet around specific topics. These groups sponsor discussions in which people can talk openly and understand each other in new ways. Another consideration is to talk with introverts on your teams about their preferred ways of interacting.

5. Design workable workplace

settings. Organizations have learned a lot about being flexible in the past few months. Many have witnessed a huge positive response to remote work. But for companies reopening their offices or whose employees never left, it may be time to rethink office spaces. Open plans can be just as effective as traditional private offices, particularly when they offer quiet pods where the conversation is off-limits so that staff can focus. Lack of privacy and noise were perennial complaints from introverts responding to the workplace survey. Ask introverts what office plans work for them and listen to their ideas for addressing potential problems with shared spaces.

6. Support customized on-site and remote working arrangements.

Working from home can offer increased autonomy and distraction-free alone time that allow introverts to do their best work. However, that isn't true for everyone, including parents with children and other family members who are also in the home. Don't assume that because people are introverted they automatically want to work at home. Not all do. [Zillow's Chief People Officer, Dan Spaulding](#), recently said, "...we also recognize that there is a balance between where people can be most effective, and that balance is unique for all of us. For some people, that may mean coming into the office a couple of days every month, and other people may want to come into the office three or four days a week just because of how their situation sets up." Organizations can customize their work-from-home and in-office arrangements to fit employees' needs.



7. Become a voice for the quiet. Rather than expecting introverts to adapt to the traditional, mainstream corporate culture, work to become a change agent in your organization to build a culture that can work both ways. Set the stage for a psychologically safe environment – one that welcomes quiet, calm contributions as well as expressive, energetic ones.

If you believe your organization needs to do more to harness introvert talent, encourage your organizational leaders to start by taking the [Creating An Introvert-Friendly Workplace quiz](#). Compare your responses to others in your organization as a starting point for discussion and to show you where to focus your efforts.

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Jennifer B. Kahnweiler, PhD, is an author, Certified Speaking Professional, and one of the top global leadership speakers on introverts. She helps organizations harness the power of introverts. Her new book is [Creating Introvert-Friendly Workplaces: How to Unleash Everyone's Talent and Performance](#) (BK Publishers, June 16, 2020). Her bestselling previous books include *The Introverted Leader*, *Quiet Influence*, and *The Genius of Opposites*. Her books have been translated into 18 languages.



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