



LEADING A HYBRID WORKFORCE

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What are the differences between leading in an office environment and a remote environment? By now you can list several things and likely offer challenges as well as opportunities in the contrast of places we have worked for the past year or more. Start your engines for the next iteration of the world of work as we move to an environment where we work in different locations on different days, or different times.

This means we have a new way of leading, and managing, our people. And new ways to build and define culture. And opportunities to grow our skills in ways no one has explored before, because you are the first leaders to bring your organization through a global pandemic! This good news means you have only successes and learning opportunities, no failures. In other words, experimenting is expected, and agility is required.

Agility is the ability to move quickly and easily between *things*, in this case, between places to work, projects and processes for working, and communication styles to relay information. This is another place where resilience is significant.

That word again, resilience. What do we do with it, how do we grow it, what is our responsibility as leaders to address it? Great questions all around and it begins with yourself. Consider these measures:

- How often do you rely on technology for answers to pop culture or trivia?
- What frequency do you stretch your body?
- When do you pause to breathe?
- Where on your calendar is 'thinking time'?

If you haven't even *thought* about these before, you are likely also experiencing the drain and fatigue so many people are reporting. So, begin with you – schedule time to think. Create your schedule so there is room between meetings, even 5 minutes is substantial in restoring energy and creativity.

Moving out to your people, create meaningful check-in calls where the time allotted is small, yet the conversations are meaningful. Have one or two items to follow on from the last check in, and incorporate wellbeing through sharing stories of personal significance since the last connection point. These brief talks aren't 'meetings', so name them something else. Catchy titles that exist include 'one-on-ones', 'huddles', 'downloads', and I challenge you to name them something that aligns with your firm's culture.

As we shift into leading folks who are both here and there, communication is more significant than ever. Email has become more dominant in our days than pre-pandemic, so consider how that message is best sent. We have many video options now, so what could be sent via a 30 second video as opposed to an email that you spend time proofing and typing, and many others read and interpret? What is best sent via your Teams or Jabber channels? How do you decide? And how can you create alignment in your leadership team as to what level of priority is established for each modality? This will become increasingly significant as we look to provide information to groups in one message, whether they are in office or remote working.

This alignment creates expectation, which is also a good way to develop teams. If you are leading a team now, how do you know what is expected of each member? What do they know they are responsible for, and when they are to deliver it? Expectations were easily managed when we saw each other in passing, could comment on something we were waiting on while heading to the kitchen for a break. Time to establish expectations differently – on camera or off? Muted or not? Attend every team meeting or not? These are the basic ones and adding more **guides** the team to success.

Guides. That means focusing on the outcome not the activity. How many times have you wondered if so-and-so was *actually* working today? You couldn't see them, you didn't hear them, they were in their remote location, and/or you were too. When we focus on the activity we lose sight of trust, and it starts to erode. When we focus on the outcome – the result of the work, which might include a progress timeline – we create credibility and respect, and trust grows. We guide our teams with expectations and leave them to do the good work that we hired them to do.

This leads to the reformation of meetings. What would happen if all internal meetings at your firm started at 5 after the hour instead of on the hour? And what if they ended at 5 til the hour instead of on the hour? Those 10 minutes of time between meetings provides you a break to shift your thinking from one topic to the next, which also means you'll have access to more ideas and creative problem solving and build your agility and resilience along the way.

And while you are rebuilding meetings, start with something that connects people – a favorite candy or ice cream, and when the last time you enjoyed it – for instance. Those first few minutes while people are signing on and getting set are informal times to share, so focus the sharing to form connection.

Connection turns into climate for your team which becomes culture for your organization. Connection also builds empathy, a cornerstone to leadership, and empathy becomes retention.

Leading a hybrid team is challenging. With some attention to developing yourself first, the challenge gets easier. Begin today with thinking time. Or breathing slowly with your eyes closed. Start small and grow big.

For more information and further reading on Leadership, visit our [online library](#).



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Judy understands teams. And she knows how to help you maximize the potential of yours. For over two decades, Judy has applied her vast knowledge of team dynamics, emotional intelligence, work/life balance, leadership, finance, and legal management to help law firms improve their people, process, performance and, ultimately, profits.

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