

Leading Virtual Teams

Working anywhere or anytime in the world is the new paradigm of work teams in our global economy. Virtual work teams bring together expertise and important contributors that may not otherwise be able to work together because of travel, cost, or time. Virtual work teams face challenges from members that may have never met one another to establishing a structure within which the team will work. Communication is the key with technology as the enabler to leading virtual teams.

Virtual leaders must be highly skilled in both verbal and written communication. The ability to connect with others over email, phone, instant messaging, or video conferencing, to develop relationships one to one and one to many is critical.

To develop trust the virtual leader must be able to communicate the goals and objectives clearly and concisely via electronic communications. Unambiguous messages contribute to mutual trust.

Identifying and resolving issues before conflict develops takes skillful listening to pick up on the clues team members give. Proactively extracting and addressing issues before they escalate into serious problems helps the high functioning team remain so.

Regular communication with each team member and with the group will eliminate any feelings of disconnectedness. Feelings of isolation can lead to low work performance. Deliverables don't seem important when there is no check back from the leader to the team. Members will quickly diminish the importance of the deliverables even if communications fall off just a little. Besides, the more the

Leading a virtual team to achieve high performance is a task that takes a disciplined approach. From the beginning of the team's inception the leader provides collaboration tools, agendas, task lists, project plans and assigns tasks to individuals. Each team member is held accountable by the leader and through the leaders' continued follow-up the team rewards the virtual leader by demonstrating commitment to the mission and value to the team.

leader knows about what each individual is doing allows for more opportunities to share information within the group. Staying connected strengthens the team.

Leaders encourage online discussion threads. This helps develop a shared intellectual model. It is a forum for the entire team to participate in discussions about strategy and planning. Team performance improves when there is a high understanding of each member's tasks. The team leader's commitment to the creation of shared intelligence helps virtual teams remain high performing.



Bringing the team together face-to-face at least once helps strengthen purpose and relationships. If that luxury is afforded the virtual leader, take advantage by getting to know each team member on a personal level and provide opportunities for each member to do the same with one another.