The Key To Leading A Successful Remote Team

Remote work is on the rise but putting together a virtual-office framework is still new to most business leaders. How can you get there if your organisation is still set in bricks-and-mortar? The answer will depend on the size of your workforce and nature of your enterprise. But three elements of company culture can help you lead a far-flung team with members based around the world.

I discovered two of these - Uniqueness and Transparency - during research for my book. I discovered the third, which I'll call Setting Boundaries, from actually leading a 100-percent remote business, which forced me to learn the ropes on the fly. Necessity can be a great teacher!

To align your processes with a staff working from home, you might want to engage a consultant who specialises in those things. But, once you have your workflows and protocols laid out, you'll want to focus on how the virtual environment is set up. To be successful as a leader when working at a distance, add a bit more emphasis to your company's culture. Help your people set boundaries to keep themselves, and your business, moving forward.

Put A Unique Spin On Culture

Whether you've got headquarters in several countries or no headquarters at all, you can group your employees geographically to construct virtual HQs. This will lend a sense of identity to workers who report from different areas of the world while uniting them under the larger umbrella of your company. Start with what you all have in common, and then celebrate your differences.

Ground your team by educating every member about your company's mission, vision, and values. Philosophies on business goals and impacts, and the ethics employed in achieving them, should be universal. For example, a dedication to novel solutions can be exercised in any location. How your distinct teams innovate, though, may set them apart.

In this example, you might query your workers about what helps them brainstorm. The answer might be meditation, nature walks, or a good game of golf. Anything that sets the mind free might work. Now, each member of the company or group of employees who have similar habits can become known for their favoured brainstorming activities. Publicise these unique behaviours internally and encourage discussion about them.

How do they relate to the company's overall mission and values?

How do they reflect individual personalities?

How do they factor into work outcomes?

Recognising and celebrating each others' differences actually brings people together. Unique traits also add to your overall company brand. As you all work remotely, pay attention to the unique qualities that allow you to share in personal moments.

Insist On Transparent Exchanges

Without the benefit of face-to-face meetings and the necessity to chat via video monitors, communicating well is a skill that your whole remote team must master. Language and idiom barriers can be overcome if we understand people's different communication styles. But first, make a commitment to the open exchange of information - whatever it is that will help people do their jobs well.

Having a central database of facts and figures available to authorised employees will save time and misunderstanding. If the same class of worker in Europe, Latin America, and Asia all need to serve customers with basic account information, gather it in one accessible place, translating as needed. It's one thing to hunt for details in a single office; it's quite another to have to scour the globe!

Survey your staff for their preferred methods of contact - telephone, email, instant message, etc. Then post those preferences along with links to each person on the company network. Avoiding frustrating calls and missed messages will make your remote team more cohesive and productive.

Use Boundaries As Virtual Walls

If your business can be transacted via computer and telephone, locations are not finite. But leaders should narrow them down. Cafés and other public spaces are not conducive to uninterrupted concentration. Neither is a living room table in front of the television. Let your team know what your remote requirements are. At many companies, for instance, they include a dedicated office space in the home or a rental office that may be shared by other virtual workers.

Finally, when leading a team that can, theoretically, work day and night, draw some walls around work time. Your business may demand that staff be on call during traditional office or store hours in a given time zone. Or, the nature of the work may mean timing is not critical. Create and discuss your guidelines so that your virtual team is all on the same page.

At my remote company, where employee engagement and enthusiasm are high, my biggest problem is getting them to stop working. Time off is mandatory, and I counsel the team not to answer work-related calls or messages while on leave. Enforcing "me" time is one of the keys to preventing burn-out. When they return to work, they'll be glad to have it all waiting for them.

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