

10 Tips for Managing Virtual Teams – Isabell M. Pacheco, FACHE

Amidst the world-pandemic and due to governmentally required stay at home requirements, many businesses have been forced to find a new way of operating. For some of us, working virtually is part of our every-day work environment, for others, this is uncharted territory. Transitioning from an in-office to a virtual work environment is not as easy as just taking your computer home and voila! You must be strategic and vigilant in planning for and sustaining a successful virtual team. I've outlined 10 tips for making that transition work for you and your teams. Enjoy!

1. **Establish Purpose** - Everyone wants to feel connected and like they are a part of something bigger than themselves. Setting the groundwork on establishing everyone's role in the team and how their work contributes to the overall organization is a vital first step.
2. **Frequent Updates and Transparency** – Update teams frequently and honestly without breaching confidentiality of course. People want to know what is happening in the bigger picture and what it means for them. Updating your team with relevant and timely organizational updates not only helps settle anxiety about feeling disconnected but squelches the rumor mill.
3. **Frequent Virtual Check-Ins** – Establishing a routine for yourself and your team is also another critical step in successful virtual teams. Creating a recurring virtual face to face check in with your team even if only for 10-15 minutes at the beginning of each day helps develop discipline by establishing a start time to the day and gets teams to interact with one another for a sense of community. Conversely, setting a similar call at the end of the day to talk through things that may have come up or encourage collaboration with teammates is also helpful in routine building. We're all in this together!
4. **Technology** – When working virtual, teams need access to the right technology. More importantly, developing a standard for everyone to use the same technology. For example, using an online communication application like Skype allows individual and group instant messaging as well as face-to-face video conferencing. It's just not practical for ten different people to use ten different applications. Internet access although might seem to go without saying today but many people choose to use personal hotspots instead of an internet subscription which can be problematic for prolonged use and may incur expensive data charges.
5. **Equipment** – Be sensitive to the type of work required for each position. If your work requires analytical work or access to multiple applications simultaneously, you may need more than one computer monitor. Reliable phones should also be an equipment consideration.
6. **Be Available** – If you are an executive who has the charge to lead other leaders in your organization, being available is paramount to a unified voice. Equally, leaders at all levels should make themselves available to their teams. Being available lets employees know that they have a support system even if it is 500-miles away. No one wants to feel like they are on an island by themselves.
7. **Be Clear on Expectations, Deliverables, and Timelines** – Be specific on expectations of work output whether it's a deliverable you'd like to see daily or a report you need weekly. Establish a mutual understanding of what is expected to avoid as much miscommunication and/or unsuccessful projects as possible. Timelines with regular check-ins are also useful in setting expectations and developing structure.
8. **Align Work Hours (time zones)** – It is not uncommon for virtual teams to be in differing time-zones. Be deliberate in aligning time-zones so that everyone on the team has at least 4-5 hours of mutual office hours. In today's fast-paced environment, aligning office hours promotes collaboration and fends off frustration within the team by being able to reach a colleague quickly.
9. **Give Frequent Feedback** – It's innate in all of us to want to know if we are doing our jobs well and more importantly, that our boss thinks so too. Giving frequent feedback to your team is crucial to their success. As a leader, you want to see your teams succeed which as you know, is a direct correlation to your own success. Don't underestimate the power of acknowledging a job well done or constructive feedback even in a virtual team. For some, this is just the thing that creates loyalty and the willingness to go beyond what is asked of them.
10. **Monitor Progress** – I don't recall where these quotes first came from but I heard them spoken to me when I was an early careerist and they have been engraved into me ever since, "if it's not monitored, it's not managed" and

“if it’s not documented, it didn’t happen.” If you take away nothing else from these tips, take these two tips with you in all that you do. They have never steered me wrong!

Bonus Tip: Virtual Team Building: This tip is a personal preference that I have found to be very effective in encouraging teams to “get to know” each other and maintain morale. I am a huge proponent of in-person team building activities so when in Rome do as the Romans do! Virtual team building can be just as fun. Virtual team trivia is a favorite of mine. There is a plethora of online resources for virtual team building activities. You won’t be disappointed.