

6 Tips for Building Relevance and Trust in Virtual Teams

Written by: Assistant Professor Bill Davis, MA, CM, CDM & Associate Professor Ron Beach, Ph.D. | August 28, 2018



Originally posted on Ashford University Forward Thinking, August

2018: <https://www.ashford.edu/online-degrees/technology/6-tips-for-building-relevance-and-trust-in-virtual-teams>

Technology continues to be the No. 1 driver of change, and rapid change is the norm in most organizations today. In response, organizations are fine tuning, and more leaders are overseeing teams that work across departments. As these adjustments and shifts continue, a virtual workplace, or at least a situation where some employees are working virtually part of the time, has emerged (Beach, 2018).

What is a Virtual Team

A virtual team is a “group of people who work independently with shared purpose across

space, time, and organizational boundaries, using technology to communicate and collaborate." (Mind Tools, n.d., para 6). Virtual teams allow organizations to bring together people with the best expertise, regardless of where they live which presents leaders with unique demands, dynamics, and challenges. To increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency, understanding the virtual team and virtual leadership is a must.

What You Need to Lead a Virtual Team

Being proactive helps ensure sustainability and continued success inside and outside of the organization. According to Steve Bailey (2016), "Working virtually has its own rules for job-sharing, strategies for effective collaboration, and discernible competencies for both leaders and team members." Virtual teams require leaders who know how to work with the right technology and who have the proper skills to work effectively across space, time, and organizational boundaries. Therefore, the ability to stay current with technology, collaborate, educate employees, and innovate is a must for organizational success.

While there are many ways to achieve these goals, **here are six practical suggestions on how to lead and manage a virtual team.**

1. Use The Right Technology:

Ensure you have the right technology, and test it in advance. It is important your audio and visual features are working properly and that you can share your screen and allow others to share theirs.

2. Understand Your Purpose:

It is very important to know in advance the purpose of your meetings. There are different types of meetings to hold (informal or formal). Some can be for team building and are more social, while others can be more serious and business-like. You should know why you are meeting, what you want to accomplish, and the outcomes desired.

3. Build Trust:

First impressions are lasting, and bad ones last longer, so be positive, immediate, reliable, consistent, and lead by example. These qualities build trust and help to boost your reputation as a leader. Remember to talk the walk and walk the talk, and keep in mind that your team is observing how you lead. Your honesty, competence, dependability, reliability

and likability are all dimensions that build trust. Be a considerate leader and work to hold people accountable on deliverables in a fair and effective manner. Having measures and some controls in place are important.

4. Master Quality Communication Skills:

Communicate, don't procrastinate. Be open, honest, and transparent, and set the right tone as a virtual leader. Send the right message, and stay engaged with your team members on a consistent basis. Be aware of your communication style on and off camera. There are three types of communication: verbal, non-verbal, and para verbal. There also are three parts to any message: content (what is being communicated), the tone (general feeling in the message), and relation (how you connect with each member). Remember the three Cs of communication, and make your messages 1) Clear, 2) Complete, and 3) Concise. Ask yourself whether your verbal communication lines up with your non-verbal communication, and keep practicing to master your communication skills. It is an art, and some naturally communicate better than others.

5. Apply Your Emotional Intelligence (EQ):

Develop and apply your EQ skills. Be socially and self-aware, self-manage, and manage your relationships. Anticipate changing events and situations, adapt and adjust to the circumstances, and understand the context and culture in which you lead. Doing so will help you avoid conflicts and become even more successful.

6. Embrace Diversity:

Leading a virtual team is an all-inclusive process, and everyone has a voice. In today's changing times, it is important to have a higher sense of purpose and be open to diversity and experience. Show mutual respect to all, and work to find common ground. When you collaborate, you gain momentum and synergy and ultimately grow your knowledge and skills.

By following these six tips, you will build better awareness, gain new insight, and reinforce your knowledge of virtual leadership and virtual teams. The trends to lead virtual teams will continue, and being proactive and consistent in your leadership style will help you ensure positive outcomes and results.

References:

Beach, R (2018). The Virtual Divide. Thornton, CO: Virtual Publishing,. Available Oct 15, 2018 on Amazon.com

Bailey, S. (2016). Virtual teams that actually work. ICPM Management Briefs. Retrieved from <http://mgmt.blog/virtual-teams-that-actually-work/>

Mind Tools Content Team (n.d.). Working in a virtual team. Retrieved from <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/working-virtual-team.htm>

About the Author



Assistant Professor Bill Davis, MA, CM, CDM & Associate Professor Ron Beach, Ph.D.

Bill Davis is an Instructor and a Faculty Senator in the Forbes School of Business at Ashford University. Dr. Beach is an Ashford assistant professor and Program Chair of the BA in Business Administration Program in The Forbes School of Business. Dr. Beach also has a book coming out in the fall available for preorder on Amazon titled, "The Virtual Divide."