



Leadership In A (newly) Remote World

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**Sutherland
Coaching &
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Who Am I ?



Janice Sutherland is CEO of the award winning leadership and personal development consultancy Sutherland Coaching & Consulting.

Janice's professional career has spanned over 25 years of leadership with prestigious multinationals in the UK and Caribbean and she made history when she became the first female CEO in the Telecoms Sector for Digicel Antigua, the Caribbean's leading Communications and Entertainment provider.

She provides leadership development and executive coaching for organizations globally. She is the author of international best-seller *This Woman Can - The no bullsh*t guide for women who lead* and host of *This Woman Can Podcast*.

Janice also a sought after keynote presenter for corporate and nonprofit environments and speaks on issues relating to leadership, women's advancement, professional success and work/life alignment.

Janice holds an MA in Strategic Sales Management (Dist.) a BA (Hons) Combined Studies in Marketing and Human Resources, a Diploma in Professional Sales. She is a certified Executive and Life coach. As a Marshall Goldsmith Certified Global Leadership Assessment (GLA360) Professional. She is licensed to carry out high-quality and high-impact leadership assessment services to leaders at every level of industry.

**In the role of
remote leader,
what should a
leader focus
on to be truly
effective?**

Input vs Output?

For a lot of organisations, there can be pushback when it comes to introducing remote workers - “How will I know they’re doing their job?” “How can I say they’re at work when they’re at home?” “I need to know that they are working and I can’t do that if they’re not in the office?” So many excuses but if you look carefully most are due to a lack of trust.

As a leader I learnt long ago, that to effectively lead I had to focus on the real objective - the **output!** Whether that was creating a product or delivering on the numbers, it was achievement of the target not necessarily the process to get there that was important.

This is the change of mindset required for any leader new to remote working.

This new reality raises a multitude of questions and challenges for team leaders that they’ve never had to consider - How do I communicate effectively with a workforce that I can’t see or spread out across multiple locations? Beyond day-to-day workflow, what does a performance evaluation for a remote worker look like? How do I keep my team members happy and on track to complete major projects? How do I trust them to deliver? How can I lead when my team is not in front of me?

This is where you need to establish a clear set of best practices for managing your remote workforce to complete projects on time, build team morale and feel confident in your leadership. Once you can answer the following six questions, you’ll be well on the way to successfully leading your virtual team.



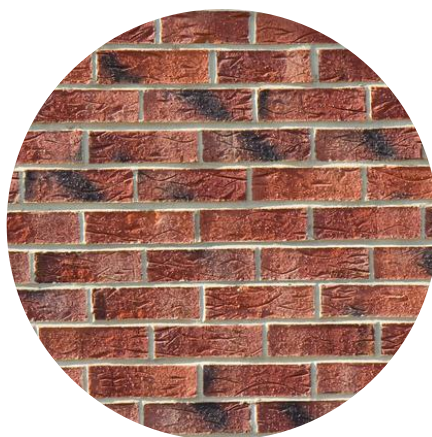
The real issue of managing inputs for a leader



1. You turn into an annoying micromanager.



2. You lose focus on the real objective/bigger picture.



3. You risk becoming the obstacle for your employees getting actions done.

**So What Are
The Key
Questions You
Need To
Answer To
Successfully
Lead A Remote
Team?**

THE SIX QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ANSWER TO SUCCESSFULLY LEAD A REMOTE TEAM.



COMMUNICATION

How do I establish effective communication channels with my team whilst their remote?



ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE

How do I avoid performance issues within my team whilst they're at home?



CLARITY

What do I need to do, to ensure that my team know what is expected of them during this period?.



TEAM BUILDING

How do I maintain team camaraderie, improve morale and stay on track?



PRODUCTIVITY

What can I do to maintain productivity levels within my remote team?.



EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

What actions can I take to ensure my team know how they're performing.

1. Communicating with your team.

Set up the right tools - Larger organizations will most likely have some Microsoft product for messaging. For smaller organizations, get in touch instantly with your team on messaging services like Slack and encourage your team members to message each other there – it's free for small teams.

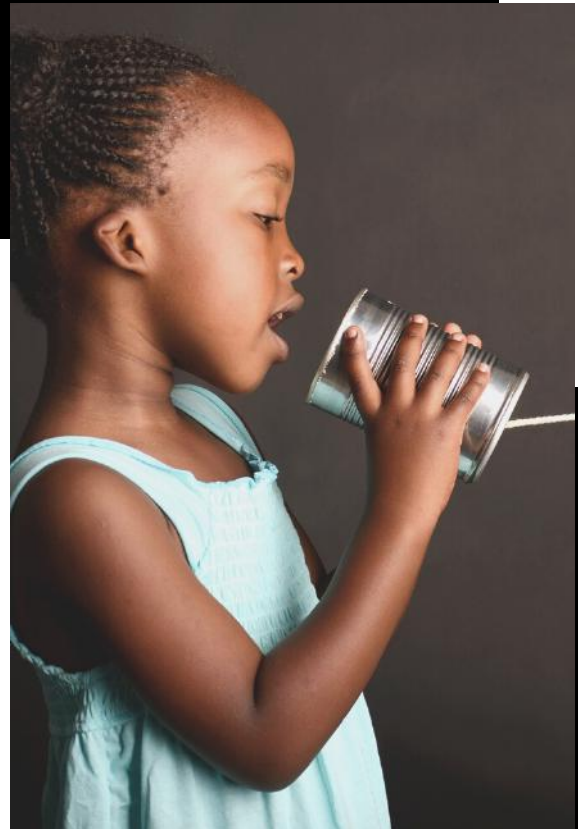
Set up sub groups for individual projects or teams making it easy for your team to see who's working on what – and how things are going. Try to avoid communication via WhatsApp, people still need to retain a level of privacy.

Regular communication around projects will most likely happen through a combination of email, video conferencing, and phone, utilize tools like Skype and Zoom to host meetings, which can help put your team all on the same page. To maintain the team environment use video or phone conferencing for all-team meetings or check-ins to ensure team members remain connected.

Establish a check-in routine that works best for your team - Yes, managing a remote workforce has its disadvantages and it can be tough for bosses who are used to hands-on management. Strike a balance between regular check-ins and team meetings and letting employees come to you with problems. For instance, schedule a morning buzz brief or end of day debrief, try setting up daily/weekly email check-ins for each employee and a weekly/monthly all-team video conference call. You can scale up or back as needed.

Encourage open lines of communication between you and your team - This all about building trust and empathy. If your team don't feel comfortable coming to you with questions, you could wind up with a bunch of missed deadlines. Just like you, it's a new way of working for them, so impress upon them your 'open door' policy and encourage them to reach out with questions, concerns, or problems.

Create space for staff to communicate with one another- Chatrooms are a great space for staff to encourage one another, ask questions, and manage projects to completion. Whether you choose Slack or a project management service like Asana, make it clear that staff members should interact with one another regularly and establish the hours when they should be available to respond to one another.



3. Team-building

Both you and your team have been used to creating that team camaraderie and there's a chance that they will struggle with feeling isolated from their co-workers, exhibiting a lack of productivity, and being unable to set clear work/life boundaries.

Make it a priority for your team members to feel comfortable with one another, in order to improve morale and stay on track.



Provide opportunities for remote social interaction – You don't have to get straight down to business in every meeting, structure ways for your team to interact socially (that is, have informal conversations about non-work topics) while working remotely, virtual coffee dates, pizza breaks (there's a boom in food delivery services across most islands). The adjustment to remote working can take time, but particularly so if your team have been abruptly transitioned out of the office. These types of activities may sound artificial or forced, but can help reduce feelings of isolation, and promote a sense of belonging.

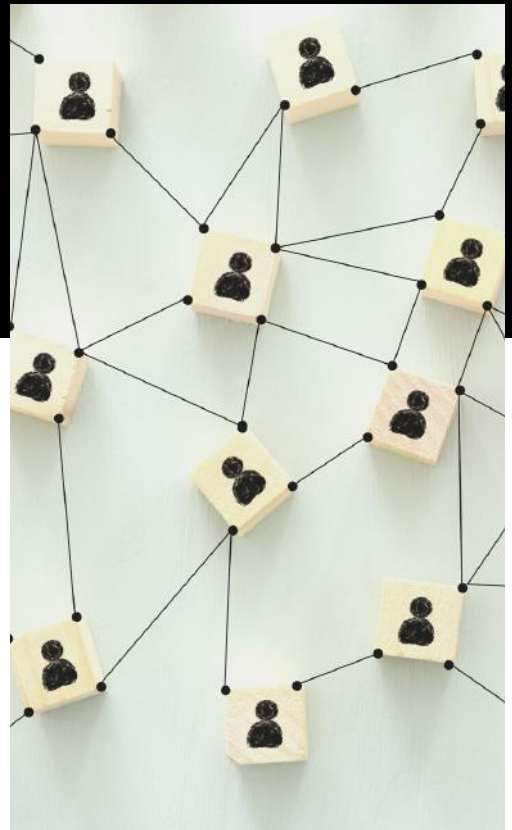
Provide encouragement and emotional support - Especially in the context of an abrupt shift to remote work, it is important for you to acknowledge stress, listen to employees' anxieties and concerns, and empathize with their struggles. If an employee is clearly struggling but not communicating stress or anxiety, ask them how they're doing, just like you would at any other time. Even a general question such as "How are you adapting to this new work situation so far?" can elicit important information that you might not otherwise hear. Once you ask the question, shut up and be sure to listen carefully to their response, briefly restate what you heard back to the employee, to ensure that you understood correctly. Let the employee's stress or concerns (rather than your own) be the focus of this conversation.

Continue with your One-to-one meetings – These will be even more critical for morale and while it can seem like a hassle to schedule one-to-ones with every team member, they make workers feel valued and are an opportunity to give feedback on work performance. If these meetings aren't conducted regularly or get rescheduled, it can make remote workers feel out of touch with what's happening in the company and unsure of where they stand.

4. Managing workflow

In an office environment, it's easy for your team to get a sense of the company's priorities, keep the big-picture goals of the company in mind, and know when they should accommodate a new request or task on the fly.

Since these elements of work can get lost in translation in remote environments, it's important for leaders to clearly communicate priorities – and when those priorities or deadlines shift.



Use task management tools – Depending on your business, you may already be using tools such as Asana or Trello to manage projects. If not a good old Excel Gantt chart can help you with assigning responsibility for tasks, and can progress can be updated via your regular check-ins to ensure project completion.

Create a check-in culture – Your team should already feel comfortable communicating with one another and with you about their progress. But set expectations from the get-go by establishing a check-in culture, a quick message will feel natural, rather than overbearing. Don't feel like you have to check in every hour - trust that your team is getting work done behind-the-scenes.

5. Addressing accountability and performance

This is probably the biggest aspect most leaders are worried about. Working from home means employees have the luxury of working out of your sight. Some employees thrive with this kind of independence, while others can falter. Create processes that help your employees excel remotely..



Focus on output not input – As a leader ask yourself what’s the real end goal – how long someone is sat at their PC or the completion of that report? For most roles your focus can be on the deliverables and not necessarily the process (at least for the short term). Also bear in mind that most workers can actually be more productive because they don’t have the constant interruptions of impromptu meetings, constant phone calls and peers stopping by for a chat.

Assign clear deadlines and communication pathways – Clearly define your deadlines, some are non- negotiables what are they? Make sure your team know what they are. Missing a deadline for a small task may not seem like a big deal, but it could escalate and impact the entire team. Establish protocols around what your team should do if they face hurdles that would impact delivery times.

Create a culture of positive feedback – Accountability isn’t just about critiquing someone’s performance. In this new environment, it can be difficult for employees to know if they’re on track or doing a great job. Make sure your team know when they’re knocking it out of the park – they need to hear praise too.

Don’t wait to address poor performance – If you sense that someone on your team is struggling to adjust, they’re missing deadlines or haven’t quite come up to speed, it’s important to address issues right away. Make your expectations clear, ensure they understand any consequences and give them the support they need to get up to speed.

6. Evaluating performance

Both you and your team would be used to receiving multiple forms of verbal feedback - from co-workers, other managers and collaborators, as well as regular input from their superior.

Since there are fewer real-time interactions on virtual teams, it can be difficult for your team to know how they're performing.



Schedule regular feedback – Now, more than ever your team need to receive regular feedback. Hearing about their performance will help them to feel like they're contributing to the team. Use your regular check-ins, briefings or calls to encourage employee feedback and questions. You can also use this time to evaluate ongoing progress on projects.

Encourage employee self-reflection before a review – How long your remote team will be operational is an unknown at present but just because your team is now remote doesn't mean that their quarterly/semi-annual or annual review is cancelled! Just as you would have done irl (in real life), this activity continues. To make the review especially useful, ask your employee to evaluate how they manage their time on their own and their comfort level with your company's set of communication and management tools. Consider their responses when you evaluate your own job as their leader. What can you do to make your teams' remote work lives even better?

Don't blindside them with negative feedback - When your team is remote, it's especially important to address problems as they come up – even if it seems easier to turn a blind eye and let things slide. If you save all of your negative feedback for the yearly review, you're not giving your remote workers a fighting chance to adapt to your virtual culture and expectations. That takes time – and practice.

The challenges of managing a remote workforce aren't that dissimilar to leading your team in the office, it just takes a flex of both your skills and mindset. Treating your newly remote team any differently could lead to trouble.

**20 Questions
to Ask Your
Remote Team
To Keep Them
Engaged,
Connected
and
Productive.**



As a manager, it can be hard to understand what your remote workers are going through, especially if you've never worked remotely. It's most probably a new experience for both parties and each are adjusting to the new way of working - it can be easy to feel isolated in more ways than one and feel out of the loop of normal office communication that happens organically.

However, that's not the only difference. They're also experiencing other challenges that they wouldn't face under normal circumstances. The most common of these remote lifestyle challenges are loneliness, juggling personal commitments and unplugging at the end of the day.

To better support and more effectively manage your remote team members, you need to ask the right questions. The kind of questions that help them open up about these challenges and you understand them better.

Asking the right questions can unlock insights that help you break through issues and better support your team. That's why we want to share some great questions you can use today to uniquely understand and support your remote employees. The key is focusing on the common challenges of working remotely. Your team may not volunteer information about these issues, but addressing them can improve their work life and the performance of your team as a whole.

I've organized a collection of questions in the 3 major areas uniquely affecting remote workers. This includes: 1) Remote lifestyle 2) Information dissemination 3) Connection

Within each section, I've provided context to help you understand the purpose of the questions and how they allow you to help remote workers facing those particular challenges.

Remote lifestyle



The questions below will help you understand how their day is structured and identify ways you may be able to help them.

- 1) What's your favorite part about working remote? (Understand what drives them)
- 2) What's your daily routine like for working?
- 3) What's the highlight of your day? (Look for signs of loneliness, encourage socializing)
- 4) What's most challenging for you in your daily work routine? (Help troubleshoot)
- 5) What do you do to recharge each day?
- 6) What's your setup like for working?
- 7) What's one thing we could get for you that would make your work easier or better?
- 8) What's the most important thing we do to help you be successful working remotely?
- 9) How do you manage distractions during the day? Is it a challenge for you?
- 10) What helps you feel connected to others and counteract the potential loneliness of working remotely?
- 11) Do you think you can fully disconnect at the end of the day?

With these questions, you'll accomplish two key things: First, you'll build empathy by understanding how they feel about working remotely and their average work day/routine. The second is you will uncover issues by understanding better what some of their challenges they're facing by working remotely. Both will help you work with them to help them have a great experience working remotely.

Information dissemination



One of the biggest challenges of working remotely is communication. Particularly, all the ad hoc conversations they miss out on that happen in the office.

Consider this scenario: you had a quick call with your entire team, including remote team members, earlier in the day. Later, a team member, Steph, comes to you and brings up an issue the team didn't realize during the call. After that, another team member, Jon, comes to you and explains that he and Steph identified a solution. You tell them it looks good and to run with it. But the other team members didn't catch any of that chain-link conversation. And, because you're not in the office, it can be easy to forget to fill them in.

By using these questions to talk with your remote team members about these kinds of issues, you'll be able to gather feedback and better understand what they're missing. Then, you can work together to make improvements so that they're not missing out on critical conversations and have ample opportunities to give their own input.

- 12) What do you want to learn more about our team / the company? (Harder to learn when you're not around the office)
- 13) Have you been surprised by any news announced at an all hands? What was it?
- 17) Do you feel included in our team decisions? Why/why not?
- 14) How are the tools we use as a team working out for you remotely? (i.e.- Are they handicapped by poor audio on hangouts or the like?)
- 15) What challenges do you feel you have compared to those in the office?
- 16) Are there any tools that we should try out that could help us improve our remote culture?

It's hard to always recognize who isn't in the room. Remembering to keep your team members in the loop is a problem that requires a consistent, intentional effort and doesn't always work out perfectly. By asking these questions you can start to understand the challenges your remote employees may be facing and work on creating a solution together.

Connection



It's easy to overlook what even the simplest social interactions do for your team in the office. Even simple day-to-day banter can build strong bonds for teams. This often happens naturally when you're working in close proximity. But when you're not working side by side every day, that can be a lot harder. Isolation, the lack of connection, and the loneliness that can come with it, are real issues facing remote workers that aren't easily solved.

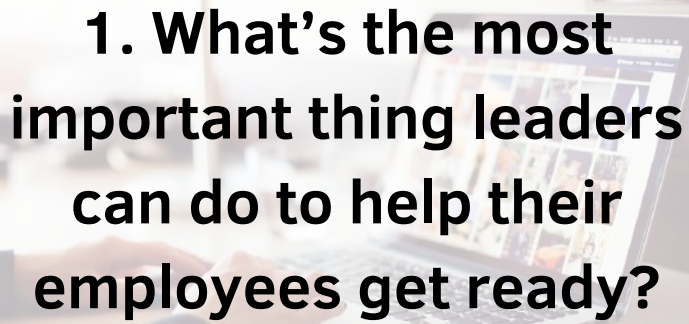
However, it's not just a lack of opportunities to bond face-to-face. One of the greatest challenges of working remotely is the lack of context. A lack of context makes connecting with remote team members difficult. Most of the information we take in from a conversation is non-verbal. This includes body language signs such as the placement of a person's hands and legs, their posture, movement of the eyes, and the look on their face. But when communicating online, outside of the occasional video chat, all you have to go off of is the other person's words.

Use these questions to ensure your remote employees are building bonds and connecting with the entire team:

- 17) How well do you feel you know your coworkers?
- 18) How could I better support you?
- 19) Do you feel supported by the team so that you could go to anyone asking them for help? (In remote teams, this can be a problem. Ideally, you want everyone to feel like they can go to anyone and ask them about something)
- 20) What challenges are you facing and how can I help?

With insights from the above questions, you can start to improve any connection-related issues.

**The 13
Questions Most
Frequently
Asked
(With Answers)!**

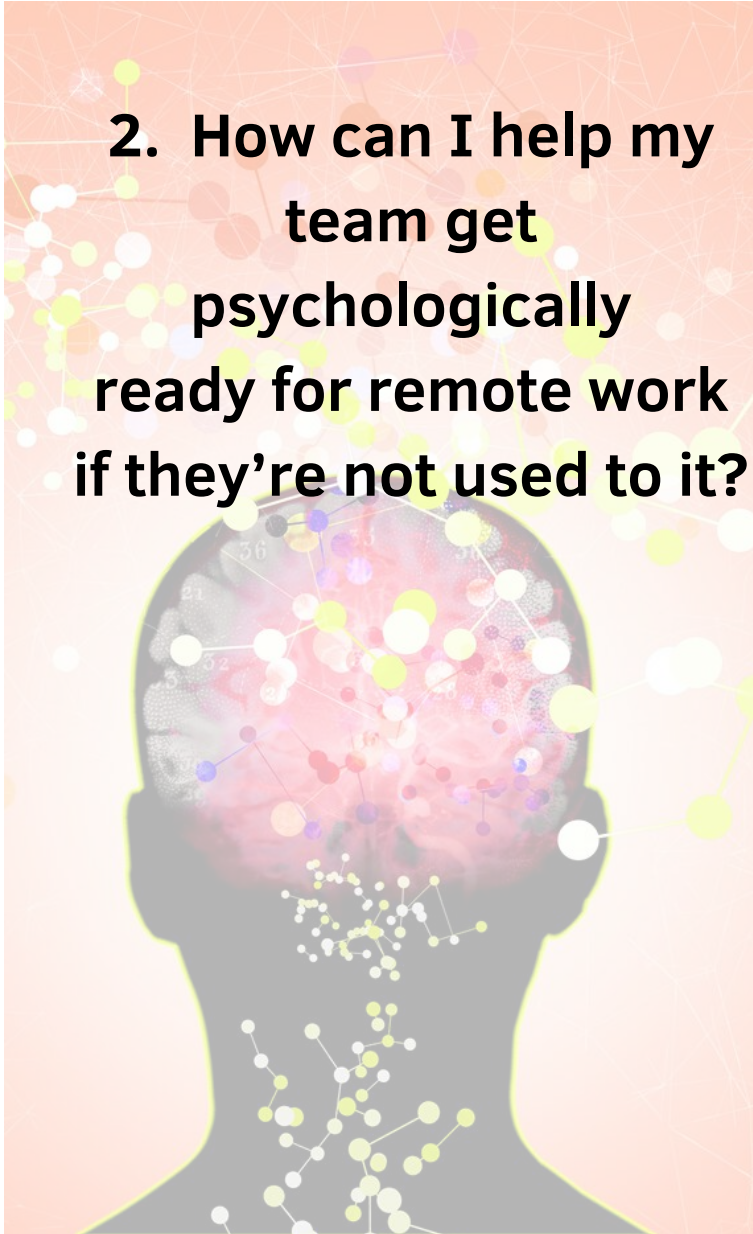


1. What's the most important thing leaders can do to help their employees get ready?

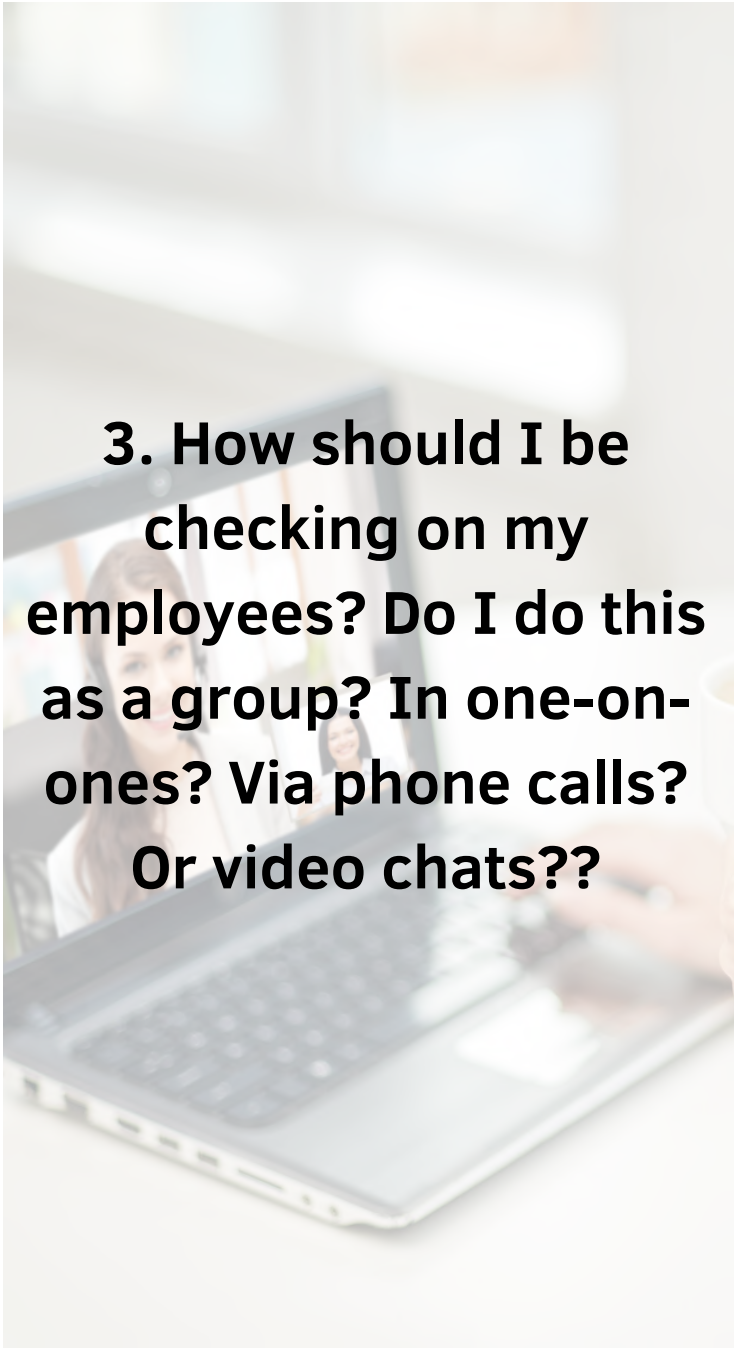
Get your infrastructure right! Does your team have access to reliable internet, do they have access to a PC/Laptop? Are they familiar with the software you plan to use? Are you happy that whatever they use will comply with firewalls, won't compromise your cybersecurity. How will you accommodate/support those who don't have laptops or good internet access? How do you make sure that they have access to the resources they need to do work? Leaders have to very quickly ensure that every employee has full access to what's needed, so no one feels left behind.

Encourage them to develop a daily routine – including a start and finish time, breaks etc. Tell them to treat WFH the same as if they were going to the office – shower, get dressed, even if it's not what they'd usually wear to work, then get started on the day's activities. They'll probably be used to moving around the office, so make sure they build movement that into their day – stretches, short walks. They'll probably miss the team interaction and can feel a little isolated so make sure connections still happen via your daily team buzz briefs or whatever medium you've scheduled deva. Help them protect themselves from feeling lonely or isolated and stay healthy, productive. When you check in on them make sure you're showing genuine interest and don't get bent out of shape if you hear music or the TV in the background – if it helps them remain productive and mentally strong then its right for them. Ask: “What can I do to help make this transition easier for you?”

Remember as a leader your focus is on the deliverables right now – not the time spent in at a computer.



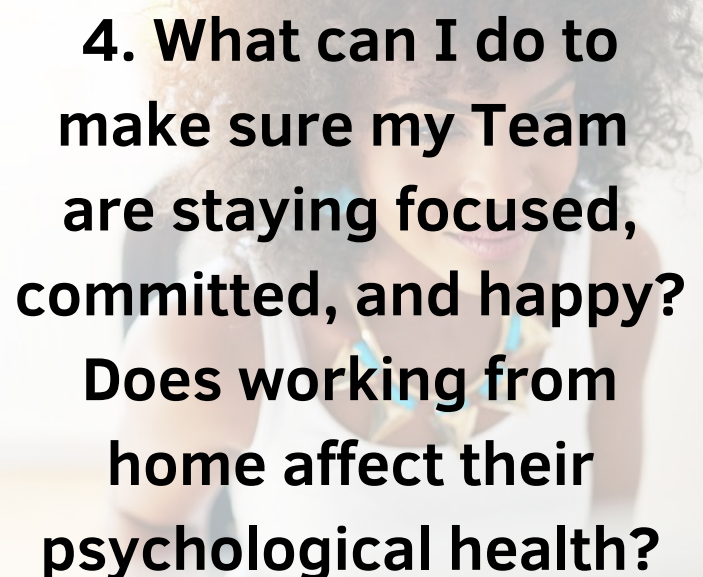
2. How can I help my team get psychologically ready for remote work if they're not used to it?




3. How should I be checking on my employees? Do I do this as a group? In one-on-ones? Via phone calls? Or video chats??

First, you should communicate with your team with respect to what's happening, be as clear as possible – put yourselves in their shoes and think what about what would you want to know e.g. how long will the situation last, how will I be supported, etc.? Have a group discussion about the new situation and ask what support they need. This should be followed by a team meeting to outline the new way of working. Agree: How often you will communicate? Via what medium – video chat, phone, or messenger service. Are there any alternatives methods that would work better and should you use them? Ask, what's the best way for us to work together? It's your job to help your team understand how to do remote work confidently. Once those actions have been agreed - meet with your team weekly without fail! In a remote environment, frequency of contact cannot go down. To be honest, your contact should probably be increasing for the whole team but not to the point where you become a micromanager. Newer employees, those working on critical projects, and people who need more contact will require extra one-on-ones. Your meetings don't have to all about business, you can do virtual fun things: happy hours, coffee breaks, pizza lunch. All these actions can help maintain the connection you had in the office. You have to be disciplined in your actions too.

Your people will those impromptu coffee chats or casual conversations with colleagues when remote working. You may not have realized it but these are actually important parts of the workday that have a direct impact on performance. So how can we create those virtually? Refer back to your initial team meeting or your 121's for some teams and individuals, it will be constant check-ins. For Others, it will be live phone calls or video chats. As the leader you can encourage the types of contact points for psychological health. Your team won't always be able to figure these things out organically. You've got to coach them. Plus don't underestimate the power of exercise, it's critical for mental well-being – here's a quick tip I've held walking 121's with team members – both of us walking whilst on our call!



4. What can I do to make sure my Team are staying focused, committed, and happy? Does working from home affect their psychological health?



5. What are the top three things that leaders can do to create a good remote culture?

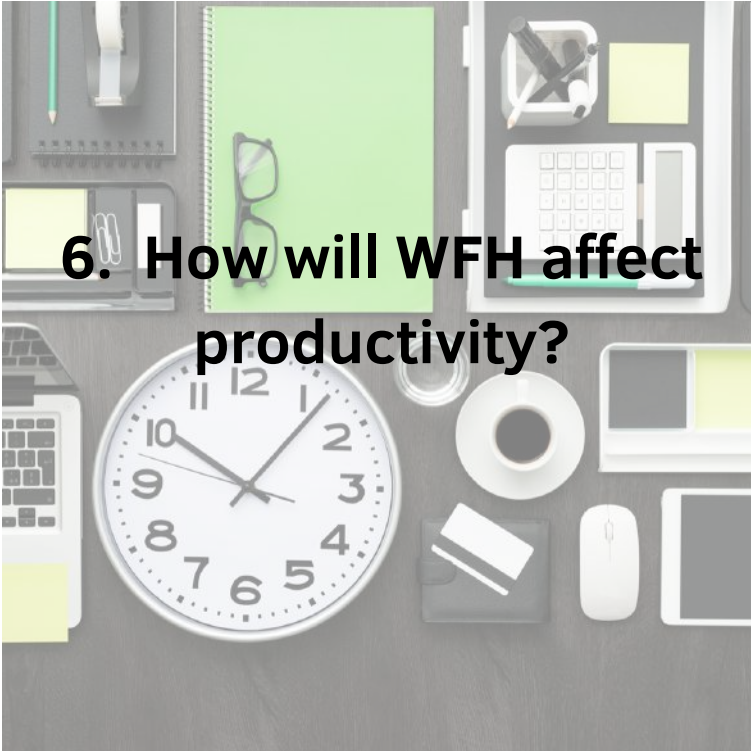
Productivity does not have to go down. It can be maintained, even enhanced, because commutes and office distractions are gone. Unquestionably, there may be other distractions in the form of partners or children and those issues will need to be addressed. Another challenge may be the ability for team to resolve problems quickly when they can't meet in person, in real time. That might create some delays but implement the actions arising from the six questions to successfully leading remote teams covered earlier. You shouldn't see productivity going down - there's robust evidence showing that it shouldn't change once you've laid out the correct platforms.

Whilst leading a remote team isn't difficult, it's not easy either! As the leader you have to actively work on it – remember this is most likely new to you too.

i) Make sure your team members constantly feel like they know what's going on – there shouldn't be any surprises. You need to communicate what's happening at the organizational level because, being at home, they can feel disconnected from the business. They'll wonder what's happening at the company, with clients, and with common goals. Communication around these points are extremely crucial, so you may find yourself emailing more, sharing more.

ii) Your team will also start to get nervous about targets and other deliverables. You'll have to reassure them and whilst you want to attain organizational goals, be realistic about what can be achieved.

iii) Ensure that all team members feel like they have equal access to you – no favorites! This is time when people's imaginations can run riot. So you have to be available to everyone equally. When you hold your team meetings, ensure you are inclusive and balance talk time, so everyone feels seen and heard.



6. How will WFH affect productivity?

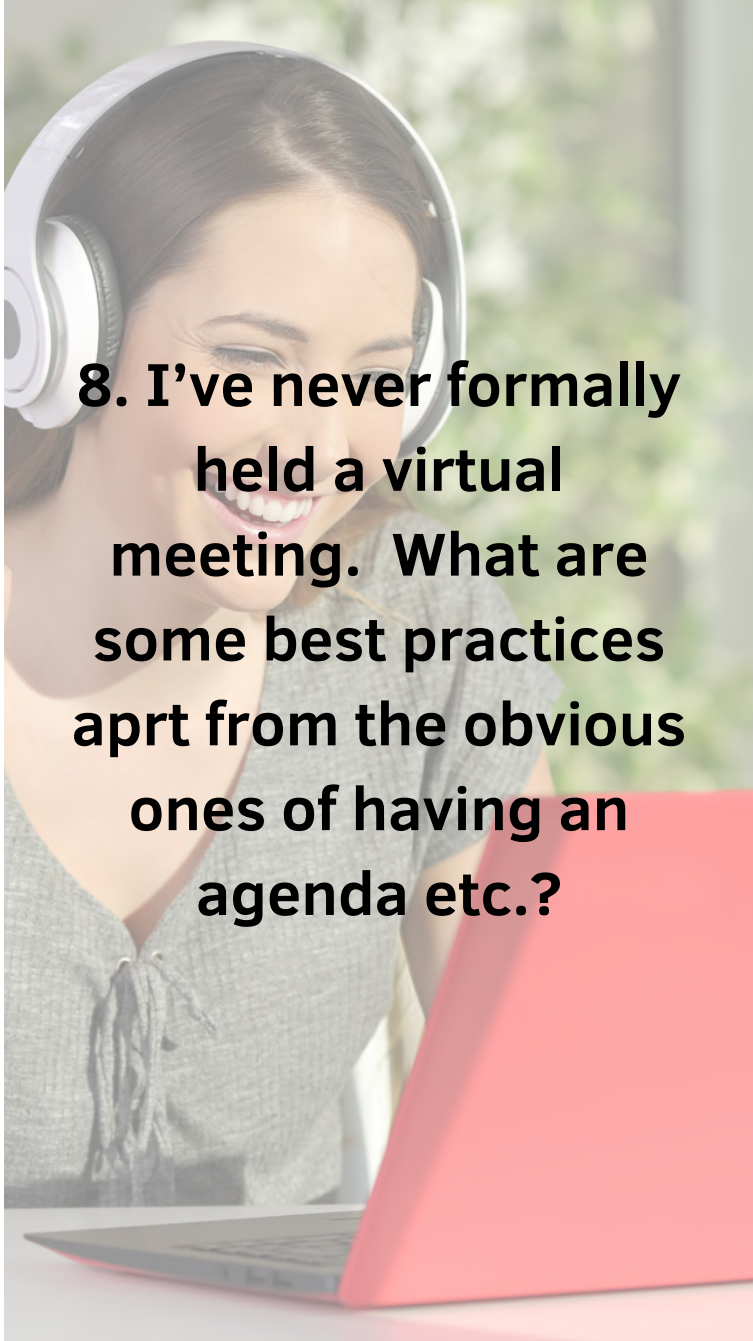
7. If social distancing continues for a while, how I measure my employees' productivity and performance review for that work period?

First, you have to have lay out the ground rules – for instance; agree that phones will be on silent, we're actively participating in the meeting so no checking emails or multitasking. I highly recommend video conferencing if you can, seeing each other builds a better connection and persons feel more accountable. Then trust your team people to follow the ground rules.

Secondly, as you no longer have casual passing the desk conversations, and people are still adjusting to WFH, spend the few minutes of the meeting checking how everyone is doing. Avoid going straight to your agenda items. Instead, ask everyone, "How are you all doing?" Start with the newest or most junior person or the one you know normally talks the least. Make sure it's a two way conversation and share what's happening with you so you're setting the example. After that, introduce the key topics of discussion and again be the example you'd like to see, whether it's connecting, asking questions, or even just using your preferred technology, like Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

Finally, follow up your meetings with the main points and actions to ensure that people have heard you and that they're clear with the outcome. You can follow up with via email or a Team message, try to have multiple touchpoints through various media to continue the conversation.

Trust in the process and your people! If you've equipped your team in the right ways, assigned their tasks, check in on them like you've agreed, they will produce in the ways you want them to. You can't monitor the process, so your review will have to be outcome-based. There's no reason to believe that, in this new environment, people won't do the work that they've been assigned – they may understandably need time to adjust but conversely you should have allowed for that. Remote working isn't new and now we have so much technology available not only to execute the work but to also collaborate. We have the tools to store and capture data, to have one-to-many conversations, to share best practices, and to learn.



8. I've never formally held a virtual meeting. What are some best practices apart from the obvious ones of having an agenda etc.?



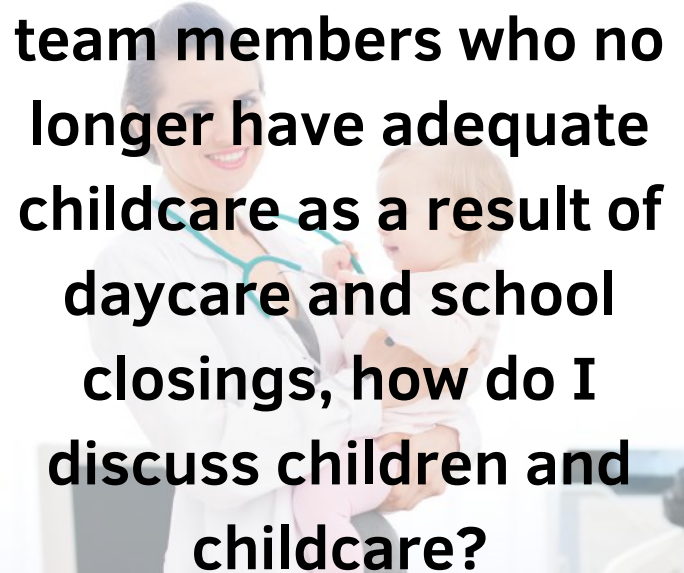
9. How do you facilitate challenging conversations when people aren't face to face?

You should be prepared for that conversation and able to help parents think those issues through. Appreciate that the boundaries between work and home has suddenly merged, so you have to develop the skills and policies to support your teams. This might involve the introduction of staggered hours around the times they work. You have to acknowledge that things have to be much more fluid and trust that your employee will do their best to get their work done. I'd also make it clear that any arrangement is as a result of the situation you're both in and the parameters pertaining to the arrangement. A word of caution – recognize that whatever actions you agree for one employee, should apply to others in similar situations, so consistency in your decision making is key – you don't want to be accused of favoritism.



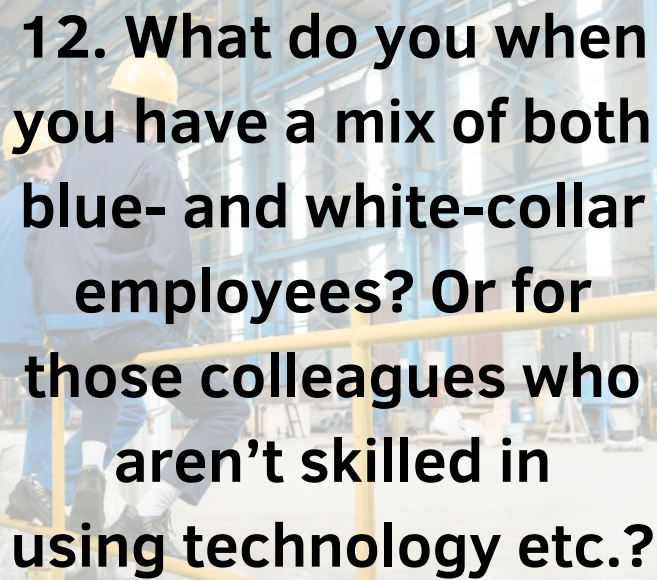
11. Is there any difference for people in client-facing functions?

Carefully! You can't more than two tough topics because you don't have the time or opportunity to work things through post meeting. There's no opportunity to walk to someone's office to clarify the points raised etc. So, be very targeted about what you raise and when and how you do it. But you can still have these conversations, don't leave the challenge lying especially if it has a knock on effect on other actions. Allowing some disagreement in order to sharpen the team's thinking is a good thing. Just ensure any points raised are always work related – never anything personal.



10. With respect to team members who no longer have adequate childcare as a result of daycare and school closings, how do I discuss children and childcare?

There's obviously been an increase in virtual sales calls and client meetings. Similar rules apply, but the use of visual media is preferred as you still get the chance to see body language within the sales process. Take whatever you would do in face-to-face meeting and keep doing it – you can't wine and dine but there's a lot you can, just be creative.



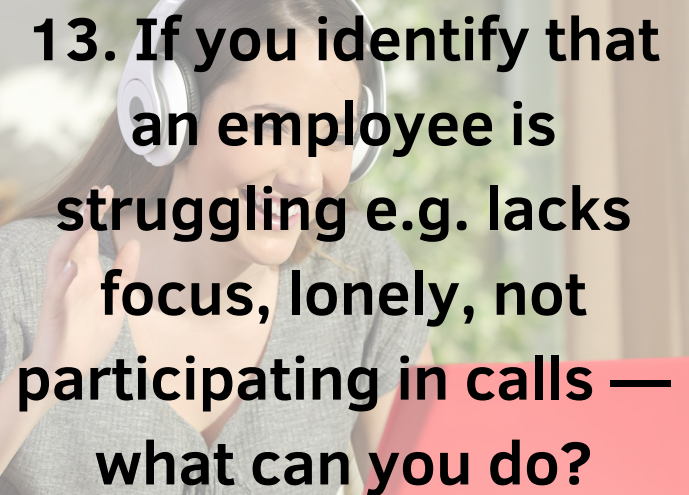
12. What do you do when you have a mix of both blue- and white-collar employees? Or for those colleagues who aren't skilled in using technology etc.?

You should always be looking for the signs — like fewer emails or more inhibition — the simplest thing to do is talk to them. Increase the frequency of chats and encourage the rest of the team to do same. Understand their challenges, ascertain what they need and close the gap. Understand that people have suddenly lost their regular routines and connection with others – indefinitely! Whilst you'd hope the majority of the team will easily adjust, others will struggle and need help. I would advise that every leader increase their visibility and accessibility — via video conferencing or recorded messages. Your team need to have confidence in you, the actions being taken and hope that everything will be alright.

Lastly, be considerate to your team and to yourself! Everyone is stressed and worried about their family, friends, and what the coming weeks will mean. Accept you'll make mistakes - the key is to acknowledge and learn from them.

Your leadership now is crucial and defining.

Your company has to figure out a way to support those workers: some kind of collective action to help them because otherwise you're completely isolating people who are critically important to your business. I would organize a group including those impacted to focus on the challenge and create solutions for how they would like to stay connected and ensure that they still feel valued.



13. If you identify that an employee is struggling e.g. lacks focus, lonely, not participating in calls — what can you do?

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Leadership Development

Customized, performance focused coaching that builds the participant's ability to achieve personal and professional goals

Customer Service

Supporting organizations to build the knowledge, skills and abilities of employees to help them develop and deliver their potential so that the organizations they work for can succeed and grow via robust succession planning.

Sales Improvement

Our proven action plans are designed to transform your current business culture into a more productive and rewarding experience for your employees and customer, resulting in more profitability for the organization.

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