

OPERATOR INSIGHTS

presented by  ENSEMBLE
HEALTH PARTNERS

Remote Control How to Lead in a Virtual Environment

The COVID-19 pandemic is changing the way we operate for the foreseeable future, and leaders must adapt to support the business and our associates effectively. Self-quarantining and social distancing are making remote work a reality. Whether they have led remote teams or not, leaders are faced with a challenge of staying connected with their peers and associates while also maintaining high productivity standards. With this in mind, we want to provide some practical ways leaders can keep in tune with their team while leading through this adversity.

The idea of working with empathy sounds simple, yet our challenge in health care is, while we visually see our patients arrive and often see them leave, we don't really see them, much less acknowledge their individual situation. We have become stuck in a rut of complacency due to short staffing, inadequate training, decreased resources, and sometimes, even an overall lack of support to drive change. Failure to empathize erodes the human aspect of patient care and forfeits the opportunity to improve ourselves, our organizations and our patients.

“ LEADERSHIP REQUIRES TWO THINGS: A VISION OF THE WORLD THAT DOES NOT YET EXIST AND THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE IT.”

-Simon Sinek

First Things First

Since virtually no one was prepared for our new virtual workplace, get back to basics with asking each team member if they have what they need to be productive and effective while working from home. In a paperless world, we still have many associates who prefer resources on paper or had notes at their desk. Likewise, ensuring all associates are connecting to virtual resources consistently and without interruption is critical. In short, the best thing you can ask your team members is: **“Do you have all you need to be successful working in your new environment?”**

If the answer is yes, it is still good to follow up with specific questions regarding must-have virtual resources: **“Are you able to access Epic without issues?”** and **“Are people able to reach you via phone?”**

If the answer is no, make it your priority to resolve the need.

Communication is KEY

Leaders are busier than ever working to adjust to the ever-changing requirements brought on by COVID-19, but don't lose sight of the fact that it can be terrifying for some of your team members. Communication is more important than ever, and maintaining strong, productive relationships is critical.

Invite your team to a team kick-off meeting to jump-start the experience in a positive way. During the meeting, ask your team **“how often should we communicate? Should it be via phone, video chat, IM?”** Once it is agreed upon, stick to it. Consistency will demonstrate your value and respect for your team. It is also important to note that communication frequency and tools you use for the team may be different when communicating one-on-one.

Remember the norms are out the window (for now), so be creative. Consider hosting coffee talks each day at the same time so anyone can log in. Have your team set up a virtual workspace in Zoom and leave it running for a couple hours or over the typical lunch hour. Leave your mics on so others can hear keyboards tapping and papers shuffling. Have the coworker conversations you're used to having, so it feels like you're in the same room. Not only will this help associates feel more engaged, there may be some great dialogue or idea sharing during the informal chatting.

Your team may be struggling to figure things out without coworkers nearby to answer on-the-fly questions. They are looking to you for guidance and reassurance, so coaching should be part of your regular conversations with them. Give them insight on managing their way through this unknown territory. Be visible and be vulnerable; sharing your own concerns can be a great way build rapport and strengthen relationships. Be honest about how you feel while presenting a clear path for success. For example: **“The COVID-19 pandemic has me feeling stressed and tired, but here's what I'm planning to do to make it better...”** and **“Here's what I need from you: please reach out with ANY questions, gossip, or rumors you may hear or have. If I don't know what you're feeling or hearing, I cannot address it.”** Don't forget to ask your team what you can do for them.

A final thought on communication: Consider incorporating Zoom or video meetings more regularly into your virtual management style, especially for one-on-one meetings. This new environment can feel isolating; just seeing a friendly face can help. Plus, knowing they are meeting you face-to-face (virtually, of course) can help motivate them to be more on their game. Zoom meetings can give you better insight to what you are hearing, because much of what we communicate is non-verbal. Pay attention to body language and facial expressions as much as you pay attention to what is being communicated verbally.

Making Virtual Meetings a Success

Your teams want to stay connected to company and team news, and they must have access to you.

When scheduling virtual team meetings, establish some ground rules:

1. You want people to be focused during that time, so ask them to log out of phones, turn personal phones to vibrate, refrain from checking emails and multitasking. Set the expectation that everyone be present and not distracted.
2. Kick off your meeting on the human side by spending the first five minutes checking in. Don't go straight to your agenda items. Instead, go around and ask everyone, "How are you all doing?" and give each person a chance to answer. You should share as well, so you're modeling the behavior.
3. Introduce the key things you want to discuss and, again, model what you want to see, whether it's connecting, asking questions, or even just using your preferred technology, like Zoom or Skype for Business.
4. Finally, follow up these virtual meetings with a recap (using the method of communication the team agreed to) for important business decisions or communications to ensure people clearly understand expectations.

**"SERVICE TO OTHERS
IS THE RENT YOU PAY
FOR YOUR ROOM HERE
ON EARTH."**

-Muhammad Ali

Stay Engaged

Because we don't have a firm time frame for this situation to pass, you must make an intentional effort to stay engaged. Don't assume that no news is good news. Keep meeting regularly with your team and individual team members; if your effort starts to lag, it can create more anxiety. When you see signs of a team member struggling (for example, participating less in conversations, sending fewer emails, etc.) act on this immediately! Increase contact and encourage others to do so, as well. Rely on your leadership peers to assist in keeping your team engaged. Other leaders can help host coffee talks or send video messages too. We are all in this together!

Pride and fear can stop people from asking for help. Act with empathy, because everyone's situation is unique. Do your best to understand the hurdles they are facing and assist in getting them what they need. Use local resources and employee assistance services to help. When you're suddenly taking away regular routines and connection with others (especially during an indefinite period of time), some will struggle and need extra help. Be visible and give your team confidence, calm, and hope.



**"THE MOST POWERFUL
LEADERSHIP TOOL YOU
HAVE IS YOUR OWN
PERSONAL EXAMPLE"**

-John Wooden

Continue to Learn

Learning doesn't have to stop in this type of environment, and it's more important than ever that associates continue to grow in their roles. Deliver 5- to 10-minute snippets of training to re-energize your team on how to use or locate resources, review best practices, or reinforce expected behaviors. Again, other leaders can help with this, so don't be shy in asking for another leader to join for a quick training session. Take input on the team for training sessions, including how to prioritize the information, so they get what they need immediately. Finally, consider allowing team members to deliver these sessions via a rotation so they stay engaged and have an opportunity to continue their personal and professional development. We all have strengths that can be drawn upon during these times.

We Are All in This Together

As a leader, you are busier than ever, and it would be challenging for you to attend to every team member's need in addition to everything else on your plate. Think differently about ways you can distribute responsibility by involving your team in the process. This is a great way to provide stretch goals to your team; some are likely to stand out in ways that surprise you. Consider assigning each person a buddy who share responsibility for interrupting the isolation these days can bring. They can share ideas, peer-to-peer coach on processes and offer quick tips. Team members building relationships and growing into stretch assignments will last well beyond this pandemic and add strength and depth to our organization.

Finally, be encouraging to your team members and peers; optimism can be contagious! Expressing hopefulness and confidence about the future and a successful outcome is critical for all leaders. Now is the time to model positive behaviors so your associates remember how meaningful their work is, and so you learn methods to be a better, more successful leader. Fighting through this adversity will make us better associates and leaders and let us hit the ground running when this is over!



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