



## LEADING REMOTE TEAMS

*How to harness the full capability of a scattered (and frazzled) team*

Suddenly people everywhere are working from home (WFH) in an attempt to contain COVID-19. We find ourselves working in makeshift office spaces, straining to maintain focus at work while juggling additional family responsibilities (like becoming headmaster, IT support, and recess supervisor for the homeschooling program you don't remember enrolling in). Remote teams working in crisis conditions can create breeding grounds for diminishing leadership where suffocating micromanagers create disengagement and disconnection or absentee managers leave people in the dark and unsure of their next steps.

When leading remote teams, it is essential for leaders to be intentional about bringing out the best in others and creating these four essential conditions: Context, Clarity, Co-Creation, and Connection.

At The Wiseman Group we've been WFH for the last eight years and have become fairly savvy at virtual collaboration. And, we try to practice the Multiplier leadership that we preach, so we've put our heads together to offer these ten tips for leading like a Multiplier, while WFH.

**CONTEXT:** Remote workers may feel like they are working in the dark having missed the meetings and informal discussion that precede decisions or changes in direction, so:

1. **Show the big picture.** People need to understand the overall picture before they can do their piece well. Anchor conversations and group meetings by reminding the team how it fits into a larger objective. Think of it as the "you are here" marker on a trail map.
2. **Explain the "why."** Good leaders tell people what needs to be done and let their teams figure out how to do it. However, great leaders explain the why, so people understand both the what and the how. So, share the why of the work and let people know why their contribution matters.

**CLARITY:** Without shoulder-to-shoulder collaboration, work can easily fall through the cracks, and when it's cumbersome to have quick conversations to clarify expectations, employees tend to defer to higher ups, so:

3. **Define ownership.** Let people know they are in charge by giving them 51% of the vote, meaning, that they hold majority vote on decisions in a particular area or piece of work. Often remote staff working on their own can get stuck, so consider naming a colleague to be their thought partner. But, let the two-some know who has primary leadership responsibility (51%) and who is the back-up collaborator (49%).
4. **Clarify deliverables with the "3 Whats."** Without a whiteboard handy, the manager's vision of success may not translate to staff members. When you delegate, provide clarity by articulating the 3 WHATs: 1) What does "great" look like? 2) What does "done" look like? 3) What is out of scope?
5. **Create a space for mistakes.** Help your remote employees take smart risks by creating clear delineation between a) the lower risk part of the work where room exists to experiment and b) where the stakes are too high to allow failure. This delineation will give remote staffers confidence to operate independently on the low-risk work but engage you on the high-risk matters.

**CO-CREATION:** Remote employees typically have a surfeit of online meetings but a dearth of opportunities to collaborate deeply with their colleagues, so give extra attention to creating forums where tough issues get tackled and where people's best ideas surface.

6. **Prime the pump:** Allow people time to formulate their thoughts prior to virtual meetings by sending out agendas in advance and providing questions that you want people to come prepared to weigh in on.
7. **Savor some silence:** Practice the five-second rule by waiting five seconds before speaking after you ask a question. Being at peace with some awkward silence not only creates a vacuum that can draw others into a conversation but also gives people time to gather their thoughts.
8. **Hold jam sessions:** When you sense team members are spinning, be willing to jump on a call for a quick troubleshooting or coaching conversation. Let people know that they don't need to stay stuck and silent.

**CONNECTION:** Remote work can be isolating, so be intentional about creating connections that build the relational capital you'll need later for difficult conversations and for tackling tough challenges together.

9. **Check in before diving in:** Allocate time in staff meetings to check on how people are doing; ensure everyone feels like a person first and an employee second. For example, try any of these questions to kick off a meeting: *What are you proud of?* *What's particularly difficult right now?* Or simply, *How are you doing?*
10. **Double up on appreciation.** It's easy to overlook what is going well when you don't see people daily, so make a practice of highlighting wins and giving positive feedback twice as often as seems normal. Invite team members to give spot appreciation awards to their colleagues or start each meeting with "wins of the week."

Now more than ever we need leaders who can both calm the storm and ignite the brilliance of their teams. Remember, "remote" technically means "apart," but even when teams working at a distance, they can still pull together and work with full force in challenging times.

Lead well and stay well.

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