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## **Where is Everybody? - Managing a Remote Workforce**

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As business expands globally it is the “new” normal to have work teams broadly dispersed. As a Manager you may have staff located everywhere from Ireland to India to Indianapolis. To successfully manage remote employees it requires building a triangle of the right manager, the right employees and the right communication techniques.



The first side of the triangle is a manager who is gifted in making and maintaining connections and delivers concise meaningful messages. Lacking the ability to give a pat on the back or a cheery good morning, this manager knows how to use email, texting and the phone to demonstrate personal interest and openness. Openness is critical if remote employees, lacking visual clues, are to feel confident to reach out for clarification on assignments or assistance in meeting deadlines.

The ability to hold people accountable is critical, and managers of remote workers must be able to clearly set expectations, establish realistic milestones and rigorously follow up on progress. All without any in person contact!

The successful manager of remote workers will be passionate and positive about the company and its mission. They will be sensitive to time and cultural differences when scheduling calls. An 8am call in California will exclude an employee in Asia where it is 11pm and don't forget holidays are different around the world! The manager will use email and intranet tools to creatively recognize team members and ensure their accomplishments come to the attention of other members of the team. There isn't room for sarcasm or negativity, which will be amplified without the in-person contact, and will fester and grow in the remote environment.

The next side of the triangle is the employee. It may seem counterintuitive but careful selection of outgoing, proactive, and focused employees is key. Loners, ruminators, and quiet types get lost and tuned out in the remote workplace. Remote workers need to be able to keep themselves motivated, energized and have the desire and skills to reach out to others on a regular basis and do their part to stay connected and interested.

We complete the triangle with techniques that compensate for the lack of “eyeball to eyeball” interaction. Start the day off with a brief – no more than ten minute – conference call. Use carefully crafted open-ended questions. “What's happening?” is not going to open up the right kind of discussion in a virtual meeting. Focused

questions – “What is working?” “What’s not?” “What do you need from me?” “What’s on your plate today?” will help the employees feel connected and give the manager a clear status update.

Celebrate successes of the team and of the individuals. Weekly recognition of a job well done within the team and regular communication with the rest of the organization will promote a feeling of visibility. Don’t let birthdays and anniversaries go unnoticed. Be sure remote based employees are invited to hear, or participate via tools like web-x, all company update meetings and important announcements.

Rotate ownership of the conference calls among the team. Assign projects that require the remote workers to reach out to each other and to co-workers in other teams. Change it up- variety is good thing!

Take advantage of electronic tools such as *Google Docs, Microsoft, 37Signals* to track and share progress.

With all three sides of the triangle in place – your remote team is as close as the next room and positioned for success!