

Three mindsets of a successful long-distance leader

There can be little doubt that the world of work is changing. In fact, what we used to call the workplace, doesn't always have a "place" associated with it anymore. Leaders are being asked to lead teams who don't all work in the same location – and may not even live on the same continent. While the principles of leadership haven't changed – we are still dealing with human and group behavior – *how* we lead must change to support a remote team and help its team members achieve great success.

While there are skills we need to enhance in this new world of work, before we get to skills, it is important to recognize that some mindsets and beliefs might need to shift as well. In this brief article, I will highlight three of the mindsets that are critical to the success of a remote leader and their team.

Results, not activity

Perhaps the first question leaders of remote workers ask is, "how will I know if they are working?" I suppose visions of TV's blaring and laundry being folded are swirling through their heads. My question is, how do you know the people down the hall are working? Are you watching them all day long? (and if you are, there is a bigger issue we might want to consider). The problem here is the mindset of activity. The mindset of activity places all the focus on what people are doing vs. a mindset of results which focuses on outcomes. When you shift to a mindset of results, you should have much less concern. After all, if you are focused on the results of your team members you likely have or could easily create ways for you and them to track and measure results.

If you can't completely get past the concern of what they are doing, know that research shows that for most types of work, due to fewer workplace distractions, people are more productive working away from the office (even if they are folding the laundry).

Collaboration, not isolation

Working remotely can create a sense of isolation, and while people may get lots done when working alone, it will be likely "their" work, and not be seen as a part of a group's output. This isolation doesn't just come from physical distance, but how and how often others communicate with them.

Unfortunately, out of sight too often is out of mind.

If you are leading hybrid team (one with some team members co-located and others remote) collaboration will come more naturally with those who work in the same location. While there is no guarantee that collaboration will come, there is virtually a guarantee that without intervention and good leadership, it won't happen with and between your remote team members.

If you have a mindset that values collaboration, you will need to describe the importance of collaboration, set expectations for how you want people to collaborate, and create the conditions and opportunities for it to happen. Remember too that collaboration can be among the team members or with you as their leader.

Interaction, not transaction

Chances are, you have been on a phone call and said “Hey, I don’t want to take too much of your time, I know you are busy.” While there is nothing wrong with being polite and considerate of someone else’s time, this points to a fact we all have experienced, but may not recognize. When we aren’t in physical proximity to others and are using technology to facilitate communication, we often become very transactional.

A transactional mindset is seductive, because we all have lots to do. This thinking leads us to communicate for the data or result, without considering the other person, the relationship, their needs or more. When we shift to an interaction mindset, we get the work done (complete the transaction) and create space for the relationship to be maintained or built as well. As a remote leader when we maintain an interaction mindset and consciously look for chances to build relationships rather than simply transact business we will create better results now and in the future.

While there are other factors and beliefs that can help or hinder you, this is a good place to start. As an individual leader, consider how these mindsets are impacting your success as a long-distance leader. If you are thinking organizationally, I urge you to share this and talk about these ideas with all your remote leaders.