

# Eight insights for managing teams remotely

*By Leah Clark, Director, Strategy and Planning, GP Strategies Corporation*

With the growing threat of COVID-19, many organisations are asking their employees to work from home. Putting that into practice, however, can prove difficult. So, what steps can we take to ensure a smooth transition from the office to the home? And how can leaders' best manage their virtual teams?

We are facing unprecedented challenges in both our work and personal lives. Many schools have been required to assemble plans that allow their students to learn remotely, and various organisations have imposed travel bans and restrictions, including a work from home policy to reduce close contact.

While this scenario limits exposure to the virus, working remotely can prove challenging and leaders need to be prepared to support their teams. This support is especially important when the upheaval in our personal and professional lives is so profound.

Here are eight insights for leaders to consider when managing their virtual teams:

1. **When you connect with your people, check in and see how they are doing on a personal level.** Don't dive right into your to-do list and contingency plan for getting things done. Recognise that they are dealing with stress and anxiety associated with the situation, and could benefit from someone to talk about how they are feeling and coping. Let them know you care about them; this opens up the door to communication.
2. **Encourage your people to practice self-care.** While many working adults are trying to juggle what you expect of them, chances are many of them are also responsible for soothing the concerns of their children and family members, or they may have elderly parents who are increasingly at risk. Remind them to keep themselves physically and emotionally healthy.

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3. **Keep the lines of communication open.** As company policies flex-and-change, and business results are impacted negatively, share with them what you know, when you know it. In the absence of clear communication, employees may fill-in-the-gaps with incorrect information.
4. **Flex your emotional intelligence as you communicate.** Be more vigilant about how your words may come across when sensitivities are heightened. Consider the “logic-emotion” bubble – when someone comes to you with an emotional reaction, acknowledge the emotion and express empathy first. Defusing the emotion allows for greater space for a logical discussion to happen.
5. **Continue making progress against individual, team, and organisational goals.** Ensuring that work continues to progress and contribution is maximized is not only good for business, but it can also create some normalcy for your team members. When so much around us feels out of control, it can be helpful to see progress in the work we do and the contributions we make.
6. **Explore new technology.** Now is the time to leverage video conference, texting, and digital platforms such as “Teams” or “Yammer” to keep communication and collaboration going, even from a distance.
7. **Be globally aware/sensitive.** It’s clear that certain geographies are harder hit than others. When working with global partners, be aware of where they are located and be sensitive to the fact that the impact of the virus may be more pronounced where they are located.
8. **Model the behaviour you want to encourage.** Take care of yourself and practice your own self-care. As a leader, you are responsible for others, but you can’t be a support to them if you aren’t physically and emotionally as healthy as possible.

It’s easy to talk about “leadership” and “teamwork” in times of success. The true success of a leader and their team emerges in times of real personal and organisation crisis. Take care of yourself, take care of your people, and know we are better when we stick together than when we suffer alone.

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