

Business Predictions for 2021: Managing Virtual Teams

Jenifer Namestka, CEO, Avo Solutions, Inc.



The COVID pandemic touched almost every part of our lives, including shining a spotlight on effective management styles. Almost overnight, millions of American employees were forced to stay home and work remotely. The ability to manage virtual teams tested the limits of antiquated command-and-control leadership styles as managers looked for effective ways to engage with and evaluate remote teams. Without thoughtful managerial adjustments, organizations will experience decreased employee engagement, limited productivity, and greater attrition.

In 2021, knowing how to lead virtual teams is not only an essential skillset, it's a market differentiator. How well is your organization managing virtual teams?

Creating meaningful engagement with remote employees requires intentionality and planning. Dropping by someone's office, socializing, and organizing team meetings will require new tools and rules of engagement. For example, stopping by someone's office for an informal chat can be replicated with mobile friendly, instant messaging tools. This digital touch-base helps continue casual conversations, reduce the feeling of isolation, and allow employees the freedom to be away from their desk. However, using these same tools to ensure employees are "at their desk and working" is a command-and-control approach and will threaten the team's trust and compromise open dialog.

Managing and evaluating performance in a virtual environment also needs a new approach to encourage performance and prevent burn out. Evaluating employees based on their ability to start work at 8 am sharp was a poor metric in the traditional office environment and will be detrimental in the virtual world. Instead, identifying each employee's daily, weekly, or monthly work effort will focus performance on outputs and not "time at your desk". This shift also helps employees find their work-life balance. Initially, virtual employees might be more productive since they are now free from office distractions. However, encouraging an employee to sustain high levels of productivity could result in burn out. That's why we recommend performance-based metrics to keep your teams producing, engaged, and feeling appreciated.

Encouraging a work-life balance by introducing mobile technologies frees your employees to leave their desk—or even the house—during business hours. In an office setting, having lunch with a coworker or going for a walk was a normal part of the workday. Employees working from home may fear a



command-and-control management style and rationalize "if I am not always available, they will think I'm not working". Mobile technologies allow employees to connect throughout the day via email, instant messaging, and video conferencing. Even simple solutions, such as wireless headsets, allow employees to participate in a conference call while sitting on the couch, making lunch, or folding laundry. And parents will be able to support their school-aged children without the stress of being perceived as unavailable. Encouraging work-life balance and transparency not only increases trust and loyalty but also exponentially improves productivity.

For the past nine and a half years Avo Solutions Inc. has helped clients build high-performing disseminated teams. Finding the right management approach for virtual teams will help keep your employees consistently engaged and productive and cultivate great coaches and leaders within your management teams. If your organization is struggling with managing virtual teams, Avo Solutions understands. Give us a call and let us walk you through the transition.

