

Communications Checklist For Virtual Leaders

An opportunity for leaders to sharpen the saw and up their game

 By [Dr. Lisa Aldisert](#)

Virtual leadership is now an essential skill as a result of living through the pandemic. Recent announcements by large tech companies such as Google and Salesforce.com that they expect their employees to work remotely until next summer are harbingers of what we can expect in the near term.

The virtual leader needs to adapt and do things differently than six months ago. Effective communication is even more essential than it was “way back” in February. Rather than being daunted by this, it’s an opportunity for leaders to “sharpen the saw” and up their game.

Stay Connected with Staff

Strong leaders are typically already good communicators, while average and weaker leaders are generally not. Since the pandemic began, however, I’ve been struck by how many leaders hesitate to communicate with their employees.

This isn’t rocket science and it doesn’t need to be perfect. Regular touch points, whether email, video calls or small group conversations, make employees feel connected. When employees don’t feel connected, they engage less. And a remote workforce needs to be engaged, especially because people are physically scattered. Here are a few ideas to consider.

- Some leaders I’ve worked with told me they have an open line on their video platform during business hours. If employees need to have a quick conversation, they can pop in and ask without setting a formal appointment.
- At one company I work with, departments have a daily 10-15 minute video check in. This gives everyone an opportunity to have a visual touch point that keeps people connected in an otherwise disconnected day.
- I also recommend that senior leaders stay connected by “walking around” and randomly joining such department staff meetings. Team members will appreciate your interest and more importantly, you’ll be conveying a message that they are important to you.

Of course, there is always the good old-fashioned one-on-one approach. People appreciate the personal outreach and it also makes the leader feel great.

It doesn’t matter how you stay connected with your people; the important thing is to do it. If your people feel connected, they will be more engaged. It will have a positive ripple effect throughout your organization’s operations.

Connection with Clients and Vendors

You don't have a business without clients, customers or patients, so it's also critical for you to stay in touch with them. If you've had some clients drop off due to the pandemic, reach out to those people, too. Clients want to know that you're in business and doing business. By having periodic contact (bi-weekly? monthly?) you will strengthen your relationships and give them confidence that you're still up and running.

One of my former clients was so surprised that I reached out, especially because his current relationships had essentially gone radio silent. My interest in the client resulted in being asked to help with a unique project that was a great fit for both of us.

The same thing applies to vendors, especially if you have needed to stretch out payments due to cash-flow challenges. Even though the vendors should be staying in touch with you (after all, you are their customers!), by being proactive, you initiate the communication. By doing this, you are signaling that you value the relationship and eager to move forward as business improves.

These suggestions are not necessarily for you as the leader to do but are important for you to facilitate within your company. The more senior you are, however, the more important is it for you and your team to identify who you should reach out to personally. A personal outreach from a senior leader can be currency for the future.

A Word About Emotional Intelligence

For virtual leaders, emotional intelligence is more important than ever. Self-awareness and empathy, in particular, have become essential skills not just "nice to have" skills. When we communicate with someone virtually, unlike being face-to-face, there is a barrier, be it a video or voice call or even email. The recipient needs to feel that you are aligned with how they feel, even if you don't know how they feel.

Obviously, this is a tall order and one that requires practice and skill to improve. Even if you make a simple assumption that the person is going through

challenges, that person will feel more understood. Sometimes it's as simple as asking, "How are you really doing?" That shows more empathy than a perfunctory "How's it going?"

Remember that cliché: people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Sounds like empathy, doesn't it?

The unifying theme throughout these examples is that communication takes a little more energy and more focused work in a virtual environment. Don't short-change people; in fact, you should go out of your way and even overcommunicate when appropriate. Your staff, clients and vendors will value the fact that you take time to stay connected.

Another outcome of this is that when companies eventually reunite in the workplace, you will have become a better communicator overall. The extra work you do today will be as invested in the future as it is in the present.

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