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OHMIGOSH! I can't believe it is June already! So where has the time gone? It's hump year, and the perfect time to make some course corrections. I suggest taking some time to reflect on the first six months of this year. What's happened? Successes? Setbacks? And create/adjust your plan for the remainder of the year. It's also the perfect time to think about your team - do you have the right people with the "art" to be successful (attitude, resources and talent)? Identify the gaps in your success strategy and make a plan for the second half of the year!

And, if you ever find yourself in Prince Edward Island (PEI), come join Joe and I for some fresh PEI mussels and lobster!

Kristin

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LEADING VIRTUAL TEAMS: 7 STRATEGIES FOR TEAM SUCCESS

Imelda, the manager of a geographically dispersed team is pondering how to improve the team's collaboration. She has some team members in the central office, others in regional offices and still others working from home. She was used to leading people in the same office, but how do you get such a diverse group of people on the same page?

First, let's get something straight. If you can't lead teams well in the face-to-face (F2F) environment, you won't be able to lead people well virtually. Small issues that are normally resolved quickly or don't even exist in a F2F environment get magnified between the miles. Some of the unique challenges in leading virtual teams are:

- Inability to read non-verbal cues (94%)
- No time during meetings to build relationships (90%)
- Absence of collegiality among team members (85%)
- Difficult to establish rapport and trust (81%)
- Time zones (81%)

- Decision making is more difficult (69%)
- Challenging to express opinions (64%)
- Language (64%)
- Holidays, local laws and customs (59%)
- Technology (43%)

None of these challenges alone is insurmountable; however, when you have multiple challenges, the complexity is compounded. The savvy leader recognizes these challenges and creates deliberate strategies to maintain the team cohesiveness and productivity:

1. **Set Expectations.** Create a team charter so everyone knows what's most important. Identify key tasks, critical milestones, roles and responsibilities. Agree on a common project management system such as [Basecamp](#) to track individual contributions to the team's work. Don't forget to establish team ground rules, those explicit behavioral expectations on how the team will work together. Don't forget to discuss the team's communications plan including the appropriate medium for regular communication, urgent communications and expected response times.
2. **"Meet" Regularly.** It's not just about getting the work done, but creating relationships among the team members so the work can be done collaboratively.
 - *F2F.* I strongly encourage virtual teams to meet F2F during the start-up phase and then periodically throughout the year (ideally, 2-4 times a year).
 - *Online.* Once you have established trust F2F, then online meetings work even better!

Conference calls are fairly typical these days, but you lose the facial expressions and team synergy. So I highly recommend video conferencing through [Skype](#), [Zoom](#) or [Google Hangouts](#) so that everyone can fully engage in the call. I also suggest having a 24/7 team chat room/instant messaging platform where people can "hang out" and ask each other questions.

Huddle Routinely. You don't want to spend your entire day in meetings, so kick off the day (or week) with a 15 minute "team huddle" that allows all team members to quickly check in.

Be Visible and Accessible. Not only do your employees not want to be forgotten, you don't want them to forget about you and the team's mission! Stay on their radar and be accessible if they need help, support or resources. Let your team know a specific window that you will ALWAYS be available or commit to a defined response time to any email or voicemail. Periodically, call each of your team members to see how they are doing, what problems they are facing, and how you might be able to help. And, if possible, go visit them as well!

Establish "Team Time." Teams that are located across multiple time zones can be "time challenged" and miss calls, especially during changes in time zones. To reduce confusion, pick ONE time zone (the core team time zone or GMT) as THE time zone for all meeting announcements. That doesn't mean that you always meet at the convenience of the central office, but you just schedule the time using that designated time zone.

3. **Encourage Interaction at Meetings.** Many virtual meetings are awkward with the leader doing most of the talking. It doesn't have to be that way...if you plan it.

Set Ground Rules for Team Interaction. My virtual team favorites are:

- All participate...no one dominates

- Say your name first
- Be concise and speak slowly
- Don't interrupt
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood
- Speak as though your team members are in the room
- Don't multi-task during meetings
- Set and distribute agendas prior to meeting

Keep track (and force) interactions. I like to keep a handwritten spreadsheet with the team members' names across the y-axis and positive and negative contributions along the x-axis. When people talk, then I make a simple check-mark in the appropriate box. In this way, I can see who has been talking (or not) and how constructive (or not) they have been. It then allows me to call on people by name to weigh in and to take a final poll before we make a decision.

Confirm Action Items. At the end of each team meeting, confirm understanding of the action items and agree on next steps, due date and accountability.

Cultural Differences. If you are dealing with different cultures, make an effort to understand the culture(s). Encourage team members to share cultural nuances with each other through quick team activities, personality profiles and team building events.

4. **Keep a Dashboard.** The glue that holds any virtual team together is the metrics. How does the organization and the team define success? Document it in a visual dashboard that all can see on the shared drive.
5. **Create Informal Gatherings** to keep the team connected. It's important to create opportunities to gather around the virtual water cooler. Support a 24/7 chat room with breaks, lunch, game time, etc. Spotlight individual team members and create an online directory. Create interesting project challenges and competitions. Create opportunities for mutual professional development. (Note: this is an area where most leaders fail to facilitate these interactions. In a virtual world, they don't happen naturally; it takes a bit of prodding).
6. **Integrate New Members.** Whenever you bring on a new team member, invest the time to virtually introduce each team member, review ground rules and team memory. If budget allows, take the new member on site visit(s) to meet the other team members.
7. **Celebrate Often.** Use any old excuse to celebrate success, including achieving a key milestone, celebrating birthdays and special occasions. Just because there are miles between you, arrange to have pizzas delivered at the same time! Take a toast of champagne, beer or diet coke.

Truth be told, these seven strategies are just as important in an intact team environment, but are even more critical in a virtual team environment. It takes dedication to stay connected and most successful virtual team leaders create rituals or habits that support the team's work. Are you intentionally using these strategies to ensure virtual team success?

5 WAYS TEAM MEMBERS HANDLE CONFLICT - by Joe Sherren

We often think that conflict is bad – it is not. In fact, conflict is natural and a very healthy part of doing business. Management and conflict is as natural as bread and butter.

Here are just a few reasons why conflict exists:

We all have different values and we put those values in a different priority order. Many

people can look at the same issue and see a different problem, then disagree on how it should be solved.

We all have different thinking styles and we each take a different approach to how we make decisions. We each have different personalities and every individual is motivated by different needs.

Another hypothesis is that people can have a totally different memory of the exact same event, based on how it affected them emotionally. Additionally, a person's memory will be altered depending on what they experienced just before or just after the event.

Is it any surprise why it is difficult to bring a group of smart people with similar goals and similar corporate loyalties together to develop strategy, solve problems, or create a new product offering without conflict? This should never stop us however, from achieving what has to be done.

Conflict will not resolve on its own. In fact, it can escalate to the point where egos and relationships are irreparable if not dealt with proactively and appropriately. It is not uncommon to see that which might have been a non-event manifest itself into a monumental problem if not resolved early on.

There are five general ways people handle conflict:

Avoiders: They hope the conflict will just go away. Unfortunately, it never simply "goes away." It just comes back in a bigger and uglier form until it becomes unavoidable. Usually, the conflict escalates far beyond the ability to engage in a rational discussion and resolution.

Accommodators: These folks prefer to pacify antagonistic team members – just to keep the peace. This strategy buys peace in the short run, but eventually accommodators erupt. They will keep score of each accommodation they've made, then one event tips them over the edge!

Competitors: They want it their way. Period. No room for discussion. The competitor wants to win and will do and say anything to get their way.

Compromisers: "You have to lose a little to gain a little" is their mantra. It is a give and take strategy. A compromise is never particularly satisfying to anyone involved. By its very definition, no one "wins." Everyone has to give up something – which doesn't lend itself to the best possible outcome.

Collaborators: Looking for a win-win, collaborators have the courage to speak their minds as well as listen to others' viewpoints. They search for a consensus that everyone can live with and support. They engage in dialogue rather than discussion.

So within your organization, recognize that each person approaches conflict differently. The key is to manage the dynamic versus letting the conflict escalate out of control. Most of us want to live a full life of excitement, achieve success, raise a family, and leave a legacy. You cannot do this without experiencing conflict.

In my next few columns I will focus on handling conflict in the workplace. I will address the topics listed above, the causes, the solutions and how organizations can actually capitalize on conflict.

My question this week: "As a manager, what are you doing to provide an environment where people can constructively disagree, but work together to develop collaborative solutions?"

HOW TO SET UP A ROOM FOR A LARGE MEETING

You walk into the convention ballroom and immediately recognize that this meeting is going to be different.

The stage is not at the front of the room, but in the middle of the room. There is no lectern – no “front” to the stage. The chairs are placed closely around all sides of the stage, with highboy tables lining the back ring of chairs. There are four screens hanging from the rafters, much like a jumbotron in an athletic stadium. Oh yeah. This is not the typical meeting room set.

Welcome to the most intimate seating arrangement for a large group: Theater-in-the-round. It’s an audience-centric room set where the audience is looking at each other during the meeting, making deeper connections with each other and with the speakers. It also allows more engagement and involvement with the audience since 50% of the audience is closer to the stage than typical theater-style seating.

Theater-in-the-round is not all that new. Common in Greek and Roman times, (remember the Coliseum?), theater in the round is used worldwide for small, intimate plays and performances. But for large events? Is that even possible?

[Sarah Michel](#), VP at Velvet Chainsaw Consulting, has staged several of these style events. She responds, “Absolutely! The goal is to bring the audience in to the conversation, to create connections and enthusiasm for the meeting. You can’t do that in a traditional format with hundreds of people, but you can in a theater-in-the-round.”

To do theater-in-the-round style seating right, consider these key factors:

Select a venue and A/V crew that will work with this unique seating arrangement. Check references as they may say they have done it, but they might not!

The stage is always in the center and is most commonly rectangular, circular, diamond, or triangular. The stage is usually on an even level with the audience, on risers, or below the audience in a “pit” or “arena” formation. For high-end meetings, you can even have the stage set on a slow rotation “turntable” that makes one rotation every 15 minutes. That’s slow enough to minimize disruption to the presenters and fast enough that everyone has a chance to maintain eye contact. (Note: If on a riser, it’s smart to have two sets of stairs for the presenters to get to the stage.)

Any furniture and scenery should not obscure the stage or inhibit the audience from seeing what’s going on. As a general rule, less is better.

As with all meetings, you want to make sure the center stage is well-lit since the presenter(s) should be visible from all sides without blinding nearby audience members. You may need to rig some drop down lights and/or keep the ballroom lights up.

The chairs should be placed as close to the stage as possible, staggered so that each person is looking between the heads of the two people sitting in front of them.

If the budget allows, the jumbotron idea is great to display video images of the presenters and their slides. Otherwise, set two to four projection screens on the outer walls.

Think segments. In this format, the optimal timing for a “segment” is about 15-20 minutes. After that, switch it up. The audience needs variety with another speaker, a new activity or other kinds of interesting and entertaining things.

Last, but not least, are your presenters. Most have never spoken “in the round,” so you’ll need to give them advanced warning. It is NOT the same as speaking to an audience from a mainstage. (Never assume they know how to do this – even if you have hired a professional speaker.) Unless you give them some direction, they will pace back and forth at the perceived “front of the stage” (even though there isn’t one!) and favor one side of the audience versus creating the intimate, conversational experience your audiences crave.

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: MILLION DOLLAR MAVERICK: FORGE YOUR OWN PATH TO THINK DIFFERENTLY, ACT DECISIVELY, AND SUCCEED QUICKLY

By Alan Weiss

Alan Weiss is considered the Consultant's Consultant...after all, this is his 60th book! But let's be clear; this book is for ANY business man or woman who wants to get ahead in the chaotic and complex workplace.

By Alan's own admission, this is NOT a "scientific" research-based book akin to Malcolm Gladwell or Daniel Pink. Rather, Alan is an "anecdotal" writer who supports his key points with examples to which you, the reader, can easily relate, such as Marshall Goldsmith and Seth Godin.

He writes crisply and concisely, without taking pages and pages to expand on the same point (thank you!)

The key points are:

- Chapter 1: "Leaving the Herd" - urging the reader to stand out and be different (after all, Alan is quite the contrarian!)
- Chapter 2: "Losing the Fear of Failure" - You can't be successful without a few failures under your belt, so this chapter puts "failure" in perspective. It's not the end of the world!
- Chapter 3: "Gaining Influence" - how to calmly and patiently influence others over the long haul
- Chapter 4: "Critical Thinking Skills" - creating your own system for thinking things through and finding causes vs. blaming others
- Chapter 5: "Learning the Hard Way" - creating high self-esteem without trying to "fix" you!
- Chapter 6: "Pain, Not Suffering" - we all experience pain, but we actually choose to hang on to continued suffering (or not!)
- Chapter 7: "The Art of the Set-up" - learning how to blow your own horn, and encourage your "evangelists" to toot it for you
- Chapter 8: "The Word" - using words with intent, purpose and agility.
- Chapter 9: "The 'App' of Success" - looking at the company we keep, attracting people who attract people, and creating true community.
- Chapter 10: "No Guilt, No Fear, No Peer" - sealing the watertight doors as you move up the four levels of existence.

So... this book is about how to "be" a better _____(fill in the blank) person. Want to be a better business person? Entrepreneur? Board Member? Mom? Consultant? You should read this book.

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