**ACCEL at Managing Remotely**

As we enter what’s being considered as the new normal, it’s important for managers and leaders to develop an effective structure around their abilities to virtually manage their direct reports. Here are some guidelines for virtual management based on [ATD’s ACCEL management model](https://www.td.org/accel-model). The ACCEL model is a set of five specific skills—accountability, communication, collaboration, engagement, and listening and assessing—that are crucial to managerial success.

**Accountability**

One of the common issues that managers face when managing virtually is knowing whether or not someone’s actually working. While some might argue that this is more of a trust issue than anything else, the fact is that proximity is something that reassures managers. For many managers, there’s not much we can do to relieve this worry.

The best way to address this challenge is by setting expectations for your direct reports. Providing structured guidelines around check-ins, due dates, milestones, and so forth are key to building trust for the virtual work environment.

Also consider implementing project management tools that you can share with your direct reports, such as Trello, Asana, Monday, or MS Project. Something as simple as a shared spreadsheet can help keep everyone on the same page with regards to projects and important deliverables.

**Communication**

In a virtual work environment, impromptu meetings, office drop-ins, and hallway conversations are not an option. However, consistent communication is still key to setting expectations and making a virtual arrangement work for teams. As the team’s manager, it’s up to you to determine the proper channels that your team should use for effective communications.

Remote teams should be willing to use a variety of communication methods to stay connected and up-to-date, and everyone needs to be on the same page with how and when different mediums and tools should be used. There are many technology solutions to help bridge the connection gap. Skype, Microsoft Teams, Slack, and Google Hangouts are just a few. And when all else fails? There’s no reason not to go old school and pick up the phone and place a call or send a text.

For effective communication within a remote environment, it’s more important to build the process that works for you and your team. Selecting the technology to use is the second step.

**Collaboration**

New challenges present themselves when working within a virtual environment, particularly around collaboration and maintaining team synergy.

Remote communication isn’t easy. It can distort the normal cadence of day-to-day conversations, and the lag between messages can often postpone or hide emotional reactions to our comments, which might affect our ability to effectively collaborate.

One way to improve collaboration is by implementing more face time (not to be confused with FaceTime, Apple’s video communication software) by way of video calls. Video calls enhance the collaborative experience because you’re able to see people’s faces and read their expressions. This type of interaction reduces miscommunication because it enables a better read on emotional reactions. Fortunately, most of the communication technologies that I mentioned allow for video conferencing.

Additionally, it’s important to hold team meetings as planned. Make sure to practice effective meeting habits such as sending out an agenda ahead of time, assigning a meeting lead and notetaker, and having someone keep an eye on time. Effective collaboration comes from having a stable, consistent process in place.

**Engagement**

Impromptu in-person conversations help maintain employee engagement and connection. Losing those opportunities is just one example for how working remotely makes engagement a challenge.

Beyond regularly scheduled check-ins and team meetings, it’s important to consider those impromptu interactions with your direct reports that are less about the work and more about building connection. Consider instituting virtual coffee breaks or happy hours to encourage socialization between employees. San Francisco-based company [GitLab](https://www.linkedin.com/company/gitlab-com/) does just that. Other organizations, such as [Groove](https://www.groovehq.com/blog/friday-qa-august-14-2015), have created slack channels dedicated to “water-cooler” talk. According to Groove, this channel might feature pictures of pets, memes, and random links from the Internet.

These examples prove that there are many opportunities to maintain employee engagement among virtual teams and organizations.

**Listening and Assessing**

The ACCEL model describes listening and assessing as a manger’s ability to gather information, think critically, and process information manager during interactions with direct reports. These are commonly referred to as the soft skills related to emotional intelligence (EQ), which entails recognizing one’s own and others’ emotions and using emotional information to guide one’s behavior and assessments.

So how does one practice effective EQ when managing or leading remotely? As previously discussed, one of the main challenges to remote working is the lack of proximity, which limits one’s ability read facial expressions and emotions. The solution for maintaining EQ during a remote environment requires less of a technological solution and more of a human one.

As a remote manager, the most important skill to work on is your ability to listen and ask questions. Listening is a skill that’s [at the core of emotional intelligence](https://www.fastcompany.com/40493058/these-emotionally-intelligent-habits-can-make-you-a-better-listener), and great listeners are also [effective questioners](https://www.fastcompany.com/40475156/nine-simple-questions-i-learned-to-ask-that-transformed-my-career). As a manager of remote team members, that’s your ticket to filling in any missing information you’d otherwise get in person.
Also build on your ability to step back and talk less. The delays and lags that come with virtual communication will test your patience when it comes to this, but it’s extremely important to ensure that your team feels heard and listened to. You can’t do this when you’re doing most of the talking.

Making the change to working remotely will present new challenges for teams. However, when managers rely on the skills identified in [ATD’s ACCEL model](https://www.td.org/accel-model)—albeit with a virtual spin—they set themselves and their teams up for success.