Tools for Leading High Functioning Teams in Virtual Times

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Working remotely is not a new concept but is now in everyone's lexicon and lives thanks to the COVID pandemic. Work that we once thought could not be remote, is being done remotely. Teams and teamwork have always been important to high performing cultures, but in this remote environment, supporting team leaders, facilitating effective team meetings, and recognizing team efforts and accomplishments are even more important. Having some tools in your toolbox can make this vital leadership function easier.

Tools for Leading Effective Team Meetings

Nicole Bendaly presents **"Leading High Performing Remote Teams: Your 'Top Four' Checklist"** in the April 2020 issue of *Forbes*. She writes that the first step to improving your meetings is to ask team members what they believe will make remote meetings more effective and enjoyable. Some suggestions include:

- Use an agenda to ensure your time together is well spent.
- Ensure every meeting has a clear objective.
- Dedicate time in every meeting to group discussion, idea sharing and problem-solving.
- Clarify expectations regarding what an effective team meeting looks like, and what team members need to do to achieve it.
- Use a video-conferencing tool instead of teleconference whenever possible. Participants should keep video on making their facial expressions visible.
- Ensure social time is included in some of your meetings. I use many of the processing activities (clock buddies, stir the class, white boards) I use in face-to-face meetings to engage and connect.

Bob Frisch and Cary Greene provide essential steps to consider as you plan virtual meetings in their *Harvard Business Review* article titled **"What It Takes to Run a Great Virtual Meeting."**

Tools for Overcoming the Virtual Distance
When you work remotely, you can't take somebody out for coffee or go to happy hour with your co-workers, but there are other ways to get around this problem. Creating and maintaining relationships among remote co-workers and their supervisors is crucially important. A Kenexa Research Institute study titled **The Impact of Employment Engagement** found that 50 percent of the positive changes in communication patterns within the workplace can be credited to social interaction outside the workplace. An open channel for communication in a technology platform gives remote team members a "meeting place" where they can go to socialize. Susan Jacobs provides multiple resources for setting up social interactions in remote work in **"12 Tech Tools for Virtual Meetings"** and Heather Harper provides intriguing team building activities in **"40 Best Remote Team Building Games."**

Tools for Conducting Learning Walks and Instructional Rounds
Key components of effective observations and feedback are consistent regardless of the learning environment and the setting in which instruction may be taking place (in-person, remote/virtual, or a hybrid setting). During these remote times, where educators have to adapt their instructional practices to respond to changing settings and needs of their students and communities, opportunities for thoughtful feedback remains and may be even more important. Don't miss the opportunity to honor the professionalism and dedication with which educators are meeting the current challenges. Use the effective observational practices you already know and use to get into those remote classrooms. If you can do it, invite team members to visit each others' virtual classrooms regularly to do focused peer observation for one another. They can collect data in service of a question one of the team wants answered (e.g. what evidence of student learning can we see?). There is skillful debriefing of the observation and planning of next steps. I came across this really useful tool from **National Standards for Quality Online Learning** titled **"Virtual Classroom Walkthroughs: 7 Tips for Effectively Observing Online Instruction"** There is a form at the bottom of the article to download a really useful form to use.

Resources and References

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