

## Virtual leadership that inspires



***We are living in an unprecedented time.***

***Working remotely is not merely a trend driven by the global health crisis; on the contrary, studies show that many company leaders intend to make it a major part of their future plans.***

Having said that, as much as working from home has become the new normal, it is not as normal as it seems.

It can be challenging to adopt a new culture that has no set office culture or a definite working time of 8 to 5.

*The remote working environment has created a few challenges for managers (and leaders)* as they still have to ensure that their team members remain motivated and productive, while also avoiding the issues of isolation.

In a previous blog, we looked at *how the coronavirus had changed the landscape of the working environment* as companies adopted remote-working policies which affected the morale of some employees.

Motivating employees remotely requires some creative thinking. In this blog, we will be exploring what makes a good leader in the remote-working world.

## Understanding the difference between management and leadership

People often regard leadership and management as the same thing, although they are in essence very different. Let's look at their definitions:

- o **Management** is the act or skill of directing, controlling, handling, deciding, overseeing, etc.
- o **Leadership** is about influencing, developing, coaching, guiding, mentoring or supervising people.

The main difference between the two is that leaders have people who follow them, while managers have people who simply work for them. So how do you lead your team in these unprecedented times?

## Understanding virtual leadership

Virtual leadership is a form of leadership where teams are managed via a remote working environment. Like traditional leadership roles, virtual leaders focus more on inspiring workers and helping teams accomplish their goals, as we currently experience in a remote working environment.

## What are the leadership skills required to lead in a virtual environment?

Below are a few leadership tips that will assist leaders with their challenges:

- **Have great communication skills** and remember that communications must be clear—even more so now than before.
- **Leaders must show their team that they're trusted to get the job done.** They must be able to motivate employees to perform at their best.
- **Make the best of a situation (be able to adjust to changes) and lead with optimism and vision.** Encourage your team to acknowledge the reality of any given situation and to plan ahead, take action and work towards a better and more successful future.
- **Reward results and not screen-time.** Consider rewarding employees for measurable outcomes and not for the time they sit in front of the computer. This does not mean that employees can become slack; the focus should instead shift from screen-time to results.
- Soft skills required:
  - Emotional Intelligence
  - Team Player Attitude
  - Growth Mindset
  - Openness to Feedback
  - Adaptability
  - Active Listening
  - Work Ethic.

## **Leaders need to be more active, rather than passive or reactive**

If you lead by adopting an active approach, you will find that most of the time you do not need to take disciplinary action. In terms of the leadership definition, you will be actively involved in the development of the employee and moulding the employee towards perfection; therefore, if an employee strays, you can help them to get back on the right path through mentoring and guidance. Being a passive or reactive leader may lead to problems snowballing and by the time you need to intervene, disciplinary action may be your only remedy. In my opinion, you then fail to lead your personnel because of missed opportunities for development, coaching, guidance or mentoring.

## **Expectations of management and employees**

To manage expectations, expectations need to be in place and clear. It is important to communicate what your expectations of team members are so that they can manage themselves to perform within scope. It is also important for employees to know how their job fits within the organisation. Tell them what top management expects of them and how it forms part of their jobs.

- Have realistic expectations in terms of working hours and availability. One of the many reasons why employees appreciate the ability to work from home or on a virtual team is that it offers greater flexibility. Leaders should be aware of this and be wary of setting unrealistic expectations. Having realistic expectations—and communicating those expectations—will help everyone to feel happier in their roles but at the same time reduce staff turnaround time.
- Departments in a company cannot function on their own; therefore, it is also important to know the expectations of other departments. Expectations cannot be set if proper communication is not in place.

In a previous blog called '*Guidelines on motivating employees while working remotely*' we already dealt with the importance of communication in the remote working context. Ensure that you know how to effectively communicate with each individual team member as not everyone prefers the same method of communication, especially while working remotely, and you cannot rely on non-verbal cues.

Leaders should put themselves under the magnifying glass to determine which skills they need to work on to effectively lead from a distance. Remember that leadership is a balancing act. You'll have to ballast uncertainty with compassion and empathy to tide you and your organisation over this crisis.

*SERR Synergy* is able to assist employers and simplify the efficient drafting of remote working policies (work-from-home policy) to safeguard the employer in the event of labour disputes. We provide our clients with proficient and world-class *labour law guidance* that empowers employers to deal with their workforce-related supervising policy, chairing virtual or in-person disciplinary hearings and guiding our clients with regard to disciplinary warnings and remedial action.

**About the Author:** Dina Korsten joined SERR Synergy in February 2020 as the HR Manager. She graduated from the University of Pretoria in 2011 with a BCom in Human Resources and in 2018 completed her BCom (Honours) in Industrial and Organisational Psychology.

Resources

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/terinaallen/2018/10/09/what-is-the-difference-between-management-and-leadership/#2e983a1074d6>

<https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2018/01/05/virtual-leadership-skills/>

<https://www.smartbrief.com/original/2020/05/5-skills-virtual-leadership-inspires>

<https://www.welivesecurity.com/2020/03/20/keep-calm-carry-on-working-remotely/>

<https://dalberg.com/our-ideas/leadership-time-pandemic/>

©SERR Synergy, [www.serr.co.za](http://www.serr.co.za)