



How to Drive Accountability with Your Distributed Workforce

Tips for Overcoming the Top 5 Challenges of Managing a Distributed Team

Introduction

Remote work is on the rise, and it's here to stay. [66% of companies now allow their employees to work at least part of the time remotely.](#) And many “Future of Work” experts predict that within the next decade, [50% of the U.S. workforce will work from home three days or more each week.](#) Thanks to technology and the global economy, companies now have employees and offices all over the world, with teams spanning timezones. How can business leaders prepare for the next generation of workers, and for an influx of employees who expect more flexibility than ever—in both work hours and location? For managers, often the biggest challenge of leading distributed teams is driving accountability. In this eBook, we'll address that worry head-on. Keep reading for practical insight, including tips from leadership experts Sharon Steiner Hart, Karin Hurt, and Deb Leathers-Parmeggianni.





5 Challenges of Managing a Distributed Team (and 5 Solutions)

1 It's Harder to Foster Meaningful Connections

[Sharon Steiner Hart](#) spent the last fourteen years working remotely. She has managed corporate teams distributed across the world and offices, and now she works from home as an entrepreneur and business coach. From her experience, the biggest challenge of leading distributed teams is fostering a sense of connection.

"With some employees working in an office and others at home, it's easy for remote employees to feel left out of important conversations," said Hart. "When decisions and conversations happen in the office, leaders often fail to include remote employees. It's those little communication details that trip up a lot of new managers and quickly erode trust. Whether you send out an end of day memo or a weekly team newsletter, it's so critical to make sure you're communicating effectively."

Beyond team communications, Hart also advises her clients to take the time to build genuine relationships with their direct reports. Without connection, it's hard to build trust or drive performance, she says.

"You need to get to know what makes your employees tick, both professionally and personally. So often, one-on-ones with remote employees either get canceled when things are busy in the office, or the manager uses the time on that call to catch up on other work, like email. That's a recipe for failure," she says. "You have to be

present during conversations if you want to build meaningful connections. Maybe that means hosting one-on-one meetings via video instead of the phone, so you can make eye contact and give your undivided attention. Giving your time and attention is the most priceless gift you can give as a manager."

Finally, Hart urges managers to set aside a budget to bring their distributed teams together once to twice every year. In her opinion, the face to face interaction is priceless. When employees get to know each other on a more personal level, they're more likely to perform at a higher level. It's easier to let down someone anonymous than a person you've had conversations with over a meal.

Quick Tip: Do you have employees who are hesitant to move their conference calls to video? Remove any anxiety by setting clear expectations. Example: are ball caps acceptable, or is professional attire preferred for video meetings? Set the ground rules to eliminate guessing and help your remote team members avoid any awkward video moments.

2 Coaching is Often Easier Face-to-Face

The role of a coach is one of the most critical responsibilities for any manager. Effective coaching enables better employee performance and development, resulting in lower turnover. But sharing performance feedback with employees who aren't located in the same building as you can be especially challenging. Learning and development coach, Deb Leathers-Parmeggianni, sees this play out all too often.

"The biggest mistake I see leaders of remote or distributed teams make is not being honest and candid with their team members," she says. "Get on a video conference or travel to them and be honest. When negative feedback is coming back, don't let things simmer. Take care of it ASAP. Get ahead of issues."

Hart echoes this sentiment. Her philosophy: lead by inspiration, not by fear. She says a straightforward way to incorporate micro-coaching moments into the day-to-day is by offering preemptive praise and sharing it publicly. Over time, these micro-moments of praise help remote employees better understand what managers expect. It also gives them the confidence that the work they're producing is making an impact. For employees who are somewhat out of sight, this is powerful.

"It's important to praise employees who get things done the way you want," she says. "Communicate what you desire—show your employees how they can win & give them visibility into what other team members are doing well. Shoutouts & celebrations are much more inspiring than gotcha-moments."

Quick Tip: Send out an end-of-week recap email. Call out two or three high performers from that week and share what they did that you appreciated. Be specific! Other team members will likely aspire to do work worthy of a mention.





3 It's More Tempting to Micromanage

Managers who are unaccustomed to leading teams distributed across locations often have a tough time finding the right way to offer adequate support without micromanaging. It's tempting to overcommunicate with the employees you don't see in the office every day; if nothing else, to let them know you haven't forgotten about them. But managers beware: too much hovering can foster insecurity and harm engagement. Particularly for high performing employees who've had experience working remotely, constant check-ins can become distracting and insulting.

Hart advises her clients to watch their tone when checking in with remote employees. Rather than using accusatory language like "I haven't seen that presentation yet—don't forget it's due today," Hart advises using a more supportive tone. Try this instead. "I know you're working to finish the presentation that's due today. Please let me know if any questions come up or you need my help."

She also points out that it's vital to respect deadlines. That means trusting employees to meet a deadline you've set rather than nagging them in the days or hours leading up to a project milestone.

"I always tell leaders to respect the due dates they set for their team. Stop over-checking on progress. If your employee is consistently meeting deadlines and producing high-quality work, there's no need to ask for updates every step of the way," she says.

If this is a struggle for your team, consider implementing a project management tool. Having access to quick updates and a clear view of key project milestones can often alleviate the urge to micromanage. It also helps to reduce the silos that often occur when some employees are in headquarters, while others are dispersed.

Quick Tip: Schedule regular one-on-one meetings with each of your direct reports—regardless of their location, and aim to have one team meeting each week. Be sure to turn the cameras-on; video meetings encourage participants to be fully present and engaged.

4 It's Harder to Get Everyone on the Same Page

Karin Hurt, Founder of [Let's Grow Leaders](#), often hears leaders—especially of distributed teams—lament that their employees aren't strategic enough. Or that they're not taking action to drive the leader's strategy forward. In reality, Hurt says the employees don't even know what the strategy is, sometimes because managers tend to approach corporate communications as "one and done." Hurts' advice? If you have a new strategic direction or a critical initiative to share with the team, find five different ways to share it.

For example, if you want your remote marketing team to prioritize your Q4 product upgrade, share why that's the priority in a team standup meeting. Follow that meeting up with an email recap, outlining the talking points from your meeting. Discuss the product upgrade during each one-on-one meeting that week and ask each employee to share their initial thoughts, reactions, and questions. Assign them a brainstorming activity tied to the product launch. The following week, have each team member share their best ideas during your team standup, and then send out recap

notes from that meeting via email. The bottom line: never assume that one email or one meeting will drive the point home. If you claim something is vital to your strategy, demonstrate that in your actions and communications. If you want your employees to think and behave more strategically, prompt them to do so.

Quick Tip: Develop a strategic vision for your team and share it in five different unique ways. You can:

- Share a quick video, even if you record it on your phone
- Send posters to your work-from-home employees
- Send a monthly email that shows how team members are living out your strategic values, etc.





5 Distance Can Make it More Difficult to Keep the Motivation and Inspiration Alive

How does that saying go? Absence makes the heart grow fonder. That might be true for a long-distance relationship, and yes, studies have shown that remote employees are more engaged than their peers. However, as with any relationship, it takes work to keep the spark alive. How can leaders keep all their employees—regardless of location—motivated and inspired to work towards the joint mission? To perform at their best, even when distractions arise? Karin Hurt says inspiring and motivating are universal leadership skills, and fundamentally, it all starts with communication.

“Motivating employees to perform at their best requires leaders to think carefully and strategically about how they communicate with employees,” says Hurt. “You first must build relationships with your employees and earn their trust. Once you’ve built that relationship, don’t shy away from the tough conversations. Set clear expectations, reinforce them, and address it when those expectations aren’t met. Approach those situations in a way that shows your employees you care about their success. Frame your conversation in a way that helps employees think about behavioral

changes they might need to make to perform better. I recommend checking out and following my [I.N.S.P.I.R.E. model](#) as a guide.”

And again, Hart says giving your team members visibility into what their peers are working on can be a big motivator.

“As a remote employee, especially, you don’t always know how other team members spend their day. You may not see what they’re working on,” she says. “But if your manager shines a spotlight on your peers’ achievements, you might want to rise to the occasion. Seeing wins in action inspires more wins.”

Quick Tip: Looking for ways to motivate and inspire your team to improve? Karin Hurt’s I.N.S.P.I.R.E. framework offers a step by step guide for starting conversations that drive action. Download a [free copy here](#), or learn more by reading her book, [Winning Well](#).

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Sharon is passionate about helping her clients identify short and long term, strategic goals and align their actions with them. She is a catalyst for business growth from the inside out, utilizing an intuitive, authentic coaching style and proven techniques. Sharon has a unique mix of business development, client relations management, and entrepreneurship experience. After managing her own successful coaching practice on the East Coast, she returned home to Los Angeles and managed a nearly 4 million-dollar client portfolio across diverse industries, including finance, legal, entertainment, healthcare, biotech, and high tech. She also provided internal Corporate Coaching to “rising stars” within her organization, providing 360 feedback and liaised between client and management. You can get in touch with Sharon at sharon@sharonsteinerhart.com.

Karin Hurt

Founder, Let's Grow Leaders

Karin Hurt, Founder of Let's Grow Leaders, helps leaders around the world achieve breakthrough results, without losing their soul. A former Verizon Wireless executive, she has over two decades of experience in sales, customer service, and HR. She was recently named on Inc's list of 100 Great Leadership Speakers and American Management Association's 50 Leaders to Watch. She's the author of 3 books: *Winning Well: A Manager's Guide to Getting Results—Without Losing Your Soul*, *Overcoming an Imperfect Boss*, and *Glowstone Peak*.

Deb Leathers-Parmeggianni

Learning & Development Expert

Formerly a Vice President at Stanley Morgan, Deb is a leader with diverse and extensive professional experience partnering to create value and deliver results. During her time at Stanley Morgan, she led over fifty direct reports dispersed throughout New England, Mid-Atlantic, New York, and the Mid-West. She organized onboarding for new hires and produced and organized the documentation of protocols, employee development, corrective actions and recommendation for employee promotions. Deb is currently freelancing remotely and open to new opportunities. She can be reached on [LinkedIn](#).



Bringing It All Together

Effective communication is the solution to so many of the challenges involved in leading distributed teams. By following the tips in this eBook, you'll be on the path to smarter communication and more productive, high-performing teams. But beyond the fundamentals, you need reliable technology that supports your communication needs. Thanks to 8x8 Video Meetings, that's not only possible, but it's also affordable. Join

meetings with a single click from any compatible browser and still get a full-screen experience. Seamlessly move chats or calls from Virtual Office to an online meeting for face-to-face interactions or screen sharing. Don't just take our word for it. Sign up for a free video meetings account here: <https://8x8.vc>



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