

Effective Communication Tips: Transforming Your Remote Workforce Into a Collaborative Unit



Business owners, like myself, certainly understand the importance of being able to work cohesively with their team, whether it be in an onsite or remote office environment. Most managers and CEOs have argued that having your entire team in one space will allow for better communication, hence improved productivity and bottom-line results. While this may seem true for some, I find the same productivity and goals can be achieved even if you have a remote workforce. I run a business with thirteen employees all working remotely and have found effective communication is the key priority to ensure an efficient and cohesive working relationship with my team.

Effective communication is vital to the success of distributed teams. It helps build trust and creates an environment where creative ideas and problem-solving are welcomed and encouraged. When there is no open communication, miscommunication or misunderstanding is often the result, causing conflict and frustration among team members. Heads of organizations need to understand that good communication and leadership is tied closely together. In this age of real-time data, we process a lot of information on a daily basis. Messages are sent through various means including text messaging, emails, instant messaging and even social media platforms. If you are contemplating implementing a

remote work force structure or contracting out projects to remote third party companies, here are some tips to help transform your workforce into a collaborative unit.

Effective Communication Starts With Listening

Listening is an important skill to master. It's not just hearing the words that are being said but also understanding and connecting with what the person is saying. If you want to create an atmosphere where your employees feel valued and inspired to freely share ideas, then you will need to hone your listening skills in order to fully connect with your employees:

- When conducting meetings, you must create an environment in which your team feels safe to freely express their ideas and opinions whether they agree or disagree with you. Make it a forum where each person can resolve issues in a creative way.
- Do not interrupt team members when they are speaking. When team members are airing their ideas and you don't agree with what is being said, instead of thinking about your response, really listen to what is being said.
- Focus fully on who is speaking. In this age where it is so easy to be looking down at our smartphones or checking emails during online meetings, we tend to miss out on important details of what is being said.

Sharpen Email Skills

Email is the most used form of communication when it comes to running a business with remote employees working in different time zones. As the leader of your organization, you will need to be able to manage your inbox in an efficient manner and train your employees to answer emails promptly especially regarding any customer related issues.

- Train everyone to reply to emails in a clear and concise manner. Make sure to address the important key points in your reply to avoid unnecessary back and forth.
- If you cannot act on a message or a request by a team member right away, send a quick note letting them know you will get back to them soon. Don't leave them hanging.
- If there are documents that need revisions and team collaboration, use tools that can be accessed by the team instead of sending it as an attachment. Two great collaboration options are [Google Docs/Drive](#), [Trello](#) or [Basecamp](#).
- If a communication issue cannot be resolved by email, pick up the phone to make sure the message is clear and nothing is left to chance.

Manage Stress For Effective Communication

Being overly stressed can lead to poor communication especially when most of your communication is accomplished over email. Poorly written messages can easily be misinterpreted and tend to send misleading signals which can disrupt your capacity to think clearly and communicate creatively and effectively. Postpone communication or sending emails when you are stressed. Take time to calm down before engaging with your clients and team.

Remove Barriers In Communication

Effective communication can only become easier when team members get to know each other better. Thanks to technological advances, there are a multitude of online tools available to make it easier for remote team members to be “present.” It’s like your virtual water cooler. Encourage team members to discuss ideas amongst themselves and collaborate through instant messaging.

Holding meetings via video or voice calls through Skype or Google Hangouts via Google Plus on a daily and weekly basis is a must depending on needs of your team. Meetings don’t have to be lengthy. Make it a priority to discuss goals achieved for the week and team objectives for next week.

Encourage your team to call you directly when urgent matters needs to be discussed so that workflow is not unnecessarily disrupted. This practice is something that I found quite useful. It allows for fast turn around in problem solving and creative discussion in real time.

Invigorate Your Remote Team With Planned Downtime

Scheduling planned downtime with your entire team present in one physical location is a great way to foster camaraderie and collaborative thinking. Some of your best creative ideas and conversations stem from having lunches out or after hours socializing with co-workers by bringing everyone together in the same location. This can also be achieved by planning annual or bi-annual team building retreats.

- Incorporate fun activities to help build trust and allow your team to get to know you each other better.
- Along with having fun with your team, incorporate some brainstorming and work activities.

Your remote workforce will only work as a collaborative unit when every team member trusts and respects their co-workers. You can only expect to get the best results from your

