



# How to Lead Virtual Teams

Skills to Put Your People First



## Remote or Removed?

**2020 was the year when work went remote.** In a matter of days, entire workforces were sent home and told to set up shop. Employees with no prior experience to working from home were asked to navigate digital communication platforms, online meeting tools, and field a deluge of email.

While some people prefer the remote worklife, it's not for everyone. You have to be highly self motivated, proactive in your outreach to colleagues, and content with some amount of solace and isolation. When thrown into this type of environment, unprepared, it can be a scary and difficult experience. Not to mention that learning how to get work done in a virtual team takes time and patience.

VitalSmarts research shows that even in good times, remote teams struggle to stay connected and successful. Sometimes out of sight really does mean out of mind.

We asked 1,153 of our newsletter readers about the challenges they experienced when they worked from home.

**Of the 52% who said they worked at least some time from home, the hardest challenge they faced as a remote employee was speaking up and sharing their concerns with their teammates.**

In fact, 84% said when they had a concern, they let it drag on for a few days or more, while 47% let it drag on for a few weeks or more.

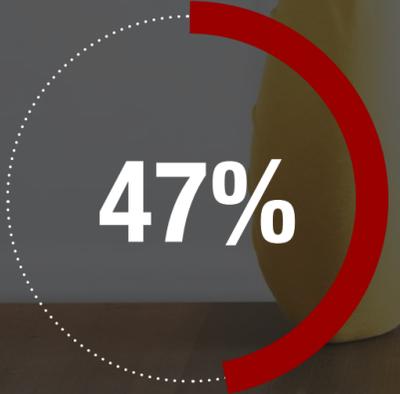
When you couple the inherent challenge of communicating remotely with uncertain and turbulent times, creating a cohesive and successful remote team can feel like an uphill battle.

**WHEN REMOTE EMPLOYEES  
HAVE A CONCERN:**

A red circular progress indicator that is approximately 84% filled, with the number '84%' in white text in the center.

**84%**

**let it drag on for a few  
days or more**

A red circular progress indicator that is approximately 47% filled, with the number '47%' in white text in the center.

**47%**

**let it drag on for a few  
weeks or more**

# Communication Is Key

So while employees struggle to find their place in a new virtual team, how can we ensure the forced—or in some cases, desired—distance doesn't lead to a culture of silence and silos? How can you put your people first and ensure distance doesn't come between relationships and results?

According to the study, the success of remote teams hinges on the quality of communication—most importantly, the **manager's ability to communicate with their remote team.**

To identify the specific communication skills integral to managing a remote team, we asked survey respondents to describe a manager who is especially good at managing virtually. We received 853 accounts detailing specific management skills characteristic of the most successful remote teams. These accounts described managers who found ways to ensure their people felt supported and valued in a remote environment. Managers who use these seven skills will find that not only are their teams **happier** and **healthier**, they are also **more successful.**

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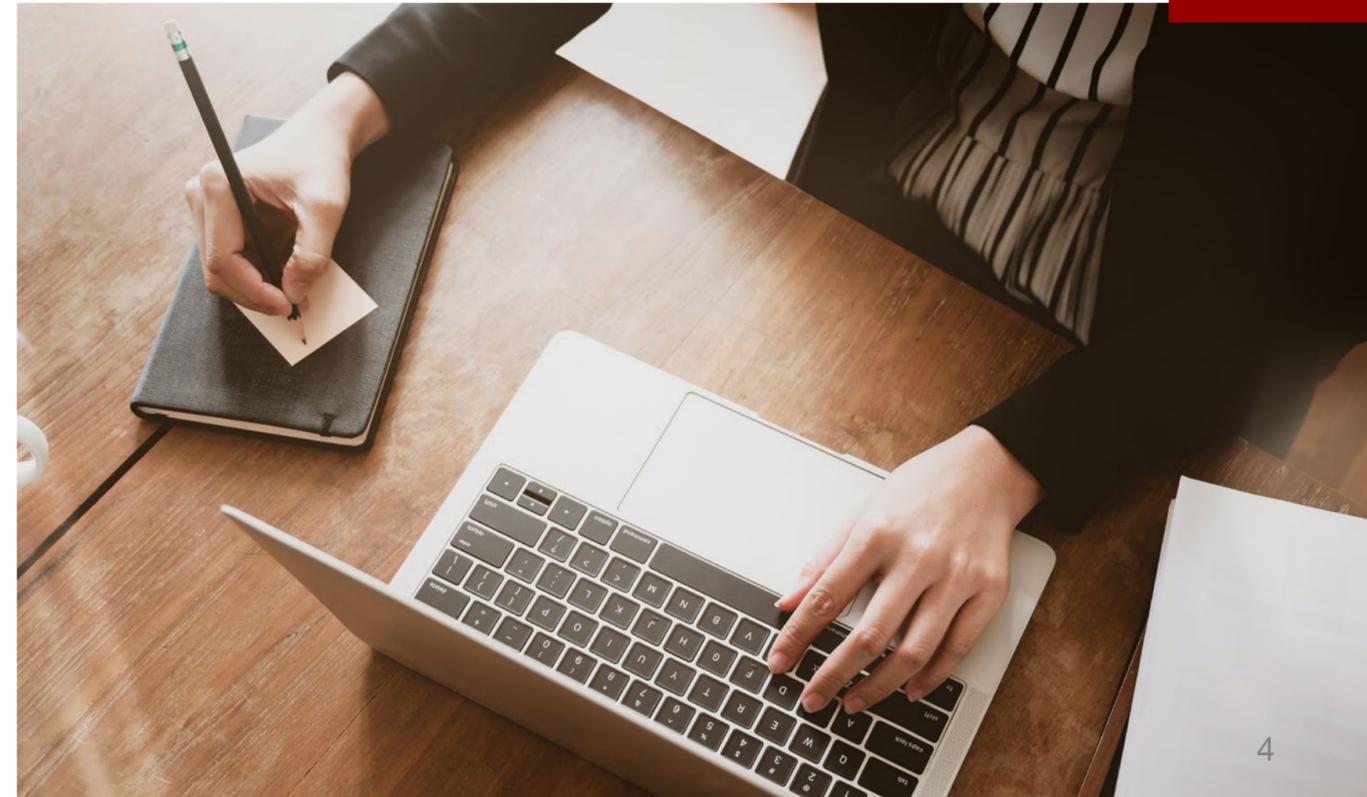


# 7 Skills To Lead A Virtual Team

1

## **FREQUENT AND CONSISTENT CHECK-INS.**

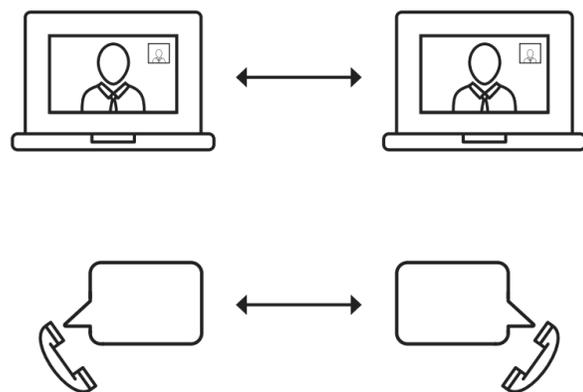
Nearly half of respondents (46%) said the most successful managers checked in frequently and regularly with remote employees. The cadence of the check-ins varied from daily to bi-weekly to weekly but were always consistent and usually entailed a standing meeting or scheduled one-on-one.



## 2

### **FACE-TO-FACE OR VOICE-TO-VOICE.**

One in four respondents said managers who insisted on some face time were more successful. If in-person meetings are not possible, at a minimum use video conferencing technology or pick up the phone to ensure colleagues occasionally see one another's face or hear one another's voice.



## 3

### **EXEMPLIFY STELLAR COMMUNICATION SKILLS.**

Respondents emphasized the importance of general, stellar communication with remote teams. The most successful managers are good listeners, communicate trust and respect, inquire about workload and progress without micromanaging, and err on the side of over-communicating.



4

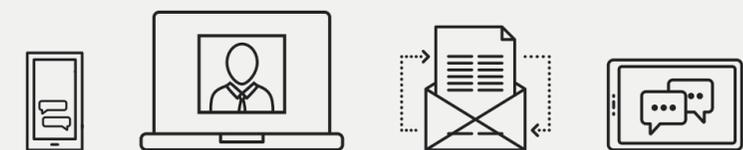
#### EXPLICIT EXPECTATIONS.

When it comes to managing remote teams, being clear about expectations was mandatory. Managers who are direct with their expectations of both remote and onsite employees have happier teams that can deliver to those expectations. People are never left in the dark about projects, roles, deadlines, etc.

5

#### ALWAYS AVAILABLE.

Successful managers are available quickly and at all times of the day. They go above and beyond to maintain an open door policy for both remote and onsite employees—making themselves available across multiple time zones and through multiple means of technology (IM, Slack, Skype, email, phone, text, etc.). Remote employees can always count on their manager to respond to pressing concerns.



# 6

## TECHNOLOGY MAVEN.

Successful managers use multiple means of communication to connect with their remote workers. They don't just resort to phone or email but are familiar with video conferencing technologies and a variety of services like Skype, Slack, Instant Message, Adobe Connect, and more. They often tailor their communication style and medium to each employee.



# 7

## PRIORITIZE RELATIONSHIPS.

Team building and comradery are important for any team and remote teams are no exception. Good managers go out of their way to form personal bonds with remote employees. They use check-in time to ask about their personal life, families, and hobbies. They allow team meeting time for “water cooler” conversation so the whole team can create personal connections and strengthen relationships. And in times of heightened concern and stress, establishing a foundation of trust with remote employees is paramount. Great managers make it their top priority.



## Dialogue Leads to Results

The health of any relationship, team or organization can be measured by the quality and speed with which people speak up and engage in dialogue. The skills to achieve a culture of dialogue are taught in the award-winning Crucial Conversations® Training.

Crucial Conversations teaches people how to achieve alignment and agreement when stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong. With skills to speak their minds honestly and respectfully, people collaborate better, make better decisions, and foster workplace cultures of trust, safety, respect, and responsibility.

Learn more at [vital-smarts.com](https://vital-smarts.com).

# VitalSmarts®

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