

INSIGHTS & ANALYSIS

Managing Remote Teams in 2021 Calls for 'Extreme Visibility'

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The pandemic has spurred 58% of the U.S. workforce to work from home at least part time, disrupting traditional management methods. Supervisors and teams are no longer sharing a physical office space where they can easily have conversations whenever they need. Now, they are spread across multiple individual home offices. This shift requires leaders to communicate differently.

Working from home has not reduced employees' desire to know what's happening within the organization. They still want to understand the company's direction, the business's health, and their work's context. The need for good, consistent communication has actually escalated, but the mechanisms available for that communication have changed.

For this reason, remote managers should practice extreme visibility. Extreme visibility replaces a physical, in-office presence with being highly accessible to your team through a variety of remote communication channels. This boosts employee engagement and retention because managers are in contact with their remote workers in the manner and with the regularity that the team prefers. It also results in heightened productivity because managers are available to offer their support.

Here's what extreme visibility looks like in 2021.

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scheduling time with everyone on your team more often. If you checked in with each direct report once a week before the pandemic, you should probably do it twice a week now—and keep that cadence.

Accidental breaks in routine communication—even one week—can invite worry and gossip. The employee might start wondering: “What’s going on? Why haven’t I heard anything?” Deliberate, extreme visibility reduces lapses in communication and the ensuing uncertainty.

The pandemic has prompted leaders at StickerYou, an online marketing company, to up the frequency of one-on-ones. Not only are these check-ins in everyone’s calendars, but they are also focused on employee well-being to make sure team members have every type of support they need to work effectively.

Plus, scheduled, recurrent communication offers managers opportunities to explain changes within the company, says Dianna Booher, author of *Communicate Like a Leader*. Sometimes, in the midst of a change, “leaders just make an announcement and expect automatic buy-in. They go behind closed doors, look at the data, and report what they’re going to do. But you have to communicate the reasons behind the decisions if you want employees to support those changes.”

Frequent, impromptu communication is as important as these scheduled interactions. StickerYou, for instance, recently adopted Slack as a way for

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channel, the leader may chime in with “Hey, that’s a great point,” or, “This is what I found, too.” Contributing to that group conversation demonstrates that the leader cares and is paying attention to their team, even though everyone is remote. When employees feel that their manager cares, they are more comfortable asking them for help.

Extreme Visibility Is Not Micromanagement

Increased communication can be misconstrued as micromanagement, which could harm your employees instead of help them. But there’s a clear difference between the two. Micromanagement is dictating and analyzing every move an employee makes, often critically, without offering helpful information, says Booher. Usually, the leader is focused on ensuring that a person strictly follows a process. “They’re telling you how to do something, and they mistake that for communication,” says Booher. Good communication, she says, offers autonomy. The employee learns what success looks like and is empowered to get there.

Another key distinction: Micromanagement is commonly only one-way communication. With extreme visibility, however, managers ask questions to make sure the team member has the tools they need to succeed. The leader might ask, “What are your obstacles? How can I help you?” as opposed to tightly tracking adherence to a method.

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“The best way to see how you’re coming across is to have people who are not reporting to you tell you about the communication’s quality, frequency, and tone. Are you dogmatic in what you say? How do you ask questions? Do you ask for input?” Honest feedback will minimize missteps.

Extreme Visibility Requires Ongoing Coaching and Support

Technical training on remote communication is necessary, but once managers leave the training environment and return to the real world, they are not especially likely to use those new skills. If managers are provided a coach—whether someone from HR, another manager, or a mentor—those new skills are more likely to stick.

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...can, senior leaders must remember that people learn at different speeds. If a group of managers receives training on visibility and communication, they are not all going to adopt the new practices at the same rate. This can be frustrating for executives. They might think, “This is failing because some people aren’t getting it.” But that’s not accurate; some people simply need more time to change their behaviors. Coaching reminds managers to practice.

Leaders make or break a company. Strong ones drive employee

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