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Humanizing remote teamwork:

quick wins for team leaders



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Intro

It's time to explore the essential elements of performing team play and fine tune your team culture. Get inspired to help your team members feel safe and connected

Project teams, management teams, agile teams and working groups. A lot has been said and written about the characteristics of well performing teams, where individuals feel safe and connected, and where each one can contribute with his own strengths.

When team members need to collaborate remotely, we have a myriad of tools at hand in order to close the gap of the

physical distance. Microsoft Teams is one of these, and it's being used in thousands of companies across the globe.

But how do we avoid introducing undesirable habits as a result of using these tools? Which are the essential elements of performing team play and which we should not forget? Working from home or with dispersed teams across locations doesn't have to disrupt the team you've built at the office or be a strain on the bonds you've created!

Can you think of a top athlete or team that has achieved peak performance without a coach? Put on your coach hat and explore practical tips to fine-tune your team culture and take teamwork to the next level.



Rethink management styles



Encourage autonomy and allow your team members space to grow.

The majority of human beings are in search of both growth and autonomy. And people who experience a higher level of autonomy also tend to feel higher job satisfaction.

This means you should evaluate your management style – as team leaders, by giving your team space to be autonomous, and as a team member, by proactively communicating status updates to the team leader. This is where team chat tools come in - as a great way to receive or send spontaneous updates, to and from other remote collaborators. If the messages stay short and relevant, this can become a healthy habit to make sure everyone is staying on track without being constantly monitored.

Follow best practices for engagement in virtual meetings

Create a smooth online meeting experience that everyone looks forward to.

A good meeting has three ingredients: an agenda, a set time and intellectually invested attendees. And the team leader doesn't always have to be the moderator. Having a different meeting moderator can change the dynamics and allow the leader to rest from time to time.

One great way to get ideas and discourse flowing is by starting a meeting with ice-breakers. You can use ice-breakers to elevate the mood and to help members express themselves.

Make sure voices are heard by asking people keep their chat box visible (in case anyone

sends written questions), or even the 'raise your hand' feature (for a more subtle interruption).

Using video is always good to achieve non-verbal communication, also because it enforces signals of belonging and trust. But don't make cameras a mandatory rule and respect members who prefer not to turn it on.

Good news for whiteboards and flipchart lovers: you can now use them as online whiteboards or even equip yourself to get, for example, Teams Room Content Camera, as it's known on Microsoft Teams.

Embrace hyper- communication

Confirm whether you're on the right track, or whether the team needs to pause and course-correct.

We all know that proper communication is crucial to ensure successful teamwork. This becomes slightly more challenging when all team members are working remotely, which is why 'pinging' or 'short signals' can be helpful to ensure no one is left alone or out in the dark.

When working in a team, especially under stressful circumstances, it's good to check-in with others and send/receive small confirmations of how things are going. Short 'pings' will allow you and your co-workers to confirm progress, assure alignment, course-correct or even press pause.



Define the values that are core to your team's identity

A clear team identity creates a stronger bond and increases commitment levels.

Allow your team members to align with the team's identity, what they stand for and why they're part of the team. This even applies to executive teams!

Begin by jointly identifying your team's mission by outlining what goals you'd like to pursue together. Also make sure to discuss which team values your collaboration will be based around. Finally, define the rules of engagement, a set of group norms that all members should agree upon. Include, for example, how to deal with a disagreement, or simply how the group will communicate.

It's also important that these rules are discussed and reviewed over time between all team members. It will create more commitment within the team, an objective basis for giving feedback in the future, and allow the team to be more resilient in periods of tension or in a crisis. While setting a team logo will help create this team identity, documenting these rules, e.g. on a Teams Wiki, it will help onboard new team members, or explain terms or jargon used by the team.

Foster healthy ways of working



Give and take a break.

Make a habit of instilling ‘break time’ in your team environment. One way to do this is to create 5 to 10-minute intervals between meetings, for example. This creates breathing space in your team members’ agendas, and will be greatly appreciated, especially by those who have meetings following each other without interruptions.

Another good practice to agree upon is to clearly show when you’re available and when you’re not. Collaboration tools already allow us to do this, so let’s make use of it. And it works in both ways – you might need to take a break and not be disturbed for a short time during the day, or you may need to contact a team member but need to know whether it’s the right time or not.

Take the initiative to break bad workplace habits

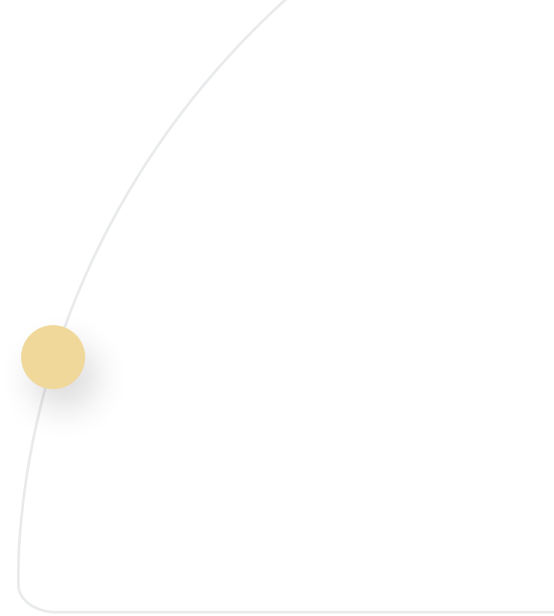


**Pay attention to the small details
- If they bother you, chances
are they bother everyone.**

As in everyday life, there are also small annoying things that cause anxiety in the workplace, but could easily be avoided. And we all know anxiety can lead to inappropriate reactions or even loss of productivity. The good news is, you can be the one to initiate positive changes in bad workplace habits.

For example, when a meeting looks like it's running over time, there's a risk many of the attendees will not be productive or even present for the remaining of the meeting. The solution? The meeting moderator can quickly launch a poll to assess who would be available for X more minutes. This won't interrupt the meeting, everyone can give their clear answer, and focus on the meeting again, if they decide to stay.

Build trust and share vulnerability



Trust takes time to build gradually, an ongoing nurturing process to maintain, but only seconds to break.

Only when there's trust will people be able to contribute ideas without the fear of being turned down. And this is where true innovation can grow.

In order to achieve trust, you must first get to know each other. The key lies in understanding one another's strengths and weaknesses, which can be done through typical team coaching workshops and techniques. The most elementary way of doing this is to have people express 1) where they usually get their energy from and 2) what might be causing a drain of energy for them. Alternatively, and taking our own Acolad example, we've recently compiled

a book of wisdom, containing inspiring quotes and their explanation by team members across the organization.

Once you've created a safe environment, it's possible to encourage risk taking, where people understand that making mistakes allows them to learn, but hiding mistakes, on the other hand, is banned. Instilling a feedback culture within your team will help make sure you give and receive feedback appropriately: to the point, but respectfully. Finally, it's important for your team to experience fun moments, where interpersonal relationships can grow beyond the work context. How about a Teams video lunch or virtual happy hour?

Focus on measurable results

Focusing on results will help your team make sure those results are achievable.

When an outcome is measurable, it becomes easier to provide objective feedback on. It's exactly this feedback, when given in an appropriate way, that will allow your team to perform better and give them a feeling of continuous learning, rather than a feeling of getting criticized or judged, for example.



Be inclusive of demographics, diversity and in communication

All team members should have the same access to what's going on in the team.

Inclusion is one of the most crucial aspects of good teamwork. Keeping open lines of communication and allowing everyone access to the same information is very important.

This is especially true when working with intercultural teams, where members need to be aware of how people from other cultures work, how they think and how they react. But the very first barrier is language – although there are tools ready to help, such as the Microsoft Teams'

chat system which now automatically translates. You can also use the most recent feature, which allows you to record meetings and share them with your team, along with the video transcript.

Inclusion might also be applicable in the case of a new colleague joining your team. Remember to share with them the team's mission, the rules of engagement and the jargon and acronyms you use daily. The empathy you put forward will transmit itself to seamless inclusion for any newcomer.

Encourage peer-to-peer recognition

Be a good example and set the tone for what to recognize and how to show appreciation.

One of the most valuable types of recognition is given by team leaders, and although extremely valuable, you can do so between peers too. Giving peer-to-peer recognition and positive feedback can help strengthen the team bond. Whether it's shared amongst the entire team or is done privately, ensure this is part of your team culture. Microsoft Teams makes it easy, using the "praise" add-on in conversations.

Did you know having colleagues recognize each other for their great work increases engagement and reduces employee turnover?



Celebrate your team's achievements



Being proud of what you've collectively achieved reinforces the team identity and trust.

Last but certainly not least, be proud of yourself and of your team's accomplishments. It's a great time to discuss together what you've learnt, in good and in bad, and find a way to share those learnings with other teams.

In a crisis situation, strong teams risk starting to isolate themselves as a group and forget they're part of a bigger picture. Therefore, it's essential that the team stays tuned to other teams and the rest of the organization. A company intranet can be useful as a place where teams can share their identity, their achievements and their learnings with the rest of the company, so that other teams can connect with them in order to ask for help, to align on ideas and to learn from each other - from their successes to their mistakes.

Final thoughts

We hope these considerations provide some inspiration to help you shape the DNA of real and strong teams, bringing human elements to task accomplishment and employee engagement.

In the end, our goal is to make collaborations more profound, more performant, and in times of stress or even during a crisis, more resilient.



Let's talk!

We can help you design a holistic digital workplace strategy that opens the way to a new collaborative culture

acolad.

hello@acolad.com

www.acolad.com

