

the leading edge

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Six Tips for Effectively Motivating and Engaging Remote Colleagues

Working remotely is gaining traction across DeVry as a desirable FlexWork option because of the benefits it offers both the organization and colleagues. Here are six tips from the book *The Virtual Manager* by Kevin Sheridan to help you effectively motivate and engage remote colleagues.

1. **Build a culture of trust** – It's important that only those who have earned your trust are selected to work remotely, then let go and support their autonomy. Build trust throughout the team by using games, humor, fun and storytelling – statistics show that these activities build engagement and camaraderie as well as trust. Plan for periodic on-site team meetings and implement team-building activities to help establish rapport.
2. **Help colleagues transition to a virtual work place** – Communication styles, coworker interactions and basic project management skills must be refined for the virtual environment. It may also help a colleague feel connected by assigning a "job buddy" who can let her partner know about formal measures, such as new policies, and informal news, such as a colleague getting engaged. Offer technology training to those who need it to learn how to use Webcams, Lync or other tools that can aid in communication.
3. **Monitor work** – Hold regular status meetings to review project lists, progress made, issues faced and deadlines to stay organized and manage workload. Virtual tracking systems can supplement status meetings. For example, a spreadsheet saved on a shared drive can be edited and color-coded to show status. An Internet-based system such as Share Point or Chatter has more robust features, so you can set email reminders and make comments about a project.

As a regional manager of field marketing specialists who work remotely, **Tiffany Kimble of Becker Professional Education** says she finds it effective to hold three team conference calls a month to monitor the team's work. Each team member has

a responsibility, such as giving an update on a particular topic, summarizing important information that was shared across the organization or simply taking and sharing notes.

"One of the biggest challenges of managing a remote team is creating and maintaining a 'team' feel," Kimble said. "These regular conference calls, along with an annual in-person team meeting and my travel to oversee the team members' strategy execution, help build a sense of teamwork."

4. **Evaluate performance** – It's important to give virtual colleagues as much feedback as possible since they can't receive in-person cues about performance. Just like traditional colleagues, they should have annual performance reviews, preferably in person or by video chat. Ongoing, informal performance coaching is a critical component of regular status meetings. Take notes on the positive behaviors and areas of opportunity discussed so the feedback can be incorporated in a fair and comprehensive way when it's time for the formal performance review.
5. **Offer professional learning and development** – Ask your remote colleagues what they would like to learn, and then help them find suitable opportunities, such as stretch assignments that are not geographically based, Webinars offered by The DeVry Leadership Center or online TED videos.
6. **Balance ground rules and flexibility** – Follow a results-oriented approach where colleagues have flexibility in managing their work schedules (if the position allows) as long as they meet deadlines and quality remains high. For this to work, you must set ground rules on response times for internal and external requests and be very clear about expectations. Organizations usually benefit from offering flexibility because virtual colleagues start working earlier without a commute and continue checking email throughout the evening.



LEADER PROFILE

Shelly DuBois

Group Vice President, DeVry University

The 2012 Leadership Excellence Award winner shares her thoughts on leadership

How do you motivate your direct reports?

I use positive reinforcement to achieve our goals and results. I am invested in their success, display my involvement and seek their involvement with the work before us. I stress that we will do this work together, persistent in the drive to achieve the desired outcome – there's no room for complacency.

How do you build a good rapport with your team members?

By getting to know the “whole” person, not just the work person, and committing and investing in them. I build a climate of trust, authenticity and respect. The relationship must be a participative, two-way experience.

How do you prepare for and lead a challenging conversation?

I face the problem with confidence and assurance. I follow the “high-impact feedback” template, which includes developing a problem statement, determining the goals and structure of the conversation and communicating the shared/mutual measurements of success. I also build the opening content by considering the issue, giving examples of outcomes expected, engaging the colleague for feedback and input, and giving them ownership.

What is the best advice you have received to help you be an effective leader?

Listen to your subordinates, to your peers, to your superiors. Leadership requires solid communication skills, the ability to converse and exchange information. To that point, you must listen to understand.

What critical piece of advice do you have for an aspiring leader?

Have patience--not a lack of urgency--but patience. You must be motivating and speak with confidence, enthusiasm, authenticity, inspiration and vision, but it's most important to be patient with yourself and your people. It is the time you take with yourself and your people that will bring the desired results.

What is the most impactful developmental experience you can give a team member?

Stretch assignments can be powerful and mutually beneficial. It's a good opportunity for both the direct report and the supervisor to assess skill sets in action and evaluate if the stretch role is a good fit with limited risk for the organization and the colleague.

What qualities do you look for when hiring talent?

The person must be eager to continually enhance their knowledge and skills. For managers, I also make certain they can manage people, processes and products; they can operate at a high level, and the role is one of responsibility, authority and accountability.

What was your most challenging work situation and what did you learn from it?

The biggest challenge was moving the business through a downturn in market share. The impact was widespread to both soft and hard assets. The lesson I learned is to be very thoughtful and dive deep in the planning process. Changes were material and the need to mitigate collateral business risk with the change was acknowledged and managed. I recognized that not all people are “change agents,” so I looked for those with the expertise

to assist with maneuvers to help us reach the desired outcomes. I learned that people are resilient and will move through adversity if they are given clear direction, the leader keeps the turning points visible and they are given opportunities to grow, improve and rebuild.

How do you build a culture that is focused on the TEACH values?

It begins with setting expectations that this is who we are and how we roll. When I interview prospective colleagues, a key component of my conversations is if they are up to living the TEACH values. If they are, great. If not, this may not be the place for them.

What do you find most rewarding about being in a leadership role?

Talent development is the most rewarding. I enjoy the relentless and unwavering commitment to continuous improvement in the building of tomorrow and tomorrow's leaders.

Work location: The Lynnwood Center in Washington, supporting the California region

Years in current role: 4 1/2 years

Previous experience: I have worked in higher education for over 25 years as campus president, SVP finance and student finance director

Education: Bachelor's in Business Administration and master's in Organizational Management and Leadership

Hobbies/interests: Traveling and spending time with my nieces, nephews and godchildren

Family: I just celebrated my 28th wedding anniversary to my high school sweetheart