INSPIRE On Leadership

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Five Considerations for Leading Your Hybrid Team

On the heels of 16 months of pandemic life, we've learned something: working-from-home is a viable option for getting work accomplished.

We have all seen firsthand that a remote workforce can, in fact, be a productive workforce. Over the years, I have worked with many leaders who remain committed to the outdated mindset, "If I can't see you, how do I know you're working?" I hope we are dispelling this myth.

As we begin to migrate toward normal life in the workplace—or shall we say a reinvented normal—we are seeing an evolution toward hybrid teams.

What is a hybrid team? Simply put, it is a team comprised of some team members working at the office and some team members working from home.

Members of hybrid teams have work experiences that may be very different, one from another. As a leader, how do you maximize the productivity of your team, strengthen the sense of team cooperation, mitigate resentment and foster a positive culture—one that will help you retain your people as recruiter calls roll in?

The people store is fairly empty at the moment, and your people may be called upon to consider a move.Make sure you've done your part to retain them.

As we explore five considerations to help you lead your hybrid team, we are focused on the members of your workforce who can, indeed, perform their work at home. I realize for many their work has to be performed on location. Even so, for these individuals, be on the lookout for opportunities for them to do something at home: projects, professional development, and even some meetings.

As you read through the following considerations, look for the one or two that most resonate with you personally. Let's get started!

1. **Mindset is key.** Before we consider actions, let's take a look at mindset. Are you willing to set aside your own belief systems about work-from-home scenarios? Are you willing to check in on the preferences of your workforce? Your preference can no longer be a guiding force for how the people around you work. The evolution of the world of work, combined with employee preferences, will override—and should—your personal belief system.

2. **Check on personal preferences of your team.** By now, many employees have weighed in on their preference as we move beyond the pandemic lockdown and disruption. Some employees will prefer to work from home, and others will prefer being in the office. Be sure to know the preferences of each employee and accommodate these preferences when you can. Research is showing us today that employees are willing to make a job change so they can work in an environment that matches their preferences.

3. **Share empathy where it is necessary.** Instances will exist where preferences are not able to be honored. You may determine you need someone in the office who prefers to work from home. Or you may have to ask someone to work from home who actually wants to come back to the office. This is part of real life. Your best first response to disappoint or struggle from your employees is empathy. "I realize this is not what you hoped for, and I'm sorry for that." If you dismiss their preference, it is possible you may fuel resentment.

4. **Establish team rituals.** No doubt, hybrid teams come with challenges. Your work-at-home team members may be left out of the loop, water cooler conversations are not as prevalent, and socializing and relationship building will be different. Aside from your standard touch base and update meetings for business purposes, what kinds of rituals can you create to foster inclusiveness, unity and alignment of your teams? Can you schedule a monthly or

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One Sentence Matters

I would love to hear more.

That is all she needed to say, and it would have made the difference.

I remember the day vividly over 33 years ago. I was telling my new leader about some things I loved very much about my previous employer, the John Harland Check Printing Company.

Without pausing for a moment, she replied, *This isn't Harland.*

I was crushed and felt differently about both her and me for the remaining years we worked together, and beyond.

Think how differently I would have felt if she had said, *Tell me more.*

I've been working with a company recently who merged two companies together. In both locations, employees are struggling with the loss of their autonomy and prior uniqueness of their prior culture. Leaders, in contract, are enthusiastically focused on the opportunities of the future.

When an employee makes a comment representing their struggle, it may sound something like:

In the past we used to _____.
This is not the way we've done it.
I've been here for 30 years, and I don't know where I fit anymore.

There is so much change going on; it's difficult.

If you're the leader, what will your first sentence be after hearing a comment similar to any of the above?

If you don't understand your employees' need to be heard, to have an opinion and to be acknowledged for their loss, you might say something like,

Well, we're not focused on the past anymore.
We can't do things the way you did in the past.
Just keep doing what you're doing.
It is, but we don't have a choice.

If you do understand your employees' need to be heard, to have an opinion and to be acknowledged for their loss, you might say something like:

I'd like to learn more.
How do you feel about this new way?
I realize we have to figure things out, and for now I want you to know you're invaluable to us and to our future.
Change can be difficult; would you like to share more about your struggle?

Whatever your first sentence, your employee will likely remember it well beyond their moment of struggle.

Choose wisely and with care.

Aleta Norris provides an ongoing column on developing better leadership skills. She is a leadership expert and Principal at Living as a Leader LLC.