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Managing project teams successfully while working remotely

Never before have we, as project managers, been tasked with managing people, resources and clients without leaving our homes. However, as a business, being adaptable to significant change is essential to ensuring we continue to grow and remain competitive. In the past, project managers would not have had access to the technology we have today to manage this situation. We have a worldwide network of communication and potential at our fingertips, and it's essential we unlock it.



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It's not just a matter of how we do this, we know how; it's how do we do this effectively as well as ensuring that the project team is motivated.

This article will take you through some key tips that we use on a daily basis. We've always worked in a range of distances, from face to face contact to managing projects abroad from the comfort of our offices and homes. Having this flexibility has created room for innovation within our project management methods and we hope that sharing these will encourage others to try something new. This article will be broken down into 3 distinctive sections, with top tips for each area discussed.

Top Tip 1

Rewarding Forums

Meetings are essential to project management, however when you're having to do them over a conference call, all the time, can feel tedious and repetitive.

In order to ensure this doesn't happen too often, it's beneficial for meetings to stay within focused groups. Don't try and stick 20 people in a project meeting at the same time. Try to split them up into departments or groups, or, if you require a range of users, then it might be beneficial to pick one user from each to attend an 'overview' meeting. This way, you limit the repetition and updates become more relevant to each individual.

Top Tip 2

Adapt the agenda.

As a project manager with several on-going projects, you will likely find yourself overloaded with update meetings which can very often be unproductive and time inefficient.

An effective way of avoiding the 'general update call', is to focus on discussing blockers. A lot of the time, a blocker or an issue can drive down productivity or may impact project morale. Distance can make it difficult to see if colleagues are struggling with work requirements and expectations, and these issues may stay unresolved if not addressed. By focusing on blockers, you ensure that the project team are not suffering in silence, and it allows you as a team to address, investigate and resolve issues efficiently.

Top Tip 3

It's difficult to remain hands-on in a working-from-home environment, however there are ways in which you can use technology to your advantage.

Support is a fundamental aspect of our client engagement. One method we've found effective is to create an 'open' conference call or a 'drop-in' session. Following key milestones during a project, technical leads and project managers would often attend client sites to ensure that implementations have gone successfully. Hosting a drop-in session allows you to recreate that possibility from a distance. This guarantees that clients and end users remain connected during both small and large scale changes.

Driving Engagement

How do you keep people motivated within projects whilst at home? Ensuring your team remain engaged is fundamental and now, more than ever, it is important to keep spirits up.

Top Tip 4

Turn that camera on - don't be shy!

Facial expressions, body language and eye contact are key aspects of communication. Without these important elements, we lose the ability to read the room.

As a project manager, reading the room is essential. We need to ensure everyone is on the same page and that our team is actively listening and contributing. With the current situation, we are practically living in a virtual world, and we need to make the most of seeing our colleagues' faces, rather than staring at their profile picture.

This may seem like an obvious tip, but it really goes a long way to driving engagement.

Top Tip 5

Did you ever have a Friday social after work?

Why not continue that tradition virtually? Having these on a regular basis can elevate spirits and increase wellbeing across the board. Using the culture of your company to maintain social activity even during remote working will help you create harmony within your team and increase that ever important engagement that we require within the lifespan of projects.

Top Tip 6

Reward and recognition

As mentioned, project managers are regularly contacting their team for updates on progress, outstanding actions, risks and issues.

Whilst this is great, it is also essential to regularly call your team to share praise for the work they have done as it will go a long way towards building your teams' confidence.

This is particularly important if you have received great feedback from a client. We share positive feedback and thanks from clients on our intranet portal, so that everyone can see the great work our teams are doing.

Top Tip 7

What do you do when a project is going well and there are few or only small updates?

Many project managers may cancel their meetings or postpone them until the following week. What's the point of having an update meeting when there's nothing to update, right?

Continuing with project meetings, albeit cutting them to 15 mins, is a great opportunity to ask your team how they are, how they're feeling in general and if they just want to chat. It's my belief that a key aspect of project management is making sure your team is unified, and you're there for one another.

Final thoughts

The key theme that underlines all the above, is communication. The art of communicating is crucial to any successful project, and even more so during these times of uncertainty.

Hopefully, these tips will help you in exploring new ways of keeping your project team focused, engaged and positive.