

# Remote Management



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**W**hat does it take for a leader to manage high performing teams? What is his or her role in shaping them? Leaders are expected to demonstrate the ability to bring all the pieces of the “puzzle” together, set the right direction, become part of the solution and finally, empower the team to solve the puzzle. Presumably, these are better achieved when leaders are physically present at the same location as their teams, as this helps them to motivate, draw lessons for them from their mistakes, and encourage them to persevere. Leaders celebrate their team’s successes just as they embrace its failures. They stand amidst the team members like a “pillar”, ensuring that their efforts do not fall apart. All of this is done most effectively when leaders are at the team location, and are readily available whenever needed by the team.

Now imagine that a leader/manager has manage his or her team remotely, and moreover, from a different country or time zone. On any given day, the manager is up in the morning and ready to start the day, but the team is already exhausted after a long work day. Understandably, the team will not be very excited about an evening call with the manager. Conversely, the team is eager to update the manager at the start of their day, but it is already evening for the manager, and that interaction cuts into his or her personal time.

I now find myself in the same space. Over six weeks ago, I shifted from Gurgaon to my company’s headquarters in the US, and to 9.5 hours behind the Indian time zone. This article reflects my thoughts on this move, and how my 35-member team in Gurgaon perceives it. Remote management can be challenging, but there are ways in which a leader can meet those, and stay connected.

## Setting the right expectations

I informed my team managers of the impending move much in advance, in order to manage expectations upfront. I instilled confidence in the local leadership, to enable them to effectively and smoothly manage day-to-day operations, independently and with minimum guidance. I have worked closely with the F&A team over the last ten years and we

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share a deep mutual trust. Still, knowing that I will no longer be physically available daily made some of them uncomfortable. There are certain habits that are hard to change. For instance, they are accustomed to walking into my cabin anytime they wish to chat, and to step out for a quick conversation over tea. As I reflect, I realise how often difficult decisions and issues were sorted over informal conversations in the café. This is one aspect that will change.

### **Enhancing transparency**

Transparency is among the most crucial aspect of managing team emotions. It was therefore important for me to explain the reason for this change. I was moving to the US as it was a necessary for me to integrate and align my goals. Knowing the “why” and the “how” of a decision or change can keep insecurities at bay.

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remotely to have the ability to walk their teams through future scenarios. They must demonstrate that they themselves are following a “plan”, and then have their team participate virtually. This will ensure that the team members collaborate in making the transition process smooth, despite the absence of the leader onsite.

### **Technological Innovation**

In today's connected world, a leader has no choice but to utilise technology for regularly communication with teams, especially ones that are working at a different location. Through FaceTime, WhatsApp, zoom meetings or other social media, it is possible to cut across boundaries of countries and time zones by using such technologies effectively and proactively. Personally, I prefer connecting with my team via video conferences, as both parties can then see each other real time, observe body language, smile and laugh together, and share thoughts – others may prefer a different mode of communication. Also, accommodating early morning calls and occasional late evening conversations build trust and conveys the message that one cares.

### **Travel**

There is no substitute for travelling and meeting people one-on-one. Costs permitting, travelling a few times in a year to meet the team makes them more comfortable. This interaction enables them to internalise the new operating model and be more open to it, which is essential for them to continue to contribute meaningfully. Also, these visits have provided me the opportunity to coach and mentor, and to reinvent my connection with the team. This is important for making such remote leadership the new normal.

### **Global dynamic business and roles**

My job requires me to be involved in global processes and solutions that are ever changing. Dynamism is the new name of the game. The leadership teams want to continually challenge established systems and processes as the business grows and market complexity intensifies. This impacts the role of finance and accounting globally and accordingly, managers must innovate and automate practices to the extent possible for greater efficiency and an improved bottom-line. For this reason, having diverse teams, and teams in different time zones, is no longer unusual. All leaders, at some point, experience a similar situation in their corporate life. The key is to stay connected, build trust, be transparent, use technology, respect individual aspirations of team members, and recognise the effort that goes into coping with changing times. ■