“I KNOW YOU’RE THERE — BUT ARE YOU REALLY WORKING?”

Realities and Practicalities of Leading From a Distance
lead (lēd)

1a: to guide on a way especially by going in advance  b: to direct on a course or in a direction
Where Is the Virtual Workplace?

The virtual work world isn’t a single, designated “place” – it’s actually anywhere that people can and do work. If you manage people you don’t see, lead a team that’s spread out geographically, or work within a group that is partially remote... then you’re part of the virtual workplace. People who aren’t in the same location, don’t work in the same time zone, or don’t see one another face-to-face each day are part of this group. So are telecommuters, “road warriors,” geographically dispersed teams, and anyone not located with coworkers.

Even if you work in a more traditional business environment, you’re undoubtedly seeing more examples every day of people working virtually. So you’ll soon need to apply your leadership skills in this new and changing virtual workplace. Regardless of where people are, when they work, and how often you see them, you need to lead, manage, and motivate for results... from a distance.

The Technology Factor

Technology has allowed the virtual workplace to become a reality. And it plays a key role in helping leaders ensure that the job gets done wherever and whenever people are working. The importance of having the right technology really becomes obvious when things don’t go well or fall short of needs and expectations. When the right technology tools are combined with the right skills, the virtual workplace can really “hum” along nicely, making communication and productivity possible.

To communicate in the virtual workplace, you must become competent and confident in the use of technology tools. Of course, being an effective commu-
icator is important for any leader. But as a distance leader, you must “listen to see” – using your ears rather than your eyes for picking up on subtle cues that indicate a problem, concern, or opportunity to provide needed coaching. Think about how easily you facilitate face-to-face meetings; getting as good at leading virtual meetings is your new target.

Another example of using technology to accomplish routine tasks in new ways is the arena of performance management. Whether you’re facing a significant performance problem or you merely need to coach a team member for either improvement or success, it’s important that you address these situations promptly. Distance can’t be an obstacle to identifying problems, talking about concerns, or praising performance. You can’t wait for an opportunity to “bump into” a team member to have these discussions. And you can’t just wonder if – or hope that – work is getting done. Rather, as a leader of a distributed team, you must use available technology tools for timely problem-solving, coaching, and recognition discussions. Sure – talking about performance issues and coaching for success might feel easier to handle in a face-to-face setting, but the virtual workplace doesn’t usually offer this luxury. A live telephone discussion or videoconference is usually the best option for a coaching discussion, while an e-mail with a quick “atta-boy/girl” praising a team member’s work might be appropriate.

Whatever option is best for you and the situation,

JUST DO IT!
TO BE A VIRTUAL BRIDGE BUILDER, REMEMBER TO:

❖ Stay connected with all members on your team, regardless of where they are and where they work.

❖ Use the best available technology tools to communicate with your team.

❖ Handle problem-solving, coaching, and recognition (praising) discussions promptly to get the best results.
When you build bridges, you can keep crossing them.

Rick Pitino