

Overcoming Remote Challenges

We all rely on many visual cues and informal interactions to interpret the world around us. When those visual cues are largely absent—like when we are working remotely—it's easy for things to go off the tracks.

There are 6 main challenges to making remote teams work:

- 1 Lack of clarity about the work
- 2 Disconnected and/or duplicate work
- 3 Lack of relationship-building
- 4 Misunderstandings and unresolved conflicts
- 5 Isolation and loneliness
- 6 Managing competing work and personal priorities

1

Lack of clarity about the work

When we see each other regularly, we can always clarify things along the way. That means we aren't always careful to be clear and specific when assigning work to someone else, or when receiving it. When working remotely, these opportunities to check in are less available. Sometimes we can make incorrect assumptions when we don't clarify things and end up solving the wrong problem or taking an approach that is not the best.

Consider these actions:

Set clear expectations that:

- Engage others in meaningful Why-What-How conversations
- Establish timelines and describe what success looks like
- Check your audience's understanding to make sure they are ready and willing to act

2

Disconnected and/or duplicate work

In the office, we regularly chat with colleagues and have a good sense of what they are working on versus our own assignments. Without that regular input, it's not easy know that your colleague may be working on another aspect of the same project, or have information that you need for your work.

Consider these actions:

Establish a daily, 15-minute team check-in call to assure no duplication of effort or disconnects exist.

3

Lack of relationship-building

Remote work often leads to "transacting" with other people—we only talk with them when we need something from them. This kind of transactional relationship can ignore the opportunity to learn more about the other person and appreciate them for who they are.

Consider these actions:

- Establish meeting agendas that start with a sincere check-in for how people are doing with remote work. Ask for lessons learned and funny stories.
- Infuse fun! Consider ways to kick off your remote meetings with a quick team building or celebration for work well done.

4

Misunderstandings and unresolved conflicts

Remote work is fraught with the opportunity for these. When we are relying on emails, texts, and phone calls, we can easily misinterpret the intent behind others' comments, silences, etc. Often, this can escalate in undesirable ways.

Consider these actions:

For every topic on the agenda, ask what is working and not working. Do the "not working" portion from the perspective of "this could work even better if we..."

5

Isolation and loneliness

Those of us who are used to working in an office environment aren't even aware of the social needs that are being met in our daily office lives. When those are absent, we can quickly begin to feel isolated and alone. Perhaps we even feel unappreciated and undervalued for anything except the work products we deliver.

Consider these actions:

- Institute "hallway chats" or water cooler conversations using texts, jabber, or other online tools.
- Reach out after meetings to people who weren't as engaged or as talkative as normal.

6

Managing competing work and personal priorities

Usually, we have our lives under control with child, adult, or pet care solutions, meals purchased or boxed for us, exercise at the gym or lunchtime stroll, etc. Now, we must do it all ourselves.

Consider these actions:

Establish meeting conventions, such as when meetings can be held (no lunch meetings, since we all have to make our own now); no virtual meetings longer than two hours, with a 10-minute break between hours; at least one hour period each morning and afternoon when no meetings can be held; and no meetings after 5 p.m.

About ALULA®

ALULA® is a management consultancy founded in 1993 as Continuous Learning Group, Inc. (CLG) to assist Fortune 500 companies with improving strategy execution. Today, ALULA exists to inspire and accelerate the extraordinary growth of individuals and exceptional performance of business. ALULA employs proven principles of behavioral science to help organizations more efficiently and effectively implement change, enhance leadership capability, and improve performance.

