



## Virtual Team Engagement – More Important Than Ever

*As we practice social distancing, we are also practicing new ways of working together. But even as we are keeping our distance, we still need the social part! I don't know about you, but I miss the chats during coffee breaks, going to lunch with my colleagues, or just stopping by their desk for a quick check-in. All those small interactions that we took for granted are now sorely missed.*

We know that high-performing teams have two strengths: *productivity* (alignment, accountability, efficient decision-making), and *positivity* (trust, camaraderie, clear communication). Unfortunately, when we are in a virtual environment, all we can see or measure is productivity—what we accomplish by day's end. It is easy to overlook the *positivity* part—the human connection—which is what really drives employee engagement. Our daily human connections are as vital to productivity as doing the task itself.

Research shows—along with our own daily experience—that engaged teams feel greater accountability, both in their individual efforts and toward the overall team goal.

During this time of upheaval, it's more important than ever that leaders provide a calm, steady hand that eases anxiety and promotes camaraderie. Leaders must find new ways to foster that team interaction that is vital to employee engagement and positivity.

### Leaders Inspire a Sense of Community

Leaders are responsible for their people, and that includes finding ways to replace the missing conversations that facilitate our lives. One way is through fun, quick activities. These are small gestures, but they build a strong sense of community. With virtual and far-flung teams becoming the norm, many are asking: how do our teams connect when we're all in different locations?

Below are specific activities to employ at each of your virtual meetings—and they only take 10 minutes or less. These quick, fun activities promote team connection and foster a positive working environment. Each encourages different personalities to participate and can be done at the beginning or end of team meetings, or even as an icebreaker.

#### Reserve 10 minutes, up front.

This is for team members to chat and catch up.

#### Use Questions or Polls.

During that 10 minutes, you can even ask group polling questions (using Mentimeter or PPT slide), such as “When we're all able to travel again, where will your next vacation be?” or “If you knew success was ensured, what would you choose to do?” or even something simple like “When I get off this call, I'm going to . . .”

#### Share with Pictures.

Ask team members to share two pictures of themselves that reveal aspects of their lives or personalities that others may not know about. Pictures can include pets, family, favorite vacation spots, hobbies, inspiring quotes, etc. Team members can take turns sharing (for recurring team meetings, one person per meeting works best), until everyone has presented. You can use Microsoft Teams or other tools to house and drive this activity.

#### Guess Who.

Ask your team members to send the leader/facilitator three fun facts about themselves. Present these and let everyone guess who the facts belong to.

#### Solve Team Puzzles.

Present a puzzle for the team to solve in a limited time. This is a great team-building exercise, while also creating opportunities to connect in a different way. There are online resources and books on the topic of lateral thinking puzzles. Check them out.

These are just a few ideas for creating specific opportunities that foster connection and positivity. Your goal is to promote team connection, ensuring everyone is seen or heard. As your new virtual teams navigate this tumultuous time, it's important that you consciously create opportunities for your team to make connections.

Building relationships deepens the sense of each person's belonging, which then increases commitment to those relationships and to the team goals. As a leader, if you create those opportunities where team members can stay connected and deepen relationships, then you should see an increase in overall engagement and productivity, even when working remotely.

## 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.

