

Episode #20: Tips to Improve Your Virtual Team's Effectiveness, Part 2

Welcome to THE CAREER ACCELERATOR, the podcast where corporate managers will find tips and tools to deliver results through others.

Hello. Now that so many teams are working at home due to COVID-19, in today's episode you will hear more tips on how to improve the productivity and effectiveness of your remote team. I'm your host, coach Percy Cannon.

In our last episode you heard three suggestions on how to improve your virtual team's effectiveness:

1. The first one was to ask yourself **what your mindset is during this pandemic**. Accept what you cannot change and recognize where you and your organization have space to grow, and help your teams grow with you.
2. The second one was to make **building a more cohesive team a priority**. You and your co-workers are facing one or more challenges which, if left unattended during this pandemic, will likely worsen your team's effectiveness. Assigning a priority to improving your team's remote capabilities may be one of the smartest things you can do.
3. And the last one was to **promote human interaction**. Continue to make building and fortifying the human component among your team members and co-workers a priority, more so now that they are also being challenged by understaffing, isolation, and unclear separation between work and personal spaces.

Today I want to provide three more suggestions on how to improve a virtual team's effectiveness. These tips are tied to Patrick Lencioni's model for "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team," which I explained in the previous episode.

1. **The first one is to leverage free content that's available online to build vulnerability-based trust among your team members.** One resource that I have recommended clients is a TEDx talk from Lencioni called "Are You an Ideal Team Player?" which is available for free on YouTube. In it the speaker explains the three virtues of an ideal team player. Here's a short summary:
 - a. **The first virtue is to be humble:** I find team members struggle the most with this quality. It's hard for them to admit their mistakes, ask for help, and praise others. Corporate cultures tend to reward individual over collective accomplishments, which makes it hard to show your vulnerabilities. However, being humble is a choice you can make and, for those of you who lead teams, you can role model.
 - b. **The second virtue is to be hungry.** I find elements of this virtue in most successful executives: They are willing to go the extra mile to deliver results above expectations. However, the challenge I see is how to demonstrate this passion and personal responsibility not only for their individual objectives, but also for the greater good of the team.
 - c. **And the third virtue of the ideal team player is to be people-smart.** This is about active listening and showing empathy for other team members. It's also about treating others the way they want to be treated.

After watching this short 14-minute video, you can discuss its content with your team, then run an exercise in which you ask each member to share which of the three virtues they feel they are the weakest in, why they think they behave this way, and what they commit to improving in the future. The rest of the team provides constructive feedback to help each person clarify growth opportunities and commit to supporting them in their quest for improvement.

It's a straightforward but powerful way to leverage an exercise that builds vulnerability-based trust within a remote team. If you feel comfortable with the subject matter, then the exercise is simple enough that it could be run by you or someone else within your company.

- 2. The second suggestion is to mine for conflict and test for clarity and buy-in during virtual meetings.** When you lead virtual team discussions, be on the look-out for those instances where there is a quick resolution to topics where you sense not every argument or option was brought up. In those instances, it can help to "mine" for conflict by asking questions that trigger opposing points of view relevant to the topic at hand. This is obviously harder in a remote environment where, as outlined in my previous podcast, it's a must for every participant to have their video on. As is the case during in-person meetings, try to read the body language of team members for signs of being uncomfortable or getting impatient. You can also call on those participants who have not volunteered their opinions.

After mining for conflict, it helps to test for clarity and for buy-in at the end of the meeting. Leverage the whiteboard and screen-sharing features of your virtual meeting platform to write down the specific agreement that has been reached, who is responsible for carrying it out, and the corresponding deadline. Then ask the assignee to confirm their commitment to deliver the task by the specified date.

- 3. The last suggestion is to align behind a common short-term objective during the pandemic.** Your organization likely went through a planning cycle for 2020, which resulted in a set of priorities and goals for this year. COVID-19 and its repercussions made most, if not all of these plans, obsolete in March. This meant that your company needed to learn to operate in an environment full of uncertainties that no one anticipated or trained for. These efforts, as heroic as they have been, have demanded a level of alignment and focus much tighter than before COVID-19. Has your team been operating under a unified objective during the last six months? Or has remote work fostered isolation and resulted in a silo approach to everyone's jobs? Your team has been operating in uncharted territory all these months. Now more than ever it's important to break down any existing silos and align everyone under a common umbrella. If this common objective is not crystal clear, or if it requires adjustments, I suggest you don't wait any longer to sort it all out. And once clarified, make sure it is communicated and over-communicated throughout all levels of the organization. Building on the previous suggestion, make sure this common objective is sufficiently discussed and debated among the stakeholders, so the desired outcome is fully endorsed by all members. No exceptions.

In summary, it's obvious that all of us are feeling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, you and your remote team are likely feeling so overworked and understaffed that the

appeal of working on improving your effectiveness is probably low and may feel like a waste of time.

But look at it this way: You can either make the time now to strengthen the capabilities of your team in this uncertain environment, or further spiral into ineffectiveness, lost productivity, and low morale. One or more of the six suggestions offered in this and the previous episode will set you on the right path to regaining your strength.

I hope you enjoyed today's episode. In the next one, I will provide tips for giving and receiving feedback among remote workers.

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This is coach Percy Cannon, working to help you ***make the rest of your life...the best of your life®***.

Percy's BIO

Percy provides corporate managers and leadership teams with customized coaching programs that help them develop the skills and capabilities needed to significantly increase their business results through others and accelerate their career growth.

Percy is an "alumnus" from three multinational corporations, Procter & Gamble, IBM & Microsoft, with whom he spent close to three decades.

Since 2011 he has been helping corporate executives, managers and employees ***make the rest of their life...the best of their life®***.

Percy has worked in the United States and across several countries in Latin America as an Executive Coach, Leadership Team Consultant and Keynote Speaker, serving companies such as Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, Citibank, Tiffany & Avianca.

Percy is a Certified Professional Coach from Wainwright Global, Authorized Partner for "The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team" and "Everything DiSC" and certified as a "Go-Giver" speaker & coach.

He published his first book in 2012-13 in English (*The Business Apostolate: Insights to Define and Achieve Your Mission in Life*) and in Spanish (*El Negocio Más Grande de su Vida*).

Percy is a Consulting Partner with Grupo Azimuth and the Chapter Director for the COO Forum in Southeast Florida.

He has lived in 9 different cities and 5 countries, and speaks English, Spanish and Portuguese fluently.

Percy is married, has 3 children and 6 grandchildren, and is a passionate runner & reader.

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