

# THE FOUR MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS FOR LEADING HYBRID TEAMS

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## **Leading, coaching and managing hybrid teams calls for a conscious change in mindset.**

The Covid-19 pandemic created significant shifts in how we work. As businesses scrambled to set up employees to work from home, there was little time to be proactive and consider future implications.

As the new normal settles in, some contact center employees have a choice to work from home or at the office. Leading a contact center was complex before COVID-19! Now we are heading into new territory in learning how to lead, coach and manage hybrid teams.

What does that mean for you as a leader?

It means a conscious change in mindset. It means your skills must be applied differently. Think of it this way: It is like going to a foreign country and learning to drive on the opposite side of the road. The fundamentals are the same. You just apply them differently.

The following are four skills to make this transformation easier.

## 1. Trust Your People

Pre-COVID-19, employees earned the privilege of working from home through top performance. Now a broad range of performers are working from home. Do you have a mindset that 99% of employees come to work to do a good job? Or is it the opposite? Do you want to build a culture of growth or a culture of control? If you hired the right people, trust them to do an honest day's work. Contact center metrics can identify poor performers so you can help those individuals improve. However, be cautious of stifling your best performers with unnecessary rules.

## 2. Build a Deliberate Sense of Connection with Everyone on Your Team

Strong leaders in this era will have robust facilitation skills using self-discovery combined with technology to engage individuals and teams. Building a connection with every employee takes time. We often hear leaders say, "I don't have any time," or "I ran out of time." What they really mean is that activity or that person was not important enough to block out time for them. Manage your time by blocking short-duration, high-frequency connections. It is better to have daily 15-minute one-on-one video calls than to have a weekly one-hour session. Frequency matters more than duration when building engagement with hybrid teams.

Support employees with empathy during this challenging time. Engage in "getting to know you" conversations. Do not make your interaction entirely business focused. Pay attention to your team member's mental health. People want to know that you care about them as a person. Role-model the empathy you want your agents to show to their customers.

You have heard the expression that communication is a two-way street. On-site employees can see you at your desk. Remote employees cannot. Make your schedule visible to your entire team so everyone knows where you are and how to contact you. It is a small act that builds trust and makes the team feel supported.

## 3. Reboot Your Coaching Program

Most contact centers stopped coaching when volumes increased due to COVID-19. They needed "all hands on deck" to manage the queue. Now that volumes are returning to normal, kick-start coaching. Remote employees may already feel isolated and forgotten. Continuing to delay or cancel coaching will only worsen that feeling.

How do you restart your coaching program? Focus on what your team member did well for the first few coaching sessions. Resist the urge to jump in with several months' worth of "corrections." Think of it this way: How would you feel if someone criticized you for what you did wrong after nothing but silence for many months? What does that do to motivation and engagement? On the other hand, what if your leader thanked you for adapting quickly to working from home and recognized what you had done well on your calls? Would you feel more connected? Would you want to work harder? That is why "reconnection" coaching sessions should focus on "did wells" rather than criticism.

#### 4. Build a Connected Sense of Community

Create a rolling 30-day communication strategy. Block time in your calendar so you can ensure that every employee is given a fair share of your time. Your team is hungry for what is happening and what is coming up. It is too easy for information to "die on the vine," so plan and have the discipline to follow through. Leaders traditionally lead from the front. With hybrid teams, lead from both the "front" (establishing structure) and "back" (empowering your employees to lead). Do not let videoconferencing limitations stop you from using your team meeting as a developmental opportunity.

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Set rules of engagement. No one likes to be "volun-told." Work together to find a comfortable way for every team member to share opinions, ideas and to confirm understanding. Putting together clear ground rules makes building a sense of community easier. Push building awareness and learning new information as an individual activity before the team meeting. Reserve your team meeting time to check for understanding and cover the why, when and how.

Build warmth into your video delivery. Use your webcam to build engagement by looking at the camera as if it was the other person's eyes. On the other hand, while technology allows hybrid teams to see and hear each other, some people feel intimidated being on camera. If you want people to ask questions or make comments, show them HOW they can participate by unmuting themselves, raising their hand (virtually), or writing questions in the chat window. Another idea is to enhance ideation or practice of sales/service skills using virtual breakout rooms with two sets of virtual buddies. Rotate buddy pairs so each team member has an opportunity to work with each other. This is a great way to make the team feel connected.

COVID-19 has changed the contact center world. In this "new normal," effective leaders need high EQ (Emotional Quotient). Key skills include listening, facilitating, analyzing and perceptively noticing emotional cues. These skills can only be effectual if leaders are disciplined in time- and

priority-management skills. Although there are many more skills, try these first four as you blaze your trail leading your hybrid team.



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