

AMA RESEARCH

## New Skills for the New Workplace

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## AMA RESEARCH



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### 14 Leadership Is Hard: A Guide to Navigating Relatable Leadership Challenges



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# 'New Normal' Will Continue to Be Ever-Evolving

**F**ace it, everyone. With Delta variant cases of COVID-19 continuing to rise across the United States, and other strains of SARS-CoV-2 emerging, the sincerest wishes that we can get back to the way things used to be are just that—wishes. As offices continue to reopen and kids head back to school, what business leaders need are plans.

As AMA President Manny Avramidis points out in his column, everything is going to remain fluid, for an uncertain amount of time in the future. While the coronavirus could conceivably burn itself out, experts say this is rather unlikely. For managers and businesses to succeed, they need to rely on flexibility and resilience, and understand how to make changes.

Research that AMA conducted with its members in July about the new skills needed for the new workplace found many reporting increases in their workload and hours worked. The No. 1 concern is being able to strategize for a hybrid workplace, while No. 2 is that change management needs to be an ongoing, organization-wide priority for professional development.

Before you can make plans, you must know the goals you are trying to reach. Edwin A. Locke draws on his 50 years of experience in goal-setting theory to create a handy checklist, with detailed instructions, on how you and your organization can achieve goals even as plans are modified and changed.

Lacey Leone McLaughlin and Emily Lopez discuss how to navigate leadership challenges, offering their perspectives as an executive coach and as an HR leader.

And Cassandra R. Lee offers advice on how to make adjustments to work in your new environment, whether that is from home, in the office, or a mixture of the two.

AMA continues to seek out new topics for its seminars and new ways of reaching people. As you navigate the fluid pandemic reality, AMA will be there to support you.

Christiane Truelove  
Guest Editor, *AMA Quarterly*

## AMA QUARTERLY

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## The Value of Good Management in Fluid Times

Over the past two years, many organizations operated in a fluid situation. As the pandemic wears on, expect this fluidity to continue for an uncertain amount of time in the future. How will your business continue to thrive in these times?

The answer to this question is relatively straightforward: Organizations with good management are in a better position to execute against their strategy. The good news is that effective management is a learned behavior, not something you're "born with." And whether one becomes more effective through valuable experience or education, managers are often the linchpin that enables execution of your strategy.

Effective change leaders seek to understand how stakeholder groups will likely respond to change. They understand that resistance is greatest when change is unexpected or unexplained. Effective change leaders take a proactive approach by developing strategies to minimize resistance and to move individuals through the change. Understanding how stakeholders will respond to change helps you:

- Anticipate how much resistance you will encounter
- Understand their readiness for change
- Understand what you need to do to build commitment
- Create a stakeholder management plan

Successful execution of strategy during times of business change requires many skills, but none more important than successfully aligning an organization's employees. The keys to successful alignment require:

- Having a sound understanding of an organization's strategy
- Knowing the specific role a division, a department, and the employee serve
- Defining what success looks like

To help ensure successful execution of strategy, employees should have a clear understanding of their objectives. A clear understanding includes prioritizing their work. Not all goals are equal, and both employees and organizations would benefit from an individual understanding the value of each goal.

AMA offers the resources, training, and experts to help you learn resilience and help you and your employees define and prioritize your goals. In fluid times, we can help you anticipate the flow, and not just go with it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Manny Avramidis". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Manny Avramidis  
President and CEO  
American Management Association

# New Skills for the New Workplace

## Meeting Increased Job Demands While Managing Change and Other Stressors

So much has changed in the workplace and the world at large since March 2020. Unfortunately, with the threat of Delta and Lambda variants, COVID-related concerns and precautions continue to affect organizational policies and everyday life. While focusing on moving forward and regaining a sense of normalcy, managers at all levels across industries face an immediate, critical challenge: understanding how the workplace is different, now and for the foreseeable future, and determining what their people need to get back on track, deliver results, stay motivated, and thrive—on the job and beyond.

AMA recognizes how the workplace has changed and how navigating the latest “new normal” for business is a work in progress for senior executives, project managers, team leaders, and individual contributors. As part of our professional development mission, we regularly provide timely insights to help managers overcome workplace

challenges and find solutions to a range of people-related challenges. In July 2021, AMA surveyed members and seminar participants nationwide about the new skills required for the new workplace. The results shed light on the increased demands placed on employees in the post-pandemic organization and call attention to the urgent need to close skills gaps and place a priority on people’s well-being.

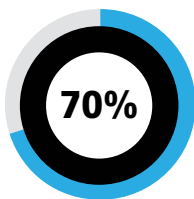
While constant change is a widely acknowledged workplace reality, the health crisis compounded the impact of rapidly advancing technology:

- Nearly 70% of survey participants reported an increase in job responsibilities since the beginning of 2020. What’s even more compelling, an overwhelming majority—nearly 80% of respondents—have found that the skills required to do their job effectively have changed in the past two years.

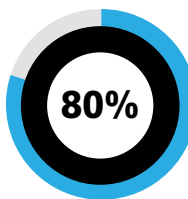
Along with an increase in job responsibilities, 74% of respondents

reported an increase in their workload from the amount before the pandemic. Correspondingly, more than 50% of participants stated that the number of their daily work hours has increased from their typical pre-COVID workday. A nine-hour workday is now standard for just over a third of respondents, while another third routinely work 10 hours or more per workday. These findings refute the common notion that remote workers, in addition to gaining back the time spent on commuting, work fewer hours than in-office workers.

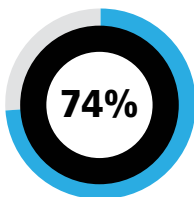
To provide further insight into specific skills gaps related to increased job responsibilities, participants were asked to rate the level of change in skill requirement—less, same, or more—that they have recently experienced across 10 areas, ranging from analytical capabilities to innovative thinking, from productivity to embracing and supporting diversity. Significantly, participants rated all 10 areas as demanding more skills in



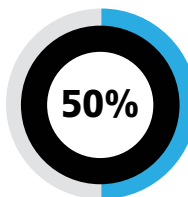
**70% of survey participants reported an increase in job responsibilities since the beginning of 2020.**



**Nearly 80% of respondents have found that the skills required to do their job effectively have changed in the past two years.**



**74% of respondents reported an increase in their workload from the amount before the pandemic.**



**More than 50% of participants stated that the number of their daily work hours has increased from their typical pre-COVID workday.**



## Key Finding No. 1

**Strategizing for a hybrid workplace is essential to maintaining effective teamwork and delivering results.**

This strategizing is the No. 1 area for development, with 202 rankings from a total of 513 survey respondents. As significant numbers of workers will continue working remotely, the hybrid workplace is the new normal.

**#1** 202  
Rankings  
Strategizing for a  
hybrid workplace

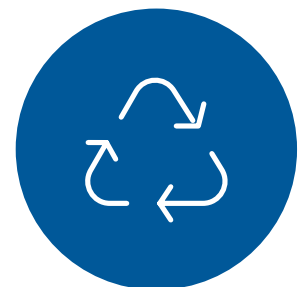


## Key Finding No. 2

**Change management needs to be an ongoing, organization-wide priority for professional development.**

Change, while inevitable and prevalent, is a significant stressor in and of itself.

**#2** 195  
Rankings  
Change  
management



## Key Finding No. 3

**Adaptability is vital to success in the new workplace and our uncertain world.**

As automation, digitization, and globalization continue to evolve and disrupt work as usual, leaders, managers, teams, and individual contributors must quickly adapt to shifting priorities, demands, and pressures in order to maintain the focus, productivity, and workflow fundamental to meeting goals and keeping a business running.

**#3** 162  
Rankings  
Adaptability



today's workplace than ever before. Two areas stood out, flagged by more than 70% of respondents: *technology skills for working virtually* and *communicating across the organization*.

Skills gaps related to technology and aggravated by the pandemic were also evident in the results when participants were asked to rank the top three areas they most need to develop or improve.

**KEY FINDING: Strategizing for a hybrid workplace** (the No. 1 area for development, with 202 rankings from a total of 513 respondents) **is essential to maintaining effective teamwork and delivering results.** As significant numbers of workers will continue working remotely long-term, the hybrid workplace is the new normal. With hybrid teams, clear communication is critical but often challenging. For starters, members might be working from different time zones and on different schedules. To aggravate matters, Wi-Fi service and platform functions aren't always reliable, and even when they work flawlessly, many people find it difficult to concentrate and genuinely connect with colleagues and collaborators during virtual meetings.

**KEY FINDING: Change management** (No. 2, with 195 rankings) **needs to be an ongoing, organization-wide priority for professional development.** Change, while inevitable and prevalent, is a significant stressor in and of itself. According to a recent survey on the return to work conducted by The Conference Board, stress/burnout is the top well-being concern among workers today, particularly among women (who typically juggle working from home with caring for children), individual contributors, and Millennials.

**KEY FINDING: Adaptability** (No. 3, with 162 rankings) **is vital to success in the new workplace and our uncertain world.** As automation, digitization, and globalization continue to evolve and disrupt work as usual—and as variants of the coronavirus threaten to spread upheaval and anxiety—leaders, managers, teams, and individual contributors must quickly adapt to shifting priorities, demands, and

## Given the many areas where employees feel the need and pressure to improve their skills, what immediate concern should organizations focus on?

- ▶ Nearly **46%** of respondents flagged investing in employee development as the most urgent priority.
- ▶ Nearly **41%** placed an emphasis on better communication to employees.
- ▶ **61%** affirmed the need for new skills to improve collaboration among remote and onsite team members in their organization.
- ▶ Only **43%** said their organization has invested in making hybrid teams more effective.

pressures in order to maintain the focus, productivity, and workflow fundamental to meeting goals and keeping a business running.

Given the many areas where employees feel the need and pressure to improve their skills, what immediate concern should organizations focus on? When asked to apply that question to their own company, nearly 46% of respondents flagged *investing in employee development* as the most urgent priority and nearly 41% placed an emphasis on *better communication* to employees. In addition, 61% of respondents affirmed the need for new skills to improve collaboration among remote and onsite team members in their organization, while only 43% said their organization has invested in making hybrid teams more effective.

As the survey's results strongly indicate, developing new skills for the new workplace isn't simply optional for motivated individuals, but absolutely essential for ongoing professional success and personal well-being—as well as to the whole company's ability to stay productive and competitive moving ahead. According to "The

Future of Jobs Report 2020" from the World Economic Forum, skills gaps will persist and remain high as in-demand skills across jobs change in the next five years.

In touch with the fast-changing workplace and responsive to the needs of today's professionals, AMA offers resources and tools to help individuals develop the skills crucial to doing their job. Whether they're part of a traditional in-office, fully remote, or hybrid workforce, and regardless of their positional power, nearly everyone could benefit from strengthening their ability to communicate up, down, and across an organization. Learning how to become a better listener and convey messages, whether spoken or written, with clarity and confidence is also vital to improving communication, both face-to-face and virtually. AMA also offers courses in project management, time management, leading with emotional intelligence, innovative thinking, and keeping yourself productive, among other valuable skills for reducing the stress of increased job responsibilities and easing the adjustment to a new workplace. [AQ](#)



# Guidelines for Effective **GOAL SETTING** in Organizations

BY EDWIN A. LOCKE



# Life is a goal-directed process. Organisms that fail to pursue and attain goals that satisfy their needs ultimately perish.

In the case of humans, goal setting above the level of the automatically goal-directed functions of the body is a volitional process. Individuals need to make choices constantly, as do organizations. An organization with no overarching goal or purpose would achieve nothing. For an organization to succeed, each member needs to engage in goal-directed action that directly or indirectly furthers the organization's core purpose or vision. What then is required to make goal setting work?

## KNOW YOUR GOALS AND THEIR FOCUS

Most people think of goals at work as being only for performance, such as sales and profits. But goals can exist for other actions that help foster good performance. Learning goals are one example. The aim of these goals is to improve one's skills or expertise by seeking information, experience, coaching and/or training. There also can be goals for behaviors such as giving others information, warning others of a problem, giving others credit or thanks, and treating others with respect. And there can be goals for process, such as going through six steps when meeting a prospective new customer or a complaining customer. The different types of goals can sometimes be combined. It has been found that a person can work to perform well while at the same time learning new skills that will make the outcomes even better.

Goals focus attention and action on certain tasks or outcomes at the expense of others. This is pejoratively called "tunnel vision," but tunnel vision is actually necessary to prevent people from going in ten or a hundred directions at once. Goals need to be specific. Telling people to "work on" customer service or sales is better than nothing, but it is still somewhat vague. One way to make goals specific is to use numbers. For example, make sure customer service ratings are at least X on a 10-point scale, make XX deliveries per day, increase annual sales by XXX%. Tunnel vision only backfires when goals for important outcomes are not set (such as focusing on quantity while ignoring quality).

## PRIORITIZE YOUR GOALS, KNOW THEIR DIFFICULTY

It may be asked, how many different goals can one person pursue successfully? This depends on the individual's ability, how much help and how much time they have, and the degree to which the goals are logically connected, as when one goal facilitates the achievement of another. Managers can delegate some goals to subordinates, keeping the more important or complex ones for themselves. When there are multiple goals, they need to be prioritized based on importance and urgency. Priorities may change

over time based on circumstances such as opportunities, emergencies, threats, and organizational changes, so employees need to be updated constantly.

The level of difficulty of the goal affects effort. For a given task, the higher the goal level, the harder people will try (commitment is discussed later). Easy goals lead to low effort. People adjust to what is asked for. If you want the best performance, it is advisable *not* to tell people to "do their best." When told that, they usually don't. The term "do your best" is very general and thus interpreted subjectively, and the personal interpretations can vary from easy to hard. A quantitative measure eliminates the ambiguity.

But the question remains: How high or hard should the ideal goal be? If the goal is set at an impossibly high level, most people will fail, and employees do not like to be considered inadequate and to have to worry routinely about being fired. Furthermore, setting virtually impossible goals will undermine trust and morale. A safer guideline is to assign goals that are challenging yet reachable, such as average previous performance for that job. (Note: In laboratory studies of goal setting, which typically last about an hour, impossible goals may be assigned to some subjects to maximize short-term effort.)

## MAKE STRETCH GOALS THE EXCEPTION

There are two special circumstances in which setting seemingly impossible goals can be beneficial and not demoralizing. The first would be during an emergency, such as an order that is behind schedule due to unforeseen circumstances—an equipment failure, a supplier failure, employee illnesses or turnover, and so forth. Employees usually are willing to pitch in and work extra time to get the job done, especially if they know they will receive a suitable reward such as extra time off. Coping with an emergency can also give people a sense of pride. However, such emergency efforts could wear thin if they become routine and lead to fatigue and burnout.

The second exception would be when the organization wants to motivate a major creative breakthrough. Let's say you make MRI machines for hospitals. These machines are expensive to buy, are very noisy, and require many minutes for each test. Goals could be set to think outside the square in order to decrease costs, noise level, or testing time by, say, 50%. The goals might be totally unreachable, but the purpose would be to motivate breakthrough thinking. In the MRI case, an improvement of even 10% might be beneficial. The key principle here is that there should be no penalty for not reaching a stretch goal. Suitable rewards for progress can be decided after the fact.

“Conscientious employees will take personal pride in their achievements, including expanding their capabilities.”



### **GIVE A TIMEFRAME FOR ACHIEVING GOALS**

Goals themselves can involve meeting deadlines. But goals for results need to involve a time perspective. Long-term goals can be hard to hold in mind, so it is beneficial to combine proximal (shorter-term) with distal (long-term) goals. The former goals are a means to the latter, and they allow one to track progress.

Proximal goals provide information about the degree to which the long-term strategy is working and can thereby increase confidence. They also help prevent procrastination (waiting until the last minute). Obviously, goal revisions may be necessary as business circumstances change, especially for longer-term goals.

### **KNOW KNOWLEDGE NEEDED FOR GOALS, GIVE FEEDBACK**

Successful goal-directed action requires not just desire but also knowledge and skill. Motivation without knowledge will produce effort, but effort has to be guided. Knowledge and skill come from experience, training, and coaching. It must be stressed that experience alone is not automatically beneficial; people can remain inept and make the same mistakes over and over. The key is what is actually learned from experience.

A key type of knowledge needed for goals to work is feedback about progress. Without it, people will not know if they are getting anywhere or whether they are on track to meet a deadline. Feedback may come from many sources, including self-tracking, organizational records and monitoring systems, team members, managers, customers, graphic displays, and the Internet. Useful feedback information must be objective (see the section on cheating below).

### **GAIN COMMITMENT TO GOALS**

Goal setting does not work unless people are committed to their goals. Four factors play a role. First, it is useful to begin by giving people the organization's reason(s) for the goal, so they do not think it is arbitrary.

A second factor is value importance. Many value elements can come into play here. For example, people are paid to work, so doing what one is asked to do is considered normal and legitimate. Raises and promotions are based on goal success, and repeated failure can lead to dismissal. Further, conscientious employees will take personal pride in their achievements, including expanding their capabilities. Achieving excellence may open up enhanced career opportunities. Leaders and peers may serve as inspiring role models. Team members may encourage success and even demand support. The job may (ideally) engage deeply held personal values—for example, producing life-protecting vaccines. Much depends on selecting employees who show evidence of holding values that fit the organization's vision.

A third factor that enhances goal commitment is healthy, reality-based (unpretentious) self-confidence, which is known as self-efficacy in psychology. People will not be motivated to commit to goals they do not think they can attain or work for rewards they do not think they can earn. Selecting and training capable people is important.

A fourth factor in commitment is organizational support. We all know that organizations have limited resources, but employees need to know that their efforts are supported. This can include time, money, equipment, space, freedom from arbitrary rules, and help from colleagues or assistants. Sincere, verbal expressions of commitment to your projects from higher-ups—managers, executives, and the CEO—can be inspiring.

### **DETERMINE WHO SETS THE GOALS, PREVENT CHEATING**

There are three broad possibilities: participatively set, assigned, and self-set. Contrary to common belief, there is no one method that is always superior to the others. In all cases, the effects depend on the challenge level of the goals and the degree of commitment. No one method guarantees the setting of specific, challenging goals.



“Employees are happy when they attain their goals or make progress toward them. Earned success is a source of pride and an incentive to keep striving.”

Participatively set goals are set jointly with one’s boss. The main benefit of participation is information exchange. Communication is critical in organizations, but this can work in more than one way. For example, subordinates may convince their bosses to agree to easy goals by saying that the easy goals they favor are actually hard. This would lead to good rewards but poor performance. (This problem undermined many old-time MBO programs.) In the case of self-set goals, people can set them at whatever level they want, high to low, without anyone’s approval. Assigned goals may be the best method of aligning organizational goals with individual goals, but the core requirements for goal effectiveness are the same for all three methods.

Virtually everyone wants to succeed in their work and get valued rewards. To many, success is a self-esteem issue. (Studies show that most people view themselves as above average, which is obviously not the case.) Thus, it is not surprising that some people may cheat by claiming or reporting achievements that are not theirs or that were faked. For this reason, all organizations need a value system that stresses, for example, honesty, integrity, and justice.

The value system is not just an online list; it is a way of acting. This system has to be driven from the top or top

management team, else the organization will descend into anarchy with each group or unit having its own value system. Enforcement requires a series of steps:

- Formulating the value system
- Ensuring that the higher-level managers and CEO are ethical role models in their own behavior
- Selecting employees for moral character as well as competence
- Communicating the value system to all employees
- Creating internal control systems (e.g., the accounting department, customer feedback, and tracking internal complaints to prevent or at least detect dishonesty)
- Incorporating character assessment, including assessments by trustworthy peers, as part of the performance appraisal system
- Dismissing employees who violate the ethics code (Note: ethics violations may be very costly to an organization, not only with respect to reputation but in terms of financial penalties)

### **TIE GOALS WITH PAYMENT, JOB SATISFACTION**

There is no validated theory within the goal literature regarding the best way to tie goals and pay together.

Obviously, people want to be treated justly. But this requires many judgment calls. For example, some people may fail more because they have harder goals than others. Some may have to overcome more obstacles not of their own making than others, and some may get more help than others. Some people get great results by abusing subordinates who later burn out or resign.

In some cases, employees make themselves look like heroes by getting out of difficult situations time and time again when their difficulties were actually caused by their own lack of planning. At the same time, the employee who smoothly gains success after success with no drama may be overlooked, even though he or she is better than the alleged hero. People may look good because they take ideas from others with no credit. The bottom line is that managers have to hold a number of context factors in mind. Look not just at who seems to be best, but also how they got their results.

Employees are happy when they attain their goals or make progress toward them. Earned success is a source of pride and an incentive to keep striving. Job satisfaction comes from other sources as well, such as fair pay, recognition, work that ties into one's personal interests, mental challenge, variety, competent and honest leadership, supportive co-workers, competitive benefits, suitable (and safe) working conditions, and more. It is a great challenge to keep people satisfied over time because the world is always changing. A key objective should be to retain as many as you can of your best people, because they are the most critical to organizational success and are also the people that other organizations will most want to poach.

## KNOW HOW TO SET GOALS FOR TEAMS

The same principles apply here as with individuals, but some new elements are added. Team members can and need to exchange information, thus (if knowledge is distributed) providing a larger pool of information. Members can also encourage and help one another practically and psychologically when there are obstacles. But they can undermine one another too, so there need to be rules for team conduct.

There is an important caveat: Team goals will not work unless all members are committed to those goals. If there is a conflict, rather than a harmony, between individual and team goals, the process can be undermined. People need to be given credit for contributions to the team. I will not go into organization-level goals here, because that is a huge topic in itself—except to say that they need to be driven from the top to start with and require enormous feats of coordination.

## DON'T BULLY WITH GOALS

What does “bullying” mean? Using goals as threats,

insulting or berating people who have failed though no fault of their own, routinely giving impossible goals that are not used as stretch goals (as noted above), raising goals arbitrarily but not rewards, and so forth. Bullying will be perceived as unjust, and employees will resent it and may quietly resist or quit. When word gets around the whole company, the culture can be undermined.

Failure needs to be treated as a problem to be solved. There can be many causes: not understanding the goal, not having the needed skills, lack of organizational support, lack of commitment, unwillingness to put forth effort, personal problems. Some failures are outside an employee's control. Termination may be needed (such as in the case of a clear lack of competence or an ethics violation), but it should be preceded by an objective causal analysis. Sometimes employees are assigned to the wrong job and could succeed if placed elsewhere.

## WRITE ABOUT GOALS, LEARN HOW TO SUBCONSCIOUSLY PRIME THEM

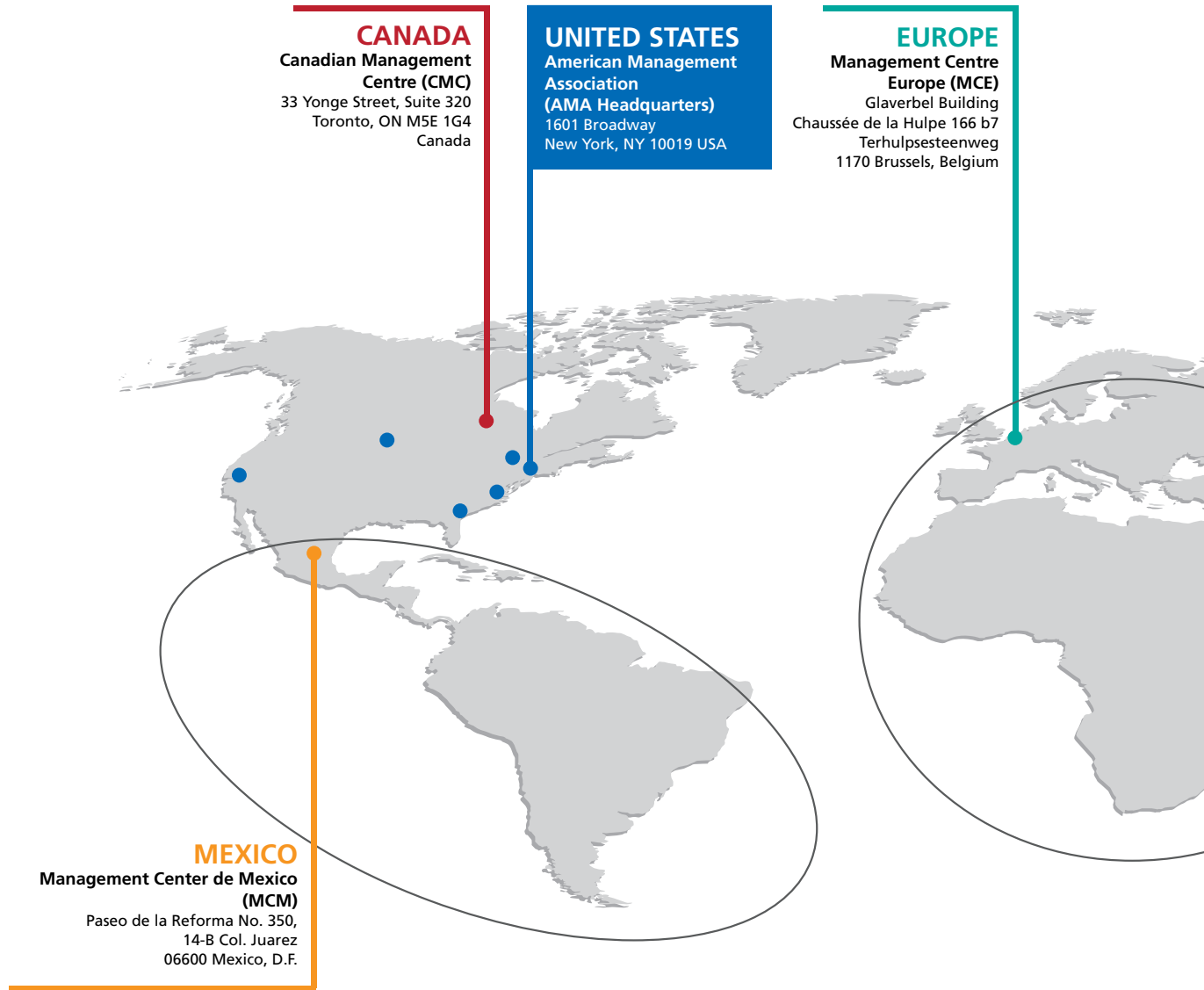
Recent studies have found that the very process of writing about goals or values leads to more motivation to take goal-directed action. Private goal or value writing sessions can take various amounts of time, and sessions can be repeated over time. Longer sessions (for example, two hours) seem to have more of an effect than shorter ones. Making the written goals specific, including a description of goal strategies, seems to facilitate action. The writing is done privately. It is not fully known why writing works.

Goal setting research has usually focused on conscious goals. However, recent research by Gary Latham, PhD, at the University of Toronto and his colleagues has found that goal-directed action can be subconsciously primed. For example, the person may be shown a picture of a runner winning a race and then given a job to perform. The people primed with a picture of a racer (in track) perform better than those shown no picture or a picture of a tree. No deception was involved. It was found that the people shown the racer picture also set themselves higher conscious goals than those shown the tree picture. Much more needs to be learned about how this all works.

Goal setting is a critically important motivational technique, but like all management principles, its benefits depend on how skillfully it is used. [AQ](#)

*Edwin A. Locke is a professor emeritus from the R.H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland at College Park. With Gary Latham, PhD, of the University of Toronto, he has spent some 50 years developing goal setting theory. He has written two books with Latham: A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance (Prentice Hall, 1990), and New Developments in Goal Setting and Task Performance (Routledge, 2013).*

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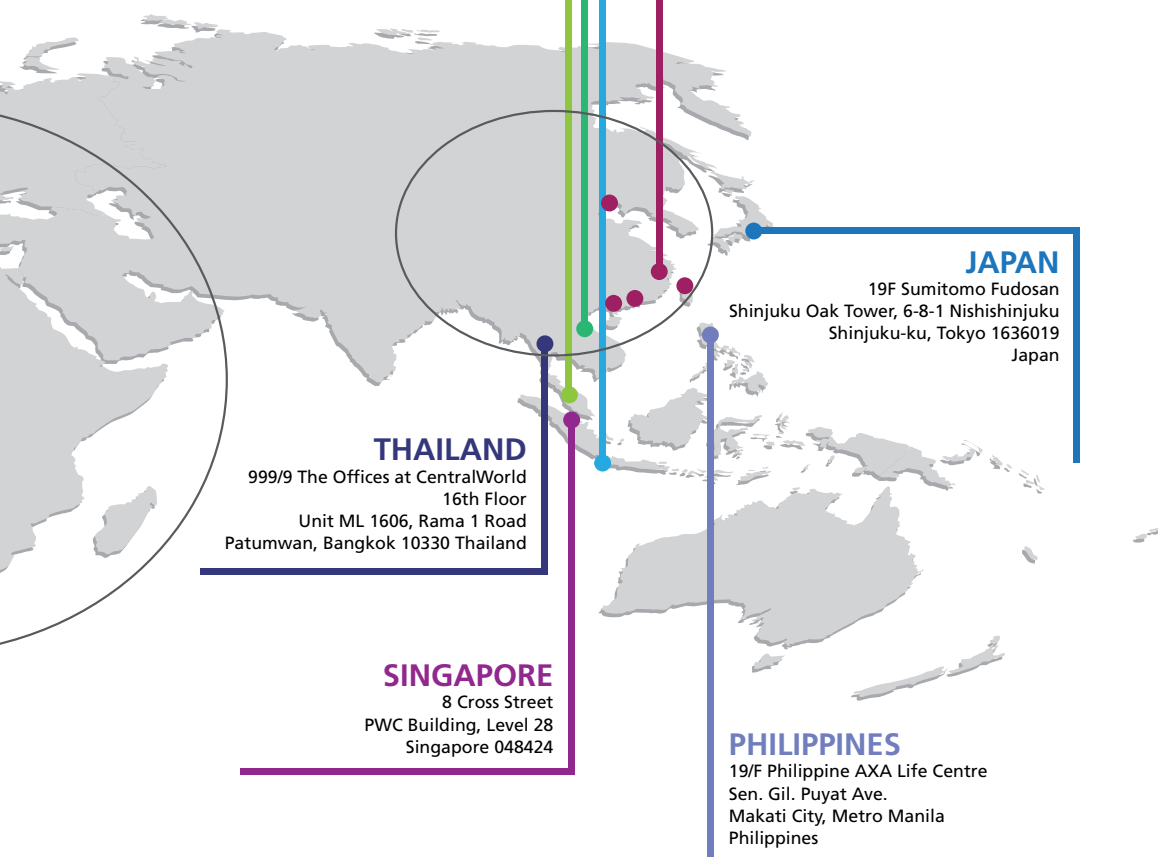
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# LEADERSHIP IS HARD

## A Guide to Navigating Relatable Leadership Challenges

BY LACEY LEONE McLAUGHLIN AND EMILY LOPEZ

Leaders want to know they are not alone and that what they are experiencing has been experienced by others.

We support ourselves better when we acknowledge that leadership is hard. Everyone, even the most confident leaders, suffers from a bit of impostor syndrome. These are the types of realities coaches help leaders accept and grow from. And when we work with a leader who has grown up in the same organization for many years, these insights have different and sometimes deeper impacts.

### LACEY'S VIEWPOINT: EVALUATING EMILY

When I met Emily, on the surface things appeared to be going well, great even. She had been quickly promoted over a 10-year period and was operating in a senior leadership role of a Fortune 100 company. Smart and ambitious, she had become more comfortable with acknowledging these attributes. But despite her growing confidence in some areas, she experienced significant growth pains in others.

Throughout our coaching, I guided and supported Emily as the reality that "leadership is hard" caught up with her. She was forced to abandon her behaviors that had once assured

her success but no longer served her and to demonstrate resilience and vulnerability well beyond what she ever considered necessary job requirements.

Our work together inspired us to share the following learnings in hopes of normalizing some of what Emily experienced for the benefit and comfort of other leaders and to provide the assurance that you are not alone.

### EMILY'S VIEWPOINT: A LEADER'S REFLECTIONS

As I reflect on the last 10 years, the journey seems immense. I found my way as an individual contributor to a supervisor, then a leader of leaders while sitting on an executive team with peers at least a decade more experienced than me. The challenges I faced seem like an obvious consequence of the significant leaps in scope and scale in such a short period of time. I transitioned from working independently to leading a team and being responsible for the work of others. Colleagues who were formerly peers were now working for me.





I was an ambitious late-20s, then 30-something leader trying to figure out my place, drive impact, and perform in a way that was consistent with what the organization wanted to see from me and with what I wanted to see from myself. Whether it was perceived or real, I felt that those around me were questioning my trajectory. And, to be honest, in the early years, I questioned my own readiness. After each leap in scope and scale, I found myself working twice as hard to avoid disappointment from my champions and advocates and prove, to myself too, that I was capable and deserving.

At the time, and maybe not even now, I did not fully grasp the accelerated leadership growth these sharp upward movements in my career would demand of me. I offered myself little to no grace. When I met my executive coach, Lacey, I felt alone and frustrated, working myself into the ground to deliver the best results, be a good leader, and maintain some semblance of a balance in my life. I remember being excited, nervous, and generally uncertain of what to expect, but grateful that the company viewed me as worthy of the investment.

Throughout our time together, I learned a lot about the benefits and obstacles of a quick progression within the same organization. These learnings helped me realize and establish who I am as a professional and a leader. Reflecting on our coaching journey, we share three critical tools below to help early-career leaders navigate these relatable

challenges: communicating for what you need, finding a coach or mentor, and finding the resources you need.

**Communicate/ask for what you need.** One of the biggest misconceptions I held early in my progression was that asking for help, support, guidance, and resources was an admission of weakness, defeat, or failure. For me, this meant subscribing to a leadership fallacy and a mindset in which there was never enough time, patience, or people to accomplish the goals in front of me. I now know that part of a leader's role is to understand and ask for what you and your team need to deliver on your goals.

**Identify a mentor/coach/advisor.** When you grow up within the same organization, you can identify individuals you look up to and proactively seek out their advice and feedback during key career transitions. If the relationships are no longer appropriate based on organizational structure or you have outgrown the mentorship, find new role models and mentors you can learn from in other parts of the organization. Also, consider an executive coach. Working with Lacey provided me with a confidential outlet to share my challenges, frustrations, and successes and develop skills to manage issues more effectively.

**Find the resources you need.** At one point in my career, I found myself stretched very thin, providing direct leadership to a large team responsible for significant goals. Instead

“As leaders, we hear repeatedly about the importance of extending empathy to those we lead. Remind yourself you are surrounded by people who want you to be successful.”



of asking for help, I neglected to speak up, concerned that asking for more resources meant I could not do the job successfully on my own. The real failure was working myself and others to death and not having the courage and maturity to redesign my team's structure. Once I finally spoke up, not only was I personally relieved, but my team was also much better positioned for success.

Part of the role of a leader is being realistic about the resources required to deliver on your team's goals. If there is a misalignment between the available resources and what is required, it is up to me to communicate that and ask for what I need. Being asked to do too much with too little can impact your ability to motivate, inspire, and empower and can lead you and your team to feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and burned out.

Here are some other pieces of advice I believe leaders need to hear:

**Develop patience and empathy.** As leaders, we hear repeatedly about the importance of extending empathy to those we lead. I was so focused on figuring out how to do that effectively that I could not see my own need for empathy. When you are stepping into a new role or leading a new team, growth, risk, and failure are a natural and expected part of those transitions. One of the benefits of being promoted internally is that there is broad recognition that you are in a new role and, in some cases, a stretch position. Chances are, you have built up goodwill and a reputation that supported your promotion in the first place. Remind yourself that you are surrounded by people who want you to be successful, and ask for their patience and support as you find your footing.

**Acknowledge the transition and the challenge.** One day you are surrounded by good friends at work; the next, venting to your co-worker about a leadership decision is completely inappropriate. Redefining relationships and setting new boundaries is a real and necessary implication when leading former peers and attempting to establish yourself as a

peer to those you previously considered your bosses. The following mindset shifts were key in my personal transition:

- **Recognize that some of your behaviors will need to change.** Decide how you are going to set boundaries with prior friends and colleagues. Lacey encouraged me to seek out a mentor outside of my function. Managing a new and larger team, I needed someone I could talk to and confide in about my challenges and experiences, and it was no longer appropriate for me to do that with colleagues within my own function. Seeking out another leader in the organization, but a different area of the business, gave me the benefit of a sounding board who knew the company but was removed from my direct team.
- **Remember that you were asked to do the job for a reason.** When you are promoted internally, the decision makers' confidence in your capabilities stems from your track record at the company. Take time to learn from your new peers and leadership team members, but let them learn from you as well. While you may be less experienced, you bring new ideas, personal strengths, and a unique perspective to the group.
- **Decide how you want to show up.** It is time to turn the chapter on who you were versus who you aspire to be going forward. Several months into our coaching engagement, Lacey guided me through an exercise for further clarity on who I am as a leader. I spent weeks reflecting on what I value, what I admire about other leaders, when I am at my best, and when I am at my worst. Through that process, I discovered more clearly the unique value that I add as a leader and crystalized how I want to show up every day. Today, I am more transparent and authentic about who I am and self-aware about my weaknesses.
- **View feedback as an opportunity to learn and grow.** Seeking feedback can be terrifying, especially when you know you are learning and will have some missteps along the way. Instead of fearing feedback, I have learned to embrace it as an opportunity to understand the impact I am having

on those around me and how I can further enhance my contributions.

As an ambitious “star” student, anything less than an “A” rating felt like a total failure to me. My worst fears were realized when I received closer to a “C” feedback from my direct reports as I was learning to lead my largest team yet. After a few days of tears and frustration, I unpacked the feedback in partnership with Lacey and went to work on applying the insights. Now, I seek feedback on an ongoing basis and formally every 6 to 12 months to check in with my key stakeholders to track and share my progress. Do not mistake your inexperience with weakness. Learning is an expected and ongoing part of the leadership journey.

- **Seek external perspective.** As an early career leader who progressed within the same organization, I placed a lot of focus on what it meant to be successful within my current company and measured myself accordingly. As I’ve matured in my career, I’ve come to appreciate the value of understanding leadership in a much broader context. Seeking perspective outside of my existing company and industry through insights from articles, external networks, and Lacey’s coaching gave me access to new role models and different styles. As I worked with Lacey to define my leadership aspirations and identity, I was able to do so with a broader appreciation of what good leadership means.

### LACEY’S ADVICE: EVALUATE YOUR OBSTACLES

Every leader’s path is different. What Emily experienced, and the learnings that helped her most along the way, may not coincide with your own experience. However, if there is one thing we hope you take away from this article, it’s the validation that the demands of leadership and quick progression are very real. While you may have excelled at everything up to this point in your career, taking time to work through these new obstacles and challenges is a natural part of growing and developing as a leader, and they deserve your understanding and attention.

Even those with the best natural tendencies to lead are faced with these challenges. Don’t confuse growth and development that may feel uncomfortable and painful at times with failure. Stay focused and be purposeful in moving toward your goals, both professional and personal, and seek help from others to support you in achieving them. Remember that asking for help and acknowledging the growth these transitions demand are not a sign of weakness but an indication of maturity. Leadership is not a destination or a task to be mastered. It’s a continual journey, and you are not alone. [AQ](#)

*Lacey Leone McLaughlin brings 20 years of experience to her executive coaching and talent management consulting practice, LLM Consulting*



“Seeking feedback can be terrifying, especially when you know you are learning and will have some missteps along the way. Learning is an expected and ongoing part of the leadership journey.”

*Group Inc. She has worked with clients across all industries and sizes, including aerospace, automotive, entertainment, media, professional services, retail, technology, and ranging from entrepreneurial-led start-ups to global/Fortune 100 companies. Recently, she co-founded and spent two years as the CEO of a tech start-up and prior to that, she spent nine years managing USC’s Center for Effective Organizations (CEO) in the Marshall School of Business.*

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# MAKING ADJUSTMENTS in the NEW ENVIRONMENT

BY CASSANDRA R. LEE



# Work in the office. Work from home. Work in a hybrid environment. These represent the ways in which we have worked before, during, and because of the pandemic.

I would imagine that you, like me, are adjusting to the new ways of performing your job responsibilities.

How are you handling the adjustments? Have you found a rhythm that works for you?

Are you finding you are productive and managing your time well with your new way of working?

I recently read an article on TheLadders.com, "Is remote working more productive? New findings give us an answer." The article revealed that the answer is "yes." Remote working is allowing employees and employers to be productive. In some cases, more productive than before.

Congratulations if you answered yes to my initial questions. You are confirming what the article revealed. You have adjusted well to the new way of performing your job responsibilities. Also, you have found a rhythm that works for you to be productive and manage your time well to accomplish the work of your day.

If, however, you answered no, kudos to you! I commend you for your honesty. This means that you, too, are revealing what the article touched on. Not everyone is as productive when working from home or using a hybrid work environment. This is your truth. It is also the reality that many employees are dealing with and employers must find a way to handle.

It is my goal with this article to share a few techniques and tips to help you better manage your time and improve your overall productivity.

First, let's explore three time management techniques that can help you to manage your time more effectively.

## **TIME MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE NO. 1: CALENDAR YOUR TASKS**

This technique helps you to visually see the important tasks you want to accomplish for the day, week, or month. When you put your tasks on a calendar, you will find that the calendar keeps you focused. In addition, you will better prioritize what you plan to do. Knowing which tasks are being completed on which day gives you an idea of when your high-priority tasks will be done.

Use the calendar type that works best for your style. A wall calendar, personal planner, desk calendar, monaplanner, calendar printout, or Franklin Covey Planner would be good to use. A sticky note with the date written at the top, along with a bulleted priority list, can be stuck to your computer

monitor. With this method, you can see the targeted priorities you want to complete for the day.

Of course, if you prefer, an electronic calendar can be used instead. Microsoft Outlook, Google Calendar, and Trello are examples of electronic tools you can use to calendar your tasks. These calendars will allow you to record multiple tasks for your day. You can also set alerts to notify you when tasks are due, which helps to keep you on track. That is the goal in suggesting that you calendar your tasks. I want you to stay on track, use your time wisely, and be productive with your day.

Again, the type of calendar you choose is completely up to you. I have learned that when you use what works for you, you will be consistent with using it. Therefore, choose the calendar method that works best for your style, and use it to calendar your tasks so that you can effectively manage your time.

## **TIME MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE NO. 2: USE A TO-DO LIST**

This is a foundational time management technique. I am sure you have heard this idea multiple times throughout your career. I would even imagine that before, during, and since the pandemic, you have relied on a to-do list to get things done. Like calendaring your tasks, a to-do list gives you a way to remember the most important tasks you plan to accomplish in your day.

The difference between the calendar and the to-do list is that the list will be in the garbage at the end of the day. Yes, you read that correctly, you will throw the to-do list away. My personal philosophy is that a to-do list is a disposable, daily snapshot of your day. The list highlights where you will put your time, energy, and effort.

Each day, create a brand-new list with no more than the six most important tasks written on it. Throughout the day, cross off the tasks you have accomplished. At the end of the day, review the current to-do list to see if any tasks remain undone. If you find you have a task or two left, put them on the following day's to-do list. Prep the list for the next day by focusing on the six most important tasks you plan to accomplish. If you added a task from the day before, add new tasks until the total is no more than six. Once you are done prepping the list for the next day, toss the current one. Start your day with the new to-do list. Use your "daily, disposable snapshot" to remain focused on your targeted tasks, better manage your time, and improve the productivity of your day.

“Set time limits for the tasks you want to accomplish. By setting specific time limits, you will be able to complete your most important tasks for the day.”



### TIME MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE NO. 3: SET TIME LIMITS

This technique will help you to accomplish more with your time. It is influenced by the basic notion of Parkinson’s Law. Are you familiar with it? Simply defined, Parkinson’s Law says, “Work expands to the amount of time available for its completion.”

When I learned about Parkinson’s Law years ago in a time management seminar, I found it fascinating. I realized this law was happening in my life all the time. I specifically saw Parkinson’s Law at play whenever I shortened my workweek from five days to four days for a vacation. I observed how the amount of work I would complete in a five-day workweek could be accomplished in four days. This was mind-blowing for me. Have you noticed this too?

Of course, the key is to use Parkinson’s Law to obtain the positive benefits of this time management principle. That is why I recommend you set time limits for the tasks you want to accomplish. By setting specific time limits, you will be able to complete your most important tasks for the day. Assign an hour to some tasks, such as team meetings. Give 30 minutes to other items, such as checking emails. Allow 90 minutes for a few tasks, such as researching and writing a performance review. Include 15-minute intervals in your schedule for breaks, and you will heighten your productivity. Setting time limits will give you assigned blocks of time, which helps to promote your productivity and improve your time management.

Mastery of these techniques will help you to be productive during the pandemic whether you work at home or in a hybrid work environment.

### MANAGING THE DAYS OF THE WEEK

Now add in my tip of using the “Days of the Week Time Management Philosophy.” Here is how it works. Think of:

Monday as **“Make It Happen Monday.”** This philosophy will help you to start off your workweek with a level of productivity. In addition, it will help you to focus on the two or three most important tasks to get accomplished on this day.

Tuesday as **“Tackle It Tuesday.”** This philosophy will get you mentally revved up to tackle four to six of the most important tasks of your day. You will find that on Tuesdays, your creativity, energy, and productivity will be at a higher charge for getting things done and off your to-do list.

Wednesday as **“Work It Out Wednesday.”** This philosophy reminds you to proactively and productively get over “hump day” by accomplishing all six of your most important tasks before the workweek ends.

Thursday as **“Thorough Thursday.”** This philosophy will motivate you to make progress in accomplishing your tasks. “Thorough Thursday” gets you focused on completing tasks that have been following you from list to list each day.

Friday as **“Freedom Friday.”** This philosophy reminds you to wrap up and close out all-important tasks for your workweek. “Freedom Friday” allows you to end the workweek as you started it—getting a few important tasks done so you can close your productive week with pride.

Categorizing your workweek with my “Days of the Week Time Management Philosophy” can increase your productivity for each day and your results for the week. You will find that you accomplish more on your to-do list and that your most important tasks will not be forgotten.

The pandemic has forced you to review the way you work. Techniques and tips for maximizing your time and remaining productive are crucial. May the ideas shared in this article help you to be more efficient with your time and better with your productivity, whether you work from home, in the office, or in a hybrid work environment. [AQ](#)

*Cassandra R. Lee has a passion for “teaching through speaking.” She is known as the “D.I.V.A. of Dialog™” because she uses “Divine Inspiration Vocally Applied™” to educate and empower her audiences toward personal growth and career success. Lee is president of SSANEE Career Growth, Inc. based in Chicago, Ill. She is an AMA faculty member and active member of Toastmasters International with over 25 years of experience training professional development topics. She is also a published author with contributions in three empowerment anthologies for women plus her latest contribution to The Community Book Project: Celebrating 365 Days of Gratitude (Donna Kozik Marketing Inc., 2020).*



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# BELONGING

## The Key to Organizational Success

BY FREDERICA PETERSON





# Belonging. Such a simple word in theory, but powerful and life-changing in its impact.

The concepts of inclusion and belonging are not new. In fact, they are rooted in the very fabric of organizational development. A company's mission and vision strategies are designed with a team aspect in mind, which, in all respects, is determined by each individual effort. And that effort is driven by the innate, human desire to belong.

So what does belonging really mean? It depends on who you ask. The definition has personal meaning for every one of us, and if you are a leader of an organization, it is important to understand this. The Webster's Dictionary definition of belonging states, "To be part of or in natural association with something; to be a member of a group; to have a suitable or appropriate place." For the workplace, the general sense of belonging means feeling valued in a way that makes an employee perceive the organization cares for people as individuals, which can manifest as having positive connections with others and being able to bring your authentic self to work. This is woven intricately and purposefully within the fabric of the organizational culture.

## COMPANY CULTURE, EXCLUSION, AND BELONGING

Company culture is a powerful thing. It defines what is acceptable and what is not and gives direction on how things should be done. If your people don't feel like they belong, they will become outcasts literally or implicitly, which ultimately will stifle their potential and, more important, their commitment to your organization. When people feel like they don't belong, they literally are "working for their lives," which means their effort is driven by fear and survival. When you are working in that headspace, you are cautious with the decisions you make. You're careful not to rely on your own thinking or think outside the box, and by no means is risk-taking an option.

A sense of belonging can also be jeopardized by acts of exclusion from co-workers through micro- or macroaggressions. These include talking over or shutting colleagues down when they try to contribute and devaluing their contributions, which often is done unknowingly through unconscious bias. I have observed managers evaluate contributions by team members from the perspective of their thinking or the group's thinking and not give credibility to others who do not align with those thought patterns. People who are different from us think differently because their experiences are different, their understanding is different, and their knowledge base is different. I have seen this time and time again in homogeneous team settings. When someone comes into the team who is "different," whether

it be gender, race, or even disability, the person with the difference has work to do to be accepted.

Whether we like it or not, when we are comfortable in our surroundings and the people we work with, we don't like to muddle it up with things that we are not comfortable with. That discomfort can come from many places, such as lack of experience or exposure, stereotypes we don't even realize we have, or even our own insecurities with potentially being misunderstood. Teams that have worked together for a long time develop a bond, and that bond can create territorial behaviors if someone comes in that may change the dynamics. Even worse, those on the receiving end of these exclusionary behaviors can be subject to victimizing again if they voice their concern and it is turned around, making it an issue about them. If you are not careful, this can become bullying, and over time these instances of exclusion can manifest into trauma for the excluded employee. The result is that the employee shuts down and eventually leaves the company altogether, quietly or with some legal recourse.

To be fair, none of us wakes up in the morning with the intention of excluding others. But whether intended or not, it can happen. In a recent discussion I had with some colleagues about businesses opening back up, we talked about the very real issue that there are some diverse employees who do not want to leave the virtual work environment. The reason is that while they have been at home, it has been safe for them. They have not had to deal with the constant biases and microaggressions that come with being in the office—the constant daily slights that people of diverse backgrounds deal with on a regular basis from well-meaning and not-so-well-meaning colleagues.

The conversation was interesting because we discovered that all of us, coming from different vocations, had experienced similar behaviors from our colleagues and co-workers over our long careers in leadership. My friend accurately described it as being in an abusive marriage. You don't want to keep coming back, but you have to because you need to make a living. And no matter where you go, it just doesn't seem to be any different. Imagine that any employee in your company may feel this way, that working for you is like being in an abusive relationship they cannot escape. I don't believe any employer wants that for their employees.

So what can you do about it? Take it all seriously. If you are committed to a DEI strategy for your company, then *commit*. It is not just about training—it's about committing to behavior change and being willing to understand, willing to make mistakes and, more important, willing to be comfortable with



## Belonging and the Bottom Line

- ▶ **40%** of people say they feel isolated at work.
- ▶ Job performance increased by **56%** for workers that have a high sense of belonging.
- ▶ The risk of turnover decreased by **50%**.
- ▶ Sick days were reduced by **75%**.
- ▶ In a company of **10,000 employees**, this could result in an annual savings of more than **\$52 million**.

Source: *Harvard Business Review*, BetterUp study

being uncomfortable. We have to start somewhere, and the only way to make a difference is to commit. Not just in the dollars but to the shift in mindset.

### BELONGING AND THE BOTTOM LINE

Why do you want to put this much effort into fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion at your company? Because it will ultimately affect your bottom line. Organizations that are not inclusive are at risk of not achieving their goals and/or sustaining high performance. Inclusive organizations benefit because it increases innovation, creativity, motivation and engagement, which are leading factors in high-performing companies.

Inclusion is a company's competitive edge. Companies that are more inclusive outperform their competitors that are not. Consider this: When your employees are happy, your customers are happy, which leads to greater retention

on both sides and an increase to your bottom line. The point is that belonging is a catalyst to performance in any organization. If we know this to be true, then why is this such a defining concept today?

A recent *Harvard Business Review* article highlighted a study conducted by BetterUp on loneliness and purpose. It provides some startling facts on the reality of belonging and why it is necessary for business success. Consider that 40% of people say they feel isolated at work. Despite all the understanding we may have on the "concept" of belonging, the practical application in a corporate culture is not always as evident. This study suggested some notable benefits to companies whose workers have a high sense of belonging: job performance increased by 56%, the risk of turnover decreased by 50%, and sick days were reduced by 75%. In a company of 10,000 employees, this could result in an annual savings of more than \$52 million. These statistics need to be seriously considered for the viability, longevity, and overall competitive edge a company could potentially achieve.

It is important to note that work cultures have evolved over the years, and a sense of belonging is becoming more and more a catalyst of employee retention and acquisition. The younger workforce of today is far more empowered than some of the older generations, and considering this, they have higher expectations. Ultimately employees are now recognizing the power they have over their career success by evaluating whether a company is a good fit for them. They are realizing they have a choice, which in the long run will be better for them and the company they choose to work for.

What does all this mean for companies today? It is leading to a revolution in the workplace, where valuing your workers' well-being must be a central focus. This should not be done just through "lip service"—by having some nicely constructed mission and vision statements—but must be representative of the behavior that shapes the culture that touches every employee in the company. The "check the box" mentality is no longer acceptable, and organizations that don't evolve may not be able to compete over time.

In conclusion, it is important for leaders to have a deeper understanding of what belonging is, why it is important, and what the business and human impact is on their organization. It has been my experience in working with leaders over the years that the more aware we can become, the more we can create a vision of what we want to be. Without being able to see what we could be, we will never become what we need to be. Evolution is necessary for every organization to not only survive but thrive. [AQ](#)

*Frederica Peterson is a diversity and leadership consultant, coach, teacher, award-winning author, and the founder of her own leadership consultancy established in 2015. She has worked with some of the top organizations in the country, including CNN, Facebook, Honeywell, NASA, United States Homeland Security, National Basketball Association, and Audible.*

# What Is the Shelf Life of **NORMAL?**

BY DAVE COFFARO

As workplaces try and adjust to the circumstances dictated by the pandemic, fluidity is key.

Thursday, October 31, 2013, is not a date that stands out in the minds of most Americans. Sure, it was Halloween. But beyond trick-or-treaters, their parents, and candy manufacturers, this specific date wasn't anything special—unless you were a frequent flyer.

From the time cell phones were commercially introduced in 1983, airlines required that these devices be turned off during a flight. The impetus for this regulation was the concern that cellular devices might interfere with an airplane's avionics and navigation systems. But 30 years later, the Federal Aviation Administration put out press release 13010, "Expanding Use of Passenger Portable Electronic Devices." The FAA determined airlines could safely allow passengers to use portable electronic devices such as cell phones during all phases of flight. The announcement explained that due to differences among fleets and operations, implementation would vary among airlines. All things considered, the agency anticipated that all carriers would safely implement the new rule for cellular use in airplane mode, gate-to-gate, by the end of the year.

As a frequent business traveler, I often begin my week in an airplane, and November 4, 2013, was no exception. My first flight was from Santa Ana to Phoenix on Southwest Airlines. As the flight pushed back from the gate, the flight attendant announced that due to an exciting FAA rule change,

passengers could now leave their cell phones on during the flight. All we needed to do was make sure our device was switched into airplane mode.

That Tuesday, I flew with a second airline from Phoenix to Minneapolis. There was no announcement during boarding or in flight about the new cell phone rule, and not a word from the crew.

Wednesday was a flight from Minneapolis to Dallas with my third airline of the week. Many passengers had heard about the new FAA rule, and during boarding the flight attendant fielded question after question about leaving cell phones on during the flight. Exasperated, he made an announcement over the PA system: "We just learned about an FAA rule change on cell phone use last week. The airline is evaluating the rule change and will let passengers know what it means as soon as possible, but for now you all have to turn your cell phones completely off during this flight."

Thursday was a flight back home from Dallas with the same airline I had flown the day before. This time, at the gate, the counter agent announced that the airline had not yet developed a plan to implement the new FAA rule.

With this regulation, "normal" was redefined on October 31, 2013—at least relative to portable electronic device use in airplanes. Southwest Airlines' vision is to be the world's most loved, most efficient, and most profitable



“While an extraordinary episode (like a global pandemic) can stimulate a desire to reach the next stability plateau, ‘normal’ is a continually unfolding context, constantly being redefined.”

airline. One value that drives the company to fulfill its vision is simple: *Stay agile*. Agility is part of how Southwest succeeds as normal is continually redefined. The airline’s quick adaptation to and communication of the new FAA rule demonstrated this.

Normal has a short shelf life. Whether we’re discussing the business environment or personal activities in daily life, the definition of normal is in perpetual motion, though speed can vary. Consider the extraordinary impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business. According to Gallup’s *State of the Global Workplace 2021 Report*, almost one out of three working people on the planet—just over 1 billion adults—lost their job or business because of the coronavirus situation. “Normal” in the business environment was redefined in early 2020 as the economic impact of the pandemic unfolded. Businesses that survived or thrived

did so under a new, rapidly evolving definition of normal. Demand, supply, supply chains, manufacturing, logistics, workforces, worker availability, transportation, and most aspects of the global economy experienced multiple redefinitions of normal.

As the world prepares to move beyond COVID, there is a lot of talk about the new normal, as though it is a destination. While an extraordinary episode (like a global pandemic) can stimulate a desire to reach the next stability plateau, normal is a continually unfolding context, constantly being redefined. What we perceive as normal is simply a point on a continuum of dynamic change to which we become accustomed. Ergo, normal must be continually redefined.

## LEADERS AND REDEFINING NORMAL

Effective leaders recognize the need for unceasingly redefining normal and building on this reality to guide their organizations in earning and sustaining relevance—pertinence, meaningfulness, importance—with employees, customers, and all stakeholders. As post-COVID operating models emerge, leaders need to ask, what comes next for this organization, and what will it take for our company to earn and sustain relevance with our stakeholders tomorrow?

The next phase of normal is a constantly evolving story for each organization to write. In many companies today, what’s next is reframing where and how work happens—at home, in a company facility, or in a shared workspace. Context for addressing these questions is the ecosystem within which a company operates. Here are five considerations in evaluating where and how work happens as normal evolves for your business:

**What role does work location play in organizational culture?** On an adaptive basis, when COVID-era normal began, triaging work locations to keep the business operating made sense. The new continually evolving normal requires leaders to intentionally revisit culture as core to the organization’s operating model. How does your company’s culture translate to remote employees? How will a hybrid work environment refine your culture? What cultural tradeoffs will be necessary to support a hybrid workforce?

**How does the location of work performance impact operating processes?** Every activity in an organization is part of a larger process, though not always by design. Activity-process connectivity is stronger when intentionally designed. Intentional process design increases the likelihood that activities will produce desired outcomes. When work locations are disparate, operating processes can be compromised, resulting in reduced effectiveness. How will management design new processes to be performed across work locations? What changes to operating procedures are necessary to optimize effectiveness across work sites? How will procedural documents be updated to include remote work sites?



## “How does a remote or hybrid work location model affect your customers? What needs to change in your customer experience roadmap to deliver consistently across your business?”

**How does your operating model need to adjust to accommodate ongoing remote work?** Business operating models have a lifespan. When leaders embrace the unceasing redefinition of normal, they ask the following: How does our operating model align with today’s reality? How will it align with what we anticipate as reality tomorrow? How do we create and sustain relevance with customers across a remote team of employees? What are the economic implications of a remote or hybrid work location model?

**What are long-term implications for customers of remote or hybrid work locations?** Early in the COVID era, customers were forgiving of service missteps. They understood that companies were making quick adjustments to service delivery approaches. Over time, as new phases of normal evolved, expectations followed. Customers recalibrated views of normal and thresholds for forgiveness. How will your company earn and sustain relevance with customers as the next phases of normal unfold? How does a remote or hybrid work location model affect your customers? What needs to change in your customer experience roadmap to deliver consistently across your business?

**How can you raise managers’ remote leadership acumen?** Few managers have been trained in remote leadership.

Management is a challenging discipline when a team is present in the same location. Add a remote, virtual element and complexity increases. What were strengths and challenges of your leadership team in pre-COVID normal? What new strengths and challenges came to light during the pandemic? How will your managers develop their remote leadership acumen? How will managers assure expected levels of employee engagement in a hybrid operating model?

As the operating environment changes, sustaining a focus on what your company does (mission), why you do it (purpose), and how you fulfill your mission (strategy) leads to greater organizational stability. Everything a leader does must be aligned with the vision to guide people and priorities. Absent a clear vision, organizations, processes, and leaders inevitably drift from their goals. This principle is particularly important in fast-moving environments where stability is achieved through anchoring to the guiding vision. With a clear vision, organizations can find comfort in uncertainty, grounding through change and stability in progress. In an environment where normal is unceasingly redefined, stability and strategic resilience stem from alignment with the organization’s vision.

At the beginning of this century, a technology revolution was taking place. Commercial applications of the Internet proliferated, and redefinition of normal in the business world was rapidly unfolding. In early 2000, an epic merger took place between companies from different worlds. The deal, valued at \$165 billion, was the largest in history at that time. The resulting company—AOL Time Warner—became the world’s largest media conglomerate. America Online, a new world media company, played a lead role in the emerging internet arena, delivering dial-up internet access, web browser capability, and email. Time Warner, a legacy media organization, had deep roots in entertainment, film, music, and print.

It didn’t take long for issues to arise as the companies came together. Early on, culture clashes between the two companies became evident. Steve Case, founder and CEO of AOL, left the board of the combined company in 2005, declaring the merger a failure. As reported by Business Insider, soon after his departure, Case said, “Vision without execution is hallucination. Having a good idea is important, but being able to execute the idea is even more important, and that comes down to people and priorities, and we were unable with the combined AOL Time Warner company to get that side of it right.” Vision guides people and priorities and informs execution when the definition of normal is in perpetual motion.

## LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGING NORMAL

In my book, *Leading from Zero: Seven Essential Elements of Earning Relevance*, I discuss a set of factors that contribute to overlooking strategic implications of a continually unfolding new normal. Here are three of those factors and potential ways to mitigate them when engaging in the emerging normal:

**Legacy fallacy.** This factor is defined by a reliance on the view that what got us here will get us to the future. Competencies matter, but they do not operate in isolation. Leaders walk a fine line between building upon legacy success factors and overreliance on yesterday’s success formula.

Mitigants:

- Anchor in an appreciation for the organization’s history without attachment to the way we’ve always done things.
- Recognize that an operating playbook is only applicable to a specific set of circumstances; when normal is redefined, the playbook requires refinement.
- Continually fine-tune the organization’s vision, priorities, and activities as new phases of normal unfold. This is necessary to carry a successful organization into its future state.

**Denial of imminent change indicators.** The perspective that current results, performance, customer behavior,

or competitive changes are simply anomalies enables a narrative where leaders wait until things “get back to normal” before digging deeper into root cause. The longer changing conditions are rationalized as anomalies, the greater the risk to the organization.

Mitigants:

- Implement an operating agreement co-owned by all team members that requires review of performance variances by a peer in another area of the business. The peer review purpose is to generate questions and observations that shine a light on imminent change unintentionally rationalized by team members closest to the circumstances.
- Include dedicated time in regular business operating reviews to explore new, emerging, or potential trends external to the organization. This can include new market research, competitor actions, industry analyses, and team members’ observations. The committed time allows operating managers to shift attention from current reality to environmental factors they might otherwise overlook or deny.

**Unconventional wisdom.** Because we think differently, we must be right—right? In his book *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*, leadership author Marshall Goldsmith says, “People who think they can do no wrong usually can’t admit they are ever wrong, which, paradoxically, makes you more wrong.” At an organizational level, this factor inhibits leaders’ ability to see emerging changes in their operating environment until it is too late to perform as a first responder in the unfolding normal.

Mitigants:

- Recognize that while contrarian views can have value, different isn’t always better.
- Ask yourself and your colleagues, *what is the substance supporting our position on this issue?* If the answer sounds like rationalizing difference for the sake of difference, examine the position and determine how it aligns with the organization’s vision, priorities, and objectives, in the context of an evolving next new normal.

In today’s reality, the shortest measurement of time is known as the zeptosecond—one trillionth of a billionth of a second, or a decimal point followed by 20 zeroes and a 1. While not scientifically supported, I suggest the shelf life of normal is close to a zeptosecond, requiring leaders to make the redefinition of normal core to their practice. [AQ](#)

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# VIRTUAL MANAGEMENT Provides Tangible Results

BY PAMELA GARBER

An effective manager needs to acknowledge the challenges and methodology unique to managing virtual teamwork.

“People bond when they feel mutually relatable. What better way to fast-track this process than by seeing each other’s homes, pets, and way of life?”



It takes a skillful manager to mention the elephant (laptop) in the room and yet prevent the at-home virtual format from overshadowing the actual work. There’s no need to make the problem any bigger than it already is, and in many cases there is no need to see virtual management from home as a problem. The first step is embracing impromptu situations on the home front, including pets and people who accidentally make their way in front of the camera and onto the team’s computer screens. These domestic snafus don’t have to run interference with the work agenda and can actually be assets.

Managers and team members have choices in structuring this new arena and the mindset displayed to others. This structure and mindset become apparent after you click on the meeting link, greet your fellow team members, and figuratively roll up your sleeves. Concentration and team engagement can remain steady as more employees choose to work from home, even if we take occasional note of a team member’s kitchen cabinets.

## REMOTE MANAGING STARTS WITH COGNITIVE CHOICES

Just as with in vivo managing, virtual management begins with the cognitive choices that both the team leader and the team members bring to the table. The foundational cognitive choice is how the challenges of at-home distractions can equal in difficulty the challenges of in-person work distractions.

Managers can view the need to keep everyone’s focus on the work at hand either as a never-ending derailer of productivity or a new challenge in style that requires the same concentration and effort as the standard interferences

that have long been part of our in-office working culture. Instead of glass conference rooms or private offices, we find our team perched at laptops with living room décor and sometimes loved ones and pets in the background.

The foundational cognitive choice is that remote managing achieves the same results as in vivo. Managing a team of remote workers is like using a different set of driving directions to get to a familiar destination. Just as a toll road can lead a driver to the same point as a more familiar highway route, remote management can yield strong results that match the required targets. After all, the destination is still the same.

Management’s end point is to keep the team engaged, keep tasks clearly identified, and make expectations understood. In any setting, effective managers must establish the precise parameters for each team member’s scope of responsibility. With the level of ownership over each role established, it becomes less likely that team members will overstep authority or exclude each other. If such overlap occurs, untangling the conflict is made clearer because of the demarcation of the original roles.

## REMOTE MANAGING RELIES ON STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION

Individual meetings with team members provide an opportunity for a manager to gain insight into the thoughts and feelings of each member. Information typically gleaned includes what this person needs from the team, what the present obstacles are, and what the person would like to see changed. Once the dialogue is established, questions and answers can be encouraged on an as-needed basis via email, Slack, or other correspondence tools.



In my work as a therapeutic mediator, I apply the same tenets team managers have long relied on in the traditional settings of corporations and small businesses. My first goal is understanding the overall status quo through my client's completed intake paperwork and getting the unique perspective of each client team member. Written questionnaires are typically my first step, followed by the face-to-face individual and group meeting. Individual caucus occurs throughout the virtual mediation, just as it would in person.

As with in-office mediation, during this remote virtual format I observe physical cues and nonverbal communication. Watching posture and listening to tone provide even more information, as these are featured literally front and center on the screen. Sneakers and workout clothes sometimes replace dry-cleaned in-person wardrobes, and this new normal provides a new opportunity to gain insight into another's persona and lifestyle.

## ADVANTAGES OF AT-HOME VIRTUAL TEAM BUILDING

*It was a tense minute and a half of therapeutic silence that felt like an hour. Christine and Lisa, two longtime best friends and business partners, sat in front of their screens. All of us were in our respective homes. Christine's cat started throwing up on the table in front of Christine's notebook. Lisa softened. The focus shifted away from whether to sell the office suite to a motivated buyer and onto the welfare of Jelly, Christine's cat.*

Because of the style and purpose of mediation, the time that relationship mediators have with their clients is typically shorter than what managers have with their team members. However, the steps of building rapport, uncovering the psychology behind each person's behavior, and finding a target point for group cohesiveness are more similar in a virtual format than different.

Our brave new virtual work world can help the process of building rapport. Familiarity with things that are common ground can lead to closer relationships. People bond when they feel mutually relatable. What better way to fast-track this process than by seeing each other's homes, pets, and way of life? Business casual get-togethers outside of the office are typically confusing and more tense than the fun spirit intended, but virtual happy hours or before-work coffee talks can foster the desired bonding without the awkwardness.

## PROFESSIONAL CONCENTRATION IS MODELED BY THE TEAM

We see teamwork unmistakably when a film scene has two people. After one actor does something in the scene, we, the audience, need to see the other actor's reaction. The first person, no matter how talented, needs the second person to reinforce what just happened.

Meetings are like that. Picture a pre-COVID office. A team is sitting around a conference room table when the test fire alarms go off. The team can pause, smile, keep the focus, and continue the discussion with ease. Or the team can choose to allow the disturbance to ruin the momentum.

## WORKING IN SPURTS: AN UPSIDE

In mediation, it is often necessary to take breaks. Being a facilitator of therapeutic mediation means I am immersed in the mud and muck of a seemingly impermeable conflict between two opposing sides. The therapeutic mediation agenda begins with expanding on the summed-up status quo. This expansion consists of each side giving their detailed account of what they experienced and their exact points of grievance. Once one side has fully made the case to their satisfaction, leaving nothing relevant unsaid, I ask the other side to articulate the same argument that was just made. Although I clarify that echoing the argument of the opposing side does not mean agreeing with them, this task is often very emotional. Because of the level of emotion, breaks can be vital. I encourage timeouts as needed and even have a designated "pace place" to cool off briefly, away from the mediation.

Facilitating therapeutic mediation online works on the same level and accomplishes the identified goals. A person can take a timeout by turning his or her computer screen off, walking away, regaining composure, and rejoining the process. A baby crying or an Amazon delivery during mediation can provide levity and a moment of shared harmonious humanizing of the other side.

*Anthony dropped his glasses in mid-scene. It was a full house in the audience and only the third night of the play. Actors huddled behind the curtains, hands cupping mouths, knowing that Katherine's monologue was about to start, and the blocking was for her to remove Anthony's glasses after her second line. Anthony had no choice but to alter the blocking on the spot. However, he did have a choice in the way he did it. He retrieved his glasses from the floor, but as he put them back on, he took the time to firmly hold the glasses in place while looking at Katherine, as if in defiance of her. When Katherine followed her blocking and removed Anthony's glasses, the moment was enhanced by the earlier mistake and correction.*

Work requires commitment to the scene, no matter where the venue is. The mistake and correction in the example above serve as the best metaphor for what effective managers must know about succeeding with a virtual team. Bottom line, people and companies can be as adaptable as their cognitive choices permit. [AQ](#)

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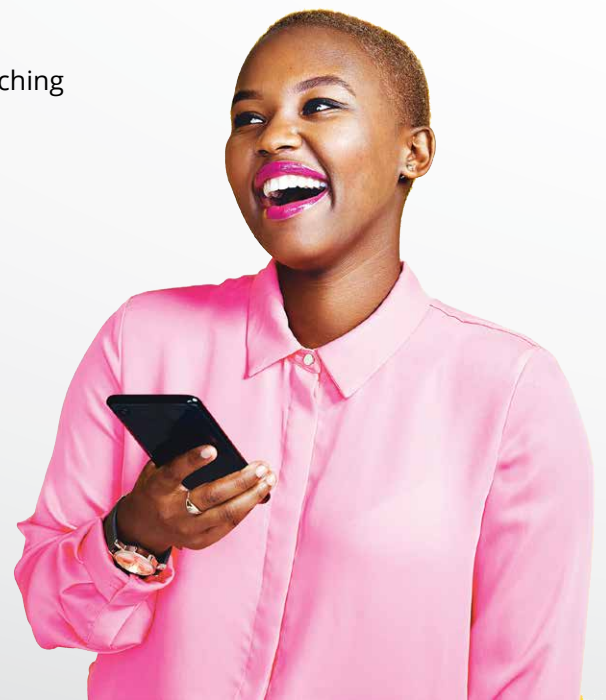
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