Human Resources
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

SUCCEEDING AS A VIRTUAL TEAM LEADER

As work environments evolve, successful virtual team leadership requires more than replicating in-office practices. Remote and hybrid teams stretch across geography, time zones, and work styles—and thrive only when leaders apply structure, empathy, and adaptability. The following steps equip leaders with actionable steps to support performance, communication, and connection in these distributed contexts.

1

Lead Through Change with Empathy
- Acknowledge that team members may adapt to remote work at different paces.
- Engage in personal conversations to assess individual mindsets and concerns.
- Adjust support strategies based on emotional cues and feedback.
- Review Leading through Change: Return to Campus - The Why and the Way.

2

Build Structure Around Accountability
- Define specific performance expectations and timelines.
- Use project management systems to clarify responsibilities and workflows.
- Hold regular meetings with written agendas and clear deliverables.

3

Standardize Virtual Communication
- Clarify what tools should be used for meetings, updates, and informal chats.
- Provide training on collaborative platforms to level the tech playing field.
- Address virtual etiquette, including workspace setup and video meeting norms.

4

Set and Enforce Team Norms
- Create clear guidelines for availability and response expectations.
- Limit virtual meeting participants to decision-makers and require cameras on.
- Ensure all team members follow the same rules to avoid equity gaps.
- Ensure consistent adherence to all USC policies and procedures, and apply appropriate corrective action when standards are not met.

5

Reinforce Collaboration in Performance
- Incorporate teamwork, responsiveness, and mentorship into KPIs.
- Recognize standout collaboration with available recognition programs.
- Gather peer input when direct observation is limited.

6

Be Visible and Respect Boundaries
- Share your availability, preferred contact methods, and emergency protocols.
- Model healthy boundaries to encourage team work-life balance.
- Avoid the expectation of 24/7 availability—yours or theirs.

7

Prioritize Human Connection
- Choose video check-ins when tone and empathy are important.
- Discuss both work tasks and personal well-being regularly.
- Be mindful of team members' diverse home situations and stressors.

8

Foster Cross-Team Relationships
- Introduce new hires via mentorships and onboarding cohorts.
- Coordinate opportunities for cross-functional collaboration.
- Promote connection through volunteering or shared social activities.

9

Stay Engaged as a Leader
- Provide consistent updates about business priorities and team changes.
- Use one-on-ones to explore development goals and engagement.
- Reinforce how individual contributions support the organization's mission.

Key Insight:

Leadership in remote and hybrid settings is about presence without proximity. The strongest virtual leaders build clarity, trust, and cohesion—screen to screen.

For additional guidance on Telecommuting, please review HR 1.22 Telecommuting Policy and the Telecommuting Guidebook. For further information, contact Human Resources at telecommute@sc.edu.