

# 5 tips for being a leader in the virtual world

Being a leader can be challenging at the best of times, but even more so in a crisis situation like the current pandemic. But how do you lead well when you can't physically meet with the people you are leading? Here are our tips for effective leadership in a virtual world.

## 1. Focus on inspiration and motivation, rather than just managing or controlling

Motivating and inspiring leadership strategies are especially important when leading virtually because we lack many social cues and tools we usually use to influence others. Be more mindful and practice this. Examples of these types of strategies include:

- Displaying ethical and inspiring behavior, taking a stand, and acting with conviction.
- Supporting others and attending to their individual needs.
- Motivating others by projecting a positive vision.
- Supporting innovation and creativity.

## 2. Be optimistic, but honest

In times like these, people look to their leaders for hope, while also expecting honesty and transparency. This can be a difficult balance, when you might be experiencing personal stress and worry and often have to communicate bad news. We recommend:

- Delivering information in a timely manner, and in a compassionate, caring, and straightforward way. Here is a checklist from the CDC on how to communicate in a crisis.
- Giving others an opportunity to process the information, and a space to share their thoughts and experiences.
- Finding opportunities for realistic optimism, pointing toward the future and highlighting ways that everyone can work towards it.

## 3. Support trust and cohesion within virtual teams

It can be challenging for virtual teams to develop trust and cohesion. As a leader, you can:

- Set norms and processes around communication.
- Encourage and schedule time for personal and social conversations as well as work discussions.
- Include regular opportunities for video conferencing, which allows for much richer interaction.
- Be a role model for these strategies.

#### 4. Provide frequent and explicit opportunities for coordination

Because virtual teams have fewer opportunities to spontaneously interact and coordinate work, it is particularly important to provide clear channels and expectations for communication and coordination. Leaders play a key role in establishing these norms and expectations, such as:

- Plan regular calls so that everyone in the group can share their progress.
- Use instant message or chat functions to take the place of impromptu in-person meetings.

#### 5. Take care of your own mental health

Leaders are not immune to experiencing worries, stress, anxiety, or sadness at times of uncertainty. In fact, you may experience a unique set of stressors, making it all the more important for you to take the time to take care of yourself. For strategies to do this, read our [blog on wellness](#).

#### About the author



Jessica Yarbro is a senior research scientist in Skills Research within the Learning Research and Design team at Pearson. Through empirical studies and synthesizing existing research, Jessica supports the development of knowledge and skills frameworks within Pearson products. Prior to joining Pearson, Jessica received her Ph.D. in clinical psychology from George Mason University. Jessica is particularly passionate about researching personal capabilities with the aim of helping Pearson support student success in school, work, and life.