Women Who Lead, Virtually: Key Takeaways

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It’s no surprise that COVID-19 has altered the way we work. For managers, this means we need to change the way we lead. Our recent Women in Business webinar helped us understand the change to working remotely. Surprisingly, the transition is going well (from a technical standpoint), but many struggle with lack of personal collaboration, isolation, and emotional fatigue.

We thought the main challenge was going to be the lack of in-person interactions, but we have found that one-on-ones over Zoom or small group virtual meetings can be just as impactful and effective, sometimes more, than in-person meetings. Some are reticent to turn on their camera, but this is a critical part of building and maintaining relationships. As you lead, we encourage setting this protocol!

**Key takeaway #1 – Communication is key**

The need to communicate frequently and efficiently is more important than ever.

- Use time wisely: communicate on the right initiatives and projects.
• Plan group sessions that are fun or informative, like happy hours or a wellness discussion.
• Do things virtually, in real time. This decreases the stilted style of email/text, plus most people are sitting at their computer during work hours, so why not?
• The whole is bigger than the individual. Being connected and “in this together” is required now more than ever.
• Strive for two-way relationships. Send fun gifs, informative articles, or text messages. Create conversations using casual interactions, which we are missing without face to face gatherings.
• Publicly thank people. This goes a long way! Celebrate accomplishments and successes, keeping in mind that emotions are contagious.
• Lift your team up. Give them confidence for the future. Plant vision and hope.
• Reach out to other leaders (board members, etc.). It’s rare to get feedback at the governance level, and it is contagious. Expand your relationships to be more than transactional.

**Key takeaway #2 – Prioritize**

Every day is different. Priorities change on a dime. Ask yourself, “What are my priorities today?” Keep in mind that what was important yesterday might not be today. A lot of our plans have become obsolete. What can be put aside?

The continual change in priorities makes it hard to look at the big picture and long-term strategy. Successful companies will continue to access and build upon their long-term goals, as it makes sense, while reacting to the daily changes around them.

**Key takeaway #3 – Manage performance**

Managing performance is harder when working remotely, and there is a fine line between micro-managing and being too hands-off. Set your employees up for success by:

• Using clear verbal communications to establish expectations, and then following up in writing via email.
• Giving immediate feedback.
• Holding one-on-one meetings on a regular basis. Use this time to go over your employees’ priorities (not to cover feedback from past projects).
• Are their tasks and projects suited to them?
• Do they have the tools they need?
• Keep your commitments.
• Scheduling 15 minute debriefs after important projects, if needed, to talk about what went well, progress that’s been made, what can be done better next time, and opportunities for growth. Then move on.
● Showing that you believe in someone’s potential by understanding and leveraging their strengths.

● Offering encouragement.

● Documenting if things don’t go well (you may need this later and it’s better to have more info than less). Email is fine. This will help eliminate potential lawsuits.

● Asking yourself, “What is the highest and best use of this moment?” in order to be constructive.

**Key takeaway #4 – Empathy is key**

With a worldwide pandemic and social unrest, there is fear, disruption, and uncertainty. Over the last couple of months, people are getting more to the point of acceptance, but employment issues have shifted dramatically with layoffs and rehiring issues, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, the CARES Act, and political and social uncertainty.

With so much change, it’s challenging for leaders to stay up to date, understand rights, keep up morale, and cater to employees’ mental health issues.

Talk candidly about issues. Even if you don’t have the right answer, you should acknowledge the subject. If you come from a place of vulnerability and care, people will respect and understand. Listen. Employ the “W.A.I.T.” acronym: Why Am I Talking?

**Key takeaway #5 – Reinforce through trust**

Building trust is not an algorithm; we can each do it in our own way. By creating space to keep open dialogues with those you lead, delivering timely and consistent feedback, and leading from a place of empathy, it’s possible to build a genuine culture of trust.

● Motivate employee performance.

● Use consistent communication.

● Employ smart collaboration (the whole is bigger than the individual).

● Exercise feedback and patience.

● Trust yourself; trust your gut.

● Acknowledge that it’s ok to make mistakes. You learn.

● Find people to support you.

● Hold yourself accountable (at the end of each day, ask yourself: What did I do today to build or break trust?).

● Treat others as you would want to be treated.

Thank you to our speakers:
Victoria Tullett, Chief Legal Officer, Papa Murphy’s
Natalie Loeb, Founder & CEO, Loeb Leadership  Download the 1-sheet