VIRTUAL TEAM SUCCESS

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR WORKING AND LEADING FROM A DISTANCE

DARLEEN DEROSA

RICHARD LEPSINGER

Virtual Team Success

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Virtual Team Success

A Practical Guide for Working and Leading from a Distance

Darleen M. DeRosa
Richard Lepsinger

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Published by Jossey-Bass
A Wiley Imprint
989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741—www.josseybass.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

DeRosa, Darleen M., 1970-
Virtual team success : a practical guide for working and leading from a distance / Darleen M. DeRosa and Richard Lepsinger. — 1st ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-470-53296-6 (cloth)
ISBN 978-0-470-77059-7 (ebk)
ISBN 978-0-470-87240-6 (ebk)
ISBN 978-0-470-87241-3 (ebk)
1. Virtual work teams. I. Lepsinger, Richard, 1948- II. Title.
HD66.D466 2010
658.4'022–dc22

2010019248

Printed in the United States of America
FIRST EDITION
HB Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my husband Joe and son Andrew; to my parents, Michael and Marianna, who always provided endless love and support; and my grandmother, Tina, who taught me the importance of perseverance.
—D.D.

To Bonnie, with love.
—R.L.

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Acknowledgments

We are grateful to many people for their help and support during the writing of this book. In particular we'd like to thank:

Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps, whose insightful books and articles on virtual teams were a major source of inspiration to conduct work in this area. Angela Travagline, who partnered with us throughout the research study and provided valuable insights that helped shape the book. Donald Hantula and Ned Kock, who collaborated with us on several research studies and articles that were a catalyst for our applied research.

Our business partner, Jennifer Forgie, whose suggestions and feedback were invaluable in helping refine and focus the chapters. Max Wolfe whose research and data gathering where tremendously helpful.

The companies, virtual team members, team leaders, and various stakeholders who participated in OnPoint's global research study. Their time and commitment added richness to the cases, examples, and guidelines that make up the book.

The people who are experts at working from a distance who generously shared their stories and experiences: Laszlo Bock, Mark Feurer, Mark Gasta, Jay Moldenhauer- Salazar, Karen O'Boyle, Kevin Squires, Swroop Sahota, Cleo Stockhoff, and Theresa Zeller.

Dottie DeHart and her team at DeHart & Company, who partnered with us to enhance the book's content and readability.

And last, but certainly not least, to our spouses. To Joe DeRosa, who was a pillar of strength during the seemingly endless writing process. To Bonnie Uslianer, who endured months of being a "book widow" while providing unconditional support and encouragement.

Foreword

When Darleen asked us to write the foreword to her book, we were immediately inclined to do so. With a Ph.D. in organizational psychology for which she wrote a dissertation on virtual teams and subsequently having conducted two substantial research studies on the topic as a management consultant, she has the bona fides to write authoritatively on the subject.

That Darleen and her co-author and business partner, Rick Lepsinger, have chosen to tackle the sore spot of virtual teams—why they fail—is testament to their expertise, energy, and insight.

A decade ago, Darleen's earliest work in this field was a research study of how "naturally" virtual teams perform over time using different kinds of media. While the technology studied then seems primitive by today's standards, her foresight in tackling this topic when few others were considering it is laudable. Technology, she concluded, plays a role, but other factors in real work settings may prove equally or more important.

She continued her work in the putative "real world" as a management consultant, teaming up with Rick, and ultimately leading to this comprehensive examination of what trips up virtual teams and what leaders can do about it.

Here you will find numerous research-based "devices" for clearing the hurdles that virtual teams present. It's not enough in a 24/7 global work environment to take the old face-to-face techniques and apply them when people are not co-located. Failed projects and missed deadlines in countless organizations

indicate that we need new ways to work. The demands of contemporary work environments—distributed, asynchronous, multicultural, and without the benefit of hallway time—require us to think—and behave—differently.

The many frameworks, guidelines, checklists, and recommendations in this book will make life easier for the newest managers, those leading virtual teams. There's no school for this yet, but when the first is established, *Virtual Team Success: A Practical Guide for Working and Leading from a Distance* will certainly be the core curriculum.

—Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps, authors of *Virtual Teams, The Age of the Network,* and many other books

Introduction

> "We have modified our environment so radically that we must modify ourselves in order to exist in this new environment."
>
> —*Norbert Wiener*,
> The Human Use of Human Beings[1]

"If there is an office in the future," wrote Charles Handy in a 1995 *Harvard Business Review* article[2] on virtual work, "it will be more like a clubhouse: a place for meeting, eating, and greeting, with rooms reserved for activities, not for particular people." Admittedly, most organizations haven't reached that point yet, but the way we work has certainly changed dramatically since Handy's mid-1990s predictions. Today, some organizations have created "hotelling" options for employees, in which they no longer have assigned offices, and it is increasingly common to leverage telecommuting and virtual teamwork.

To put this brave new world in context, consider the fact that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, few people had heard of virtual teams. At that time only a small number of companies were even using them. Today, of course, companies big and small are using some form of virtual collaboration.

Many of the nation's major corporations are choosing to go virtual. According to a study from *Communications of the* ACM[3] (conducted by Intel Corporation in April 2009) approximately two-thirds of the company's employees were on virtual teams. Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar, who is currently the vice president

of Talent Management at Gap, Inc., and formerly held senior HR roles in Sun Microsystems, Taco Bell, and Barclays Global Investors, estimates that virtual teams are used to deliver projects about 50 percent of the time at Sun and BGI. Similarly, Laszlo Bock, vice president of People Operations at Google, states that at least 50 percent of Google employees are working on virtual teams at any given time.

Virtual collaboration has already begun to transform many business sectors. For example, it's becoming increasingly used in the health care industry because it helps to improve availability and treatment. A January 2007 *Financial Times* article illustrates those benefits. It discusses the use of virtual teams during the Amazon Swim Project, a geographically dispersed team of researchers who were assisting a marathon swimmer as he swam almost 3,500 miles. Using advanced medical technology, the team provided health care services for the swimmer and his support team. By collaborating virtually, the medical team was able to include the best specialists and experts from all over the globe.

Another great example is Virtual Integrated Practice (VIP), a health care delivery model developed by Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. The program is designed to address the challenges of caring for elderly and chronically ill patients, who commonly have complex needs.

VIP develops effective team building and ongoing collaboration among health care providers who are not in the same locations or even in the same organizations. It prevents the logistical obstacles of having clinicians meet in person to discuss patient cases by providing a system that allows them to meet "virtually." The two-year study yielded positive results. When VIP was used, there were fewer emergency room visits and increased patient awareness. Physicians on the VIP team were also more informed about patient progress than those who were not on the team.

Why Virtual Teams Are More Prevalent

So what has contributed to this dramatic shift in the way people work, and more specifically, the growing popularity of virtual workplaces? At least in part it has been the gradual shift of the U.S. economy from manufacturing and production to one of knowledge and information. But there are three other important reasons.

First, organizations are looking for the best available talent, regardless of their geographic location, which has led them to use virtual collaboration. Today, when forming teams, rather than rely on a group of people who are geographically closer but may not have the right expertise, many companies strategically select talented individuals who have the appropriate skill set, even though they may live thousands of miles apart.

Bock at Google reports that "one of the biggest drivers of virtual teamwork is that we believe that there are talented people everywhere in the world, so we have numerous locations in order to access talent. We do a lot of remote work and collaboration. For example, most of our engineering teams span three continents."

Theresa Zeller, executive director/leader, GHH Marketing Learning at Merck, states, "We work in a global environment and our clients are geographically distributed, so it doesn't matter if our team is in one place. If you have a global mindset, time and distance become irrelevant. In a lean and flexible organization where your expertise is needed globally, we need to be able to conduct business in a global manner while enhancing efficiency."

In 2007, IBM's effort to become a "globally integrated enterprise" gained significant momentum. Historically, IBM had created mini versions of itself in each country where it operated, which was inefficient and expensive. Today, as a "globally integrated enterprise" the company just sets up shop wherever it finds the right talent at the right price. For example, global IT service delivery in India, global supply chain in China, and global financing back office in Brazil.