Guidance for Individual Contributors of Virtual Teams

While the manager plays an essential role in leading a virtual team, individual employees should also be cognizant of the changing dynamics. Here are some suggestions for virtual employees, pulled from guidelines for managers by Emily Wilson, Associate Director for Learning & Organizational Development at Appalachian State University:

- ***Be prepared for a higher level of accountability.*** This may mean more detailed documentation of your work and time and should not come as a surprise given the physical distance between you and your manager.

- ***Abide by the expectations set for the team.*** Whether this is related to work hours, technology tools, or communication processes, the expectations that were set collaboratively with your team are there to ensure that the virtual work environment is productive for everyone. Discuss with your manager individually if you are having trouble following a specific expectation.

- ***Create a professional home workspace.*** Keep in mind that you will likely be logging/calling into meetings or having video chats often. Set your workspace apart from other activities and clear as much clutter as possible. This doesn't require setting up a home office, but an open wall behind you and a table to set your computer on during meetings will help create a sense of professionalism. Maintain professional standards of appearance as necessary for your work obligations (i.e. don't arrive for the video call in your pajamas).

- ***Be prepared for meetings and participate.*** Log in to the meeting on time with information prepared for your update. Remove distractions as much as possible. While your fellow dog-loving colleagues may be happy to see your puppy in the background, barking dogs can be deafening in a virtual meeting. Wear headphones if possible. It is easy to disengage during a virtual meeting, so brush up on your listening and communication skills. Take notes and write down questions to be asked later.

- ***Be a self-starter.*** On top of greater accountability, you should be focusing on working with as little direction as possible. This may mean creating a system of organization that is different than what you would have in your physical office. It also may mean sticking to structures or schedules, so you have focused, dedicated time.

- ***Pay attention to your stress and emotions.*** Many people see working from home as a pathway to greater work-life balance, but it can be hard to adapt to the isolation you may feel. You may also feel disconnected from members of your team who are still working in the office. If fear of missing out gets too intense, know when to ask for some face time with your manager or members of the team. If you are feeling overwhelmed, know when and how to reach out for help.

- ***Be flexible and empathetic.*** As other members of your team make the transition to virtual work, they may struggle in different ways. Some may need to learn new technologies. Some may not be as self-directed, and some may even have accessibility concerns. If technology hiccups happen, be prepared with a backup plan, and be patient as the kinks get worked out.

Skills of Effective Virtual Team Members:

- Flexibility and adaptability
- Strong communication and interpersonal skills
- Ability to think locally and globally
- Listening skills
- Initiative and self-management
- Enthusiasm
- Consensus-building skills
- Collaboration skills
- Patience and empathy
- Nonjudgmental attitude
- Cultural harmony

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