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Inclusive remote-working practices for leaders

Experiment with different practices, track the ones you've tried, and continue learning.

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Demonstrate vulnerability and empathy

- Embrace the opportunity to share more about your life (for instance, show your home and important people or animals in your life).

- Get to know team members on a more-personal level by asking open-ended questions on topics they care about.

- Create space to learn what is on everyone's mind; ask, "What's going on with you, how is your home life influencing work life?"

- Allocate time each week to do a physical-emotional-intellectual (PEI) check-in and ask everyone to share details on they are feeling physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Answer honestly and remind people, "It's okay not to feel okay."

Ask about people's needs, acknowledge them, and tailor actions accordingly

- Ask team members to share potential distractions or challenges they are facing and what they need to be fully present.

- Share your personal circumstances and unexpected needs as they arise, demonstrate your understanding, and encourage others to feel more comfortable doing the same.

- Reduce the length of meetings by five minutes from the usual 15-minute increments to allow team members time to quickly check in with children or others at home before jumping onto the next call or videoconference. For example, instead of a 30-minute call, make it 25; for 60 minutes, reduce it to 55 or even 50 minutes.

- Establish direct communication with coworkers who may feel like "onlys," see how they are doing, and draw them into discussions.

- Be brave and address the "elephant in the room": acknowledge difficult situations, ask questions, and create space for people to share openly how they are feeling and what they need.

- Be willing to have challenging conversations; start by acknowledging potential mistakes, and emphasize a desire to learn if others are open to teaching.

Challenge personal assumptions, adopt a learning orientation, and seek to understand others' experiences and styles

- Acknowledge what you don't know, and express a desire to learn and find out more.

- Ask questions before asserting, rather than assuming someone's experience.

- Be aware of different communication styles and avoid that influencing your assessment of a person's contributions. Instead of jumping to a conclusion, assume positive intent and take a moment to consider alternative explanations for the situation. People might be struggling to get into the conversation versus having nothing to contribute; their communication style might be unconventional rather than ineffective.

Build space for diverse perspectives and encourage greater participation

- Send out an agenda for the meeting ahead of time, with clearly defined roles and content topics.

- Have a rotating schedule of call facilitators.

- Start the meeting by asking everyone to answer the same question to get their voices into the discussion.

- Ask every participant for their opinion at least once and acknowledge their answers.

- Give credit where it's due; when an individual reiterates an idea that someone else put forward earlier in the meeting, point out who shared the idea originally.

- Draw attention to and celebrate different opinions and the value different perspectives play in getting the best answer.

- Coach team members through potential conflict by encouraging curiosity and learning how to be comfortable with not being right. Embrace the idea that your job isn't to have answers to everything, but to guide the team to the best solutions.

Make time for structured remote team building and networking

- Set up semiregular remote sessions dedicated solely to familiarizing team members with one another.

- Develop exercises or games that encourage interactions with unfamiliar team members:

  — Pair team members up to get to know one another and join in if needed to make the number work. Each person should be asked to introduce their partner to the group.

  — Set up a trivia game where everyone on the team submits a few fun facts about themselves. Develop questions to bring together the facts, drawing attention to both similarities and different strengths across the team.

  — Ask everyone to share two truths and a lie. "Who would have thought it?" moments abound as participants share unlikely stories about themselves and learn more about each other.

  — Group everyone into pairs or trios (depending on the numbers) and send them to separate virtual breakout rooms, IM channels, or phone calls to identify four similarities and one difference. After ten minutes, ask everyone to share with the group.

- Draw on the energy and ideas across the group to develop a diverse set of virtual team events. Ask for volunteers to define a team-building event focused on getting to know each other and rotate the responsibility.

Be intentional about mentoring and developing all team members

✓ Schedule regular one-on-one check-ins to discuss how individual team members are doing; assess their goals, interests, and explore their professional development intentions. Keep a running list of whom you spoke with, and when, to ensure interaction with the whole team.

✓ Assess the list of your mentees and sponsors. Make it a point to add someone with a different background from you.

✓ Keep a running list of people and their goals. When an opportunity arises, take a look at the list before allocating the opportunity to the first person who comes to mind.

✓ Ask rather than assume a team member would or would not want an opportunity.

✓ Increase transparency of opportunities by asking the whole team for volunteers.

Encourage team members to set individual inclusion commitments

✓ Share your commitments with your team and be specific about the steps you're taking to be more inclusive, such as by saying, "I will _____ this week; please hold me accountable."

✓ Ask each team member to commit to a tangible (and observable) inclusive practice to experiment with each week.

✓ Share a list of inclusive actions for inspiration:

— Establish common language to celebrate inclusive behavior or draw attention to noninclusive behavior in the moment without implying judgment. For example, as a team, select videoconferencing tools or a word or term to call out noninclusive behavior.

— Set up an end-of-week reflection (or include one in existing meetings) to celebrate positive changes and areas for continued growth as a team and reinforce a more inclusive environment.