



Lunch and Learn: Leading Your Team Remotely with Tammy Williams

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12:00pm – 1:00pm

Tammy Williams is the Vice President of People and Culture at Canadian Tire and serves on the Sageesse board. She has been a senior leader in operations resources for over 20 years and has experience leading change and transformation. Her organization has had to move to 100% remote work and has been able to come together quite quickly in vulnerability and capability.

Getting into our Rhythm with Remote Teams

- Not using the language of “virtual” teams: new norms are rising and we will keep things that work for us. Experts say that there is nothing “virtual” about this – we are in this and experiencing this together.
 - Language matters. Remote, distant, etc.
- Establishing boundaries: there will be those who are comfortable working from home and may have trouble keeping themselves from working 24/7. Allow these people to state their boundaries with a clear shutting off time. Others may be less comfortable and more disengaged.
 - May be those who aren’t comfortable to open up what’s behind them – the option of a virtual background can maintain these boundaries.
- Being transparent: option to show if you’re available or not. When dealing with time zones, an icon to show availability can help manage boundaries as well. Important to honor these norms for your teams as well.

Increasing Productivity

- The need to figure out the best way to communicate with the team – Zoom, Microsoft teams, group chats, etc.
- Important to come up with communication norms upfront. How will you indicate the importance/severity of the communication? 911 vs. no action required? If set up in the beginning, you don’t need to worry about them in an emergency
- Things to avoid:
 - Don’t confuse brief communication with clear communication. Must make every meeting count – focusing on productivity within meetings. May need to stay with a topic until there is a resolution and spend a little more time on each item.



- A need to make the implicit explicit – you can't over communicate
- Don't bombard coworkers with messages: have a plan and go through it rather than texting on an ongoing basis
- Important to establish the purpose of the meeting upfront to allow people to get into the right mindset

Consider a 'Cycle of Commitment' for Clarity

- Starting with a request → clarify expectations → accept or decline counter offer → fulfill → accept, acknowledge, revert or close
- Counteroffers also important in clarifying boundaries
- Help everyone understand the cycle that you're working from

Spotting and Dealing with a Disengaged Worker

- Role of 93/7: up to 93% of communication happens through body language, tone, and eye contact. Crucial to pay attention to these cues when distant working
- Video is extremely important in this. Allows connection to the team, effective at building rapport and empathy
 - A personal form of online communication
 - Telephone-only can lead to marginalized people/women being talked over. Video conferencing can lead to alleviation of this/humanization
- Disengagement can be clear from missing meetings, slow to respond, missed deadlines, lack of participation
- Importance of chitchat at the beginning of the call. Creates social norms, brings in the 'humanity' piece of human resources
- Check ins are crucial both for getting used to distance collaboration and why we are distancing
- Ask managers and team leaders to make sure checking in flows all the way through the agency

Additional Tips for Engagement

- Lunch-and-learns: schedule a lunchtime webinar and reimburse colleagues for the cost of their lunch delivery/bring-you-own coffee/virtual happy hour/Netflix viewing parties
 - Add to connectivity
- Commit to an hour of learning, keeps teammates engaged

Tips & Tricks

- Celebrate milestones and achievements



- Mindful of time zone gap: may be difficult to overcome, but important to acknowledge it
- Rely on video conferencing
- Make time for feedback: don't let distance stop from this, it's likely more important than ever. May be challenging one-on-one but a good best practice
- Allow reproduction of organic chats: e.g. "water-cooler" chats, etc. How do we reproduce these?
 - Leader may have to orchestrate, e.g. a happy hour invite
- Keep a sense of humor, but stay respectful

Video links/resources

[Brene Brown on Empathy](#)

Open Q&A

Do you recommend MS Teams?

- A good way to cut expenses – mitigates long-distance costs
- Ability to share screens, video conference, chat
- Collaborative nature: can work in real-time like Google Docs

Do you have any tips and trips on working and balancing work and children?

- Lots of respect and empathy
- Need for leaders to hold people capable – if possible, recognize not everything can be time-sensitive if they're looking after children
 - A need to increase situational leadership (the fact that you can't treat all workers the same) – loyalty and trust will likely come back
 - Vulnerability & accessibility

How would you suggest supporting folks who may not have the more advanced levels of tech and new communications style to maintain connection and feeling of inclusion?

- This is where humor can come in
- Identifying who is best at that – asking them to become the expert and guide others

How do we hold staff accountable while working remotely?

- Tough to become a manager who does this now if accountability wasn't in certain terms before. Hopefully can turn up the type of accountable manager you were before
- A team meeting about how you intend to operate/hold people accountability. Coming up with group norms



- Required upfront so there's an expectation
- Management roles haven't changed just because the modality has changed

How do you recommend supporting folks who are struggling more with their mental health given the current situation and being able to only support remotely?

- Many employees are taking crisis calls – CDVC is seeing an increase in volume and severity of calls
- If there is a threshold that's considered 'productive' with calls/cases – it may have to be adjusted for the health of people taking the calls
 - For example, self-isolation, childcare
- A need to take care of oneself first before others
- Meetings with a practice of mindfulness, meditation or gratitude. Staying grounded is more important than ever
- Importance of physical exercise

What would you say are the most important things to do first when addressing and supporting your team in losses that they are experiencing – the emotional impact as they continue working?

- Video suggestion: Brené Brown's distinction between empathy and sympathy. It can be appropriate to say, "I don't have the right words but I'm here for you"
- Importance of just hearing what people have to say – loss, grief, etc.

How to support leaders through having difficult conversations virtually?

- Constructive feedback should take place in private
- Don't shy away – need for follow up questions
- Staff want to do better – how can you help them to be the best version of themselves?

What can we do now to help us reintegrate staff once we're back to working together?

- Some of the language we've dropped into our norms will likely survive – e.g. the cycle of commitment – this language is working
 - Part of a gratitude practice that makes the team stronger
- Talk about how to maintain performance after working remotely

How do you address the nature of the unknown and the questions that can't be answered?

- Vulnerability with the team – no one has been through this before; it's unprecedented
- Double down on the concept that great ideas can come from anywhere