

Leading Virtual Effectiveness

Four strategies for effective communication in a distributed workforce

by Camille Preston, PhD, PCC



Effective communication and remote relationships are the keys to success in the virtual world. Associates, team members, and clients need to have effective remote relationships in order to thrive in today’s continually developing marketplace. This ebook is for:

Agility

- The associate, manager, or executive who leads 10 or more projects at once

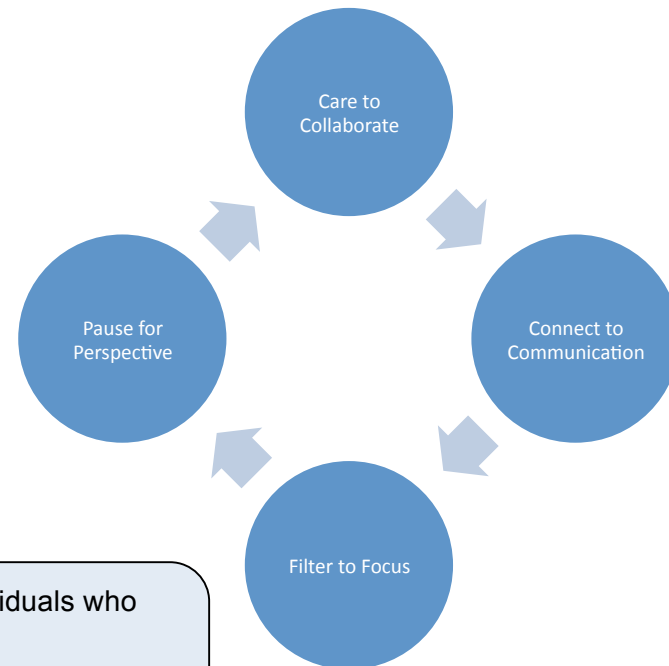
Alignment

- The small to midsize companies that often work with remote organizations

Achievement

- The teams that develop opportunities, increase leadership, and maintain success

Learn these four strategies for virtual effectiveness:



This ebook is dedicated to associates, managers, and individuals who are committed to leading in a global business world.

- When one person understands leading virtual effectiveness, they can improve their results.
- When the entire organization practices and embraces leading virtual effectiveness, they achieve sustainable success.

The Changing Speed of Business

Overwhelmed and Overloaded

Unable to unplug, people

check their emails in bed,

answer phone calls in the bathroom,

text at all hours of the night and

update their Facebook status every few minutes...

So many of us want to be more, want to do more, and yet this cycle will never end. This ebook is for people who want to adapt, navigate, and manage the virtual overload we all experience.

Take a moment and think about how the pace of business has shifted in the past 5 years.

- How has communication changed?
- What did you always do that you don't anymore?
- What are you always doing that you didn't before?



Disconnected and Disengaged

As the speed of business increases, more and more professionals are finding themselves isolated and overworked. Creating high-performing, effective collaborations has become even more challenging as:

- Individuals are shifting jobs and responsibilities more often.
- Colleagues are working on more projects, more frequently.
- Teams are forming and then dispersing with even faster turnover.
- Businesses are continuing to transition to remote collaborations.

With over 300 million active users and 50% of these users signing on each day, over 8 billion minutes worldwide are spent on Facebook per day.¹ LinkedIn has over 50 million members in over 200 countries and territories around the world.² With more technology, we can become more connected, and yet we feel even less connected.

To be effective, leaders should:

- 1. Care to Collaborate**
- 2. Connect to Communicate**
- 3. Filter to Focus**
- 4. Pause for Perspective**

Understand that changes occur and appreciate the relationships that you are developing.

¹ Facebook Statistics. (2009). Retrieved November 4, 2009. <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>

² LinkedIn Facts. (2009). Retrieved November 4, 2009 from website: <http://press.linkedin.com>

How We Do Business



How we do business is shifting. Businesses are more global, more electronic, more communication oriented, and more accountable. As we become more connected, we are simultaneously becoming more detached.

In the **Industrial Age**, businesses and leaders focused on their capital assets and bottom line. They delivered results, whatever the human costs might be. In the **Information Age**, virtual leaders realize that people must balance results with relationships. *Who* you collaborate with and *how* is becoming as important as *what* you do.

Business is becoming virtual

- 73% of the workforce will be virtual by 2011.³
- U.S. service revenues driven by mobile workforce applications are projected to grow from \$9.1 billion in 2007 to nearly \$13 billion in 2012.⁴
- With more mobile employees, some companies are reporting that as much as 1/3 of their total communications spending is for mobility.⁵
- Because so many employees are mobile, as many as 50% - 70% of mobile phone minutes are used within the company where fixed line or Wi-Fi communications are possible.⁵

The 4 V's of Information Overload

There is an exponential increase in the

- Volume** of information available;
- Variety** of ways we get information; and
- Velocity** at which information is bombarding us.

Plus, we must increasingly assess and question the **Veracity** of the information we receive.

Proactively navigate the volume, variety, velocity and veracity of information you receive.

³ Stacey K. Sudan, Stephen D. Drake, Raymond, Boggs, Sean Ryan, Merle Sandler and Randy Giusto. (March 2008). Worldwide Mobile Worker Population 2007-2011 Forecast. IDC #209883E

⁴ The Insight Research Corporation. (May 2007) The Mobile Workforce and Enterprise Applications 2007-2012.

⁵ Kelley, E Brent. (April 2008) Mobile Unified Communications: Mobile Workforce Communications Choices for CXOs and Managers. Wainhouse Research Publication No. RE-MOB.

Work Relationships Are Changing

- Almost 1 in 5 employees are disengaged.⁶
- More virtual employees are engaged than their peers who work with their entire team present (34% vs. 28%).⁶

Three Signs of a Miserable Job

In his above-titled fable, Patrick Lencioni shared that people are miserable when they feel anonymous, their work is irrelevant and their results are immeasurable. Because of the current speed of business – people are going so fast, teams are changing so quickly, projects are evolving and adapting to changing market demands – many people are miserable at work.

Associates often complain that:

- Getting to know colleagues takes too much effort, energy, and time.
- They are too focused on making deadlines to have “time to connect.”
- Team-building activities often feel canned.
- Investing time into relationships is a waste since teams are always shifting.

Adapting to Constant Change

We have all heard the one constant is change. We are constantly changing and developing for an even better way to manage, lead and empower our teams. And yet few have developed new strategies to comfortably, consistently and proactively adapt to this change. Virtual leaders appreciate how change helps them to be effective, efficient and sustainable.

Effective leaders create time to focus on what matters most, communicate concisely, and successfully connect to those around them.

Create your relationship before you meet with the person. Know your outcomes before the meeting.

Disengaged:

- Only 25% of government employees are engaged at work.⁶
- 65% of workers receive no job recognition.⁶



⁶ Blessingwhite. (2008) The State of Employee Engagement 2008 North American Overview.

Why Leadership Needs to Change



- 66% of managers effectively encourage the use of their direct reports' talents.⁶
 - That leaves a third of the workforce not being encouraged.
- 59% of managers effectively recognize and reward achievements.⁶
 - That means that 2 in 5 employees are not being recognized for their efforts.

One client who leads international teams shared with me:

“I feel I am being assaulted by email... I have been out of the country on business for 3 days, I am 324 emails behind. Even if I spent one minute per email, I still need over 5 hours to dig out...”

We need new strategies for mastering virtual effectiveness.

Leading in a Virtual World

Sustainable Success

To be effective in the business world, individuals must be able to build relationships quickly and remotely. Virtual leaders learn who they are working with, what matters most to this person, and how to set this person up to be most successful.

Virtual leaders have this ability to do this with anyone, anywhere.

- Individuals are more engaged when they know their purpose.
 - Effective communication means understanding who they work with and how to leverage strengths.
- Teams are more effective when they establish genuine relationships.
 - Effective communication builds connections, creates measurable outcomes, and links tasks to outcomes.
- Organizations that promote transparent relationships benefit from increased engagement, efficiency and mutual respect.
 - Effective communication creates the structure to predict, plan, and prepare.

Leaders are clear on the outcomes and flexible in the approach.

How Virtual Leadership Is Different

Effective leaders appreciate that managing and leading remotely is different.

To compete in a global economy, everyone needs to be “on board.” Virtual leaders first grow themselves and then support others’ development. Virtual leaders encourage each member of their team to be aligned, invested and inspired. The tools in this ebook are crucial to those next steps to move forward.

“I started my first company from the ground up... After selling it, I launched XXX company and was completely blindsided by the differences of virtual leadership. My wife calls it my million-dollar lesson in communication.”

Virtual leaders know that

- Individuals feel valued when they see that their contributions have an impact.
 - Acknowledge the individuals’ accomplishments; celebrate the small wins.
- Teams must trust and respect one another even more to collaborate virtually.
 - Promote open communication, engage in active “debates,” and leverage team members’ strengths.
- Organizations that build transparency also build trust.
 - Engage the teams, invest in your communication.

Virtual leaders are prepared. They:

- *Encourage open communication.*
- *Set clear expectations.*
- *Define the parameters before the meeting.*
- *Understand the best way and time to contact each person (email, phone, text, time zones, night, day).*

Virtual leaders embrace new strategies to connect, communicate, collaborate and create.



The Consequences of Not Changing

Think back to a “nightmare” project, a dysfunctional team, or a draining assignment:

- What was the energy like?
- What was your motivation for working?
- How long did this project take?

We can all recall a workplace communication challenge. Either the ideas were not engaging, the colleagues were not invested, or the outcomes felt irrelevant.

Working virtually magnifies the importance of communication:

- When we don’t know colleagues as well, we make assumptions which may or may not be true.
- When we can’t see them in person and we miss body language - 55% of communication is body language.⁷
- When we have fewer opportunities for informal conversation, we are less engaged in conversations.

Additional Costs of Being Detached and Disengaged

The negative consequences extend beyond our productivity and result. They are compounded by the negative impact on our health, well-being and relationships.

Almost 1 in 5 employees (19%) have quit a previous position because of job stress.⁸

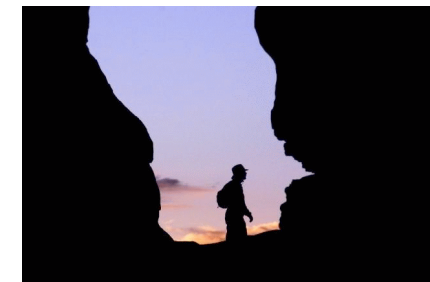
Most leaders fail to realize that within their organization:

- 88% of workers have great ideas to improve their work effectiveness and efficiency, yet only 15% offer them.⁶
- 53% of employees do not trust upper management.⁶

Now, think for a moment: How would it feel...

- ...to work on projects where you knew their purpose and could see the impact?
- ...to collaborate with people you knew were invested?
- ...where you knew your coworkers strengths and leveraged them regularly?
- ...to inspire others even more?

Virtual leaders determine the costs and leverage the resources.



⁷ Albert Mehrabian. In Wikipedia. Retrieved November 4, 2009, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Mehrabian

⁸ American Institute of Stress. (2000 Integra Survey). Retrieved November 4, 2009. <http://www.stress.org/job.htm>

4 Steps to Mastering Virtual Effectiveness

1. Care to Collaborate

Virtual leaders take time to know who they are collaborating with, what matters most to them, how to set the other person up for success, and where to leverage synergies.

2. Connect to Communicate

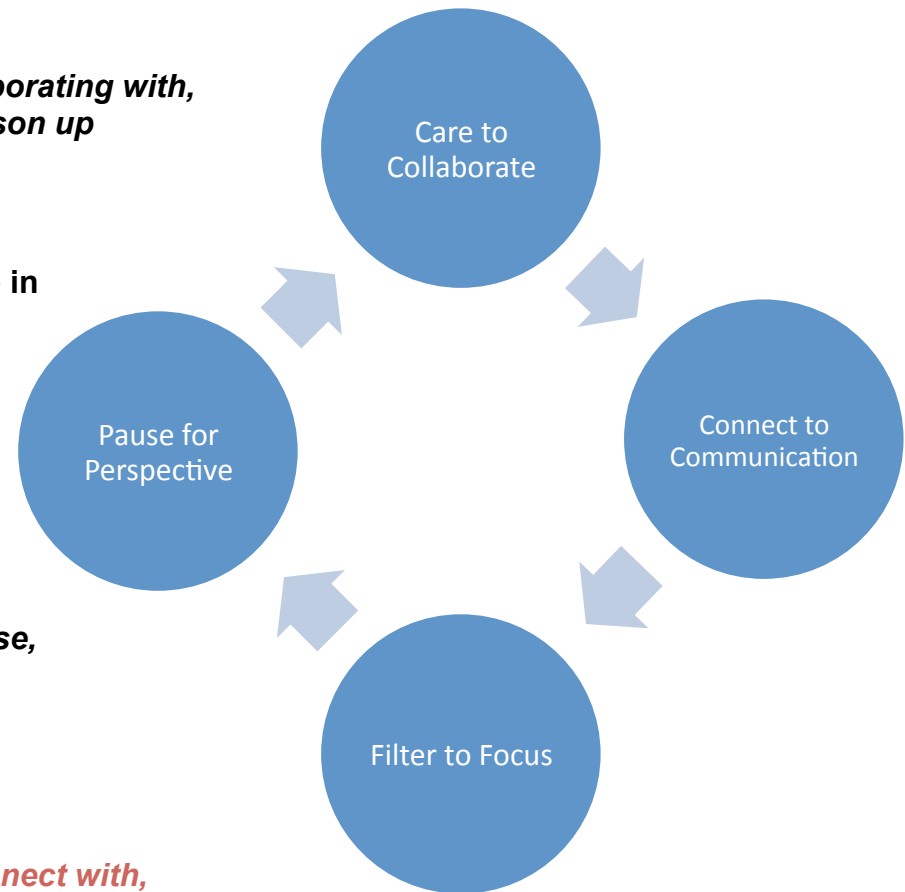
Virtual leaders take time to proactively communicate in order to maximize their productivity.

3. Filter to Focus

Virtual leaders filter incoming information, focus on what matters most, and then, are flexible in how they achieve these outcomes.

4. Pause for Perspective

Virtual leaders know that they must take time to pause, get perspective, recalibrate plans and celebrate.



The process is iterative, with new people to connect with, upgraded technology, more ways to filter, and constantly shifting perspectives.

Care → Collaborate

How often do you...

- Know who you are collaborating with?
- Learn what matters most for them?
- Set the other person up for success, before you set yourself up for success?
- Identify where there are synergies?

Virtual leaders take time to *proactively*:

1. Listen intently to understand their beliefs and values.
2. Know that within each associate is a creative and resourceful team member.
3. Lead your team the way they respond most effectively. Balance the Golden and Platinum Rules.

The Golden Rule vs. the Platinum Rule

When speaking to large groups of executives, I often ask “what is the Golden Rule?” The first time I asked, I was startled by the response. In unison, they called out “He with the most gold wins!” Not exactly, what I learned at Sunday School....

Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would want done unto you.” If you want to be treated with respect, treat others with that same respect. Although I agree with the tenants of this practice, I no longer believe it is as effective as the Platinum Rule.

Platinum Rule: “Do unto others as they would want done unto them.” So if you like your steak medium rare, great. When you have a houseguest, make sure that you understand how they like their steak cooked. Sounds quite simple, but it is surprisingly challenging.

- *Whose rules do you live by?*
- *Whose perspectives are you open to?*
- *What is it like to give gifts that people want rather than what you want to give?*



Demonstrate caring by having open body posture. Be aware of how you present yourself to others. What would make them even more eager to work with you?

- Uncross your arms during a conversation.
- Nod yes/no while discussing with the person.



*“People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.”
~ John Maxwell*

Connect → Communicate

How often do you...

- Listen to learn, before you speak?
- Understand who your audience is, what matters to the listener, how to best connect their way?
- Assess the impact of your communication?

Virtual leaders take time to *proactively*:

1. Understand who their audience is, aka Stephen Covey's "Seek First to Understand" (Connect with the Who).
2. Determine what matters most to them (Connect with the What).
3. Identify how to communicate in ways that resonate (Connect with the How).



Physiology

What does it look like when someone is disinterested in a conversation? Do they have good posture, or do they fidget? Do they stretch or slouch?

- Use your hands to portray location and time.
- Maintain alert and engaging posture.

Leaders connect with others through communication (physiology, tone, or language).

Customize Your Communication

A client and successful entrepreneur shared how he uses a different technology to connect with each of his three partners. He knows that:

- *Ralph is an email guy.*
- *Clark is into instant messaging.*
- *Matt is a texter.*

Mark is a **Virtual Leader** who understands the Platinum Rule. He took the time to:

- (1) Connect with his associates.
- (2) Figure out their preferences.
- (3) Communicate "their way."

Filter → Focus

How often do you...

- Actively “delete” unnecessary noise (emails, conversations, websites, chatter)?
- Know what result you must accomplish, within what specific time frame?
- Read (emails, paper, websites) with a clear outcome or timeframe?
- Have clear outcomes and timeframes for managing your email inbox?

Exponential Information Curve

There has been an exponential growth in information and communication over the past 10 years. And, it will continue to get worse. Virtual leaders know that they must have a system for filtering what gets their attention and focusing on what matters most.

Virtual leaders take time to *proactively*:

1. Filter incoming information.
2. Build systems to organize information so as to “access” when needed.
3. Focus on the outcomes.
4. Be flexible on the approach.

There is so much coming in, so much to focus on...

1. Capture results to accomplish.
2. Identify tasks to achieve outcomes.
3. Sort things to be done at the same time/place.
4. Prioritize your list.



Our focus is directly related to our physiology. What does a sad person look like? What does a happy person look like? What are both of these people focusing on? When we change our physiology we shift our focus.

- Leave your desk once an hour to move around.
- Take stretch breaks.
- Move your hands or walk around while brainstorming.



Filter the volume, variety, velocity, and veracity of information in order to focus on the outcome.

Pause for Perspective

How often do you...

- Find stillness – within you? Around you?
- Step back from daily demands to focus on what matters most?
- Identify outcomes to achieve vs. “tasks to do”?

Virtual leaders take time to proactively:

1. Get perspective: take a deep breath and analyze the situation.
2. Recalibrate plans give and get feedback.
3. Reward, rejuvenate, and renew: In our “go, go, go” culture, *celebration* is necessary.



Are you on the balcony or the dance floor of life?

Too much time amid the action, moving, and shaking of life can be exhausting. Ronald Heifetz uses a phenomenal metaphor in *Leadership without Easy Answers* that compares time on the dance floor and time observing from the balcony. Virtual leaders know how to balance their time between actions on the dance floor and perspectives on the balcony.

TIP: Schedule TOOTs regularly
(TIME out of TIME)

This is a great tool used with clients. Time to be still, to step back, to see all that is. A two minute TOOT could save you two hours later, and yet we are living in a world that is so schedule that we rarely have space.



Taking time to pause is a mental, physical and emotional activity.

- Shake your body out before pausing. Notice where you have tension, where you are holding emotions.
- What surroundings or physical environments help you get perspective?

Pause where you are, see what you have accomplished and recalibrate to ensure your outcomes.

Integration

Strategies for becoming more virtually effective are important. Turning these insights into action is essential. Next, we must identify what we want to achieve. To fully leverage these strategies, we must understand what we want to achieve (and why!), what we did in the past, and what specific actions we must take to expedite the outcomes.

Ideas → **Action**

Virtual leaders maximize their learning by integrating insights and applying them to their own life. Reading this ebook is a good step; creating an action plan of how you will apply these ideas and following through is *OUTSTANDING*.

What will you do differently?

Why you must do it differently?

How will you achieve your outcomes?

Remember, virtual leaders know how to:

1. **Care to Collaborate**
2. **Connect to Communicate**
3. **Filter to Focus**
4. **Pause for Perspective**

Identify Role Models → Imitate Their Strategies

- Recognize who has successfully achieved what you want.
- Identify how they achieved these outcomes: What are their strategies? What can you imitate?
- Clarify your next steps to achieve your outcomes.

*What you have done in the past has gotten you to where you are;
to move forward to the next step you will have to do something different.*

Application

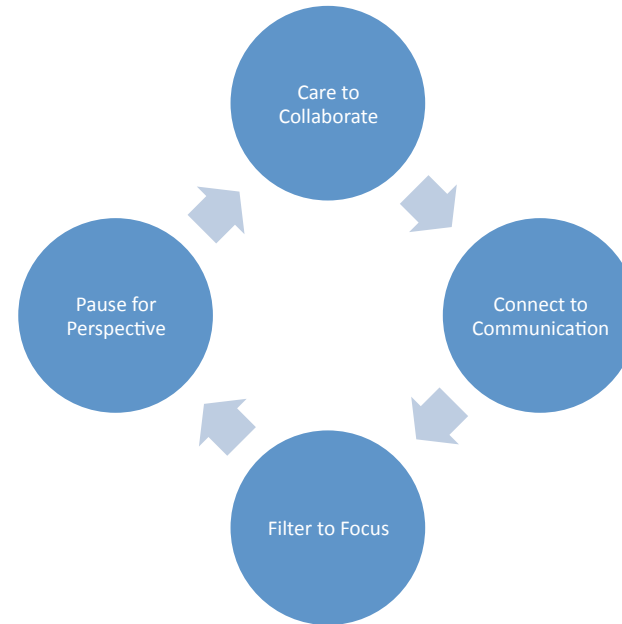
Take 2 minutes to complete this and ensure you integrate all that you have learned and maximize your virtual leadership.

	Who are your role models? What are their success strategies?	What are your outcomes? What else do you want to achieve?	What have you done in the past? What worked? What didn't work?	What must change? What will be different? What new results will occur?
Care				
Connect				
Focus				
Pause				

Committing to Virtual Effectiveness

Know what is important to yourself and others, and ultimately how to maintain and motivate. You will be an even more effective leader when you continue to:

- 1. Care to Collaborate**
- 2. Connect to Communicate**
- 3. Filter to Focus**
- 4. Pause for Perspective**



How are you inspired to lead virtual effectiveness? What new conversations or interactions will you have? What relationships will you build and strengthen? **Find time every day to strengthen your virtual effectiveness with colleagues and associates.** You do not need to limit your virtual effectiveness only to work. You can use these applicable and versatile techniques with your friends, family and new relationships! The key is to DO IT... and DO IT YOUR WAY!

Practice makes permanent. What type of virtual effectiveness are you practicing?

About AIM Leadership, LLC



Camille L. Preston is Founder and Principal of AIM Leadership, the coaching and training company focused on improving individual, team and organizational effectiveness by developing leadership capabilities from the inside out. Through writing, speaking, training and effective coaching, AIM provides innovative, real world, and strategic solutions.

Dr. Preston has communicated to leaders and executives around the world, coached individuals, developed curricula, delivered trainings and facilitated strategic retreat sessions for organizations and teams within the corporate, private, government and non-profit sectors. She utilizes her knowledge of human development and psychology to continually create dynamic learning environments that ensure a lasting impact.

An avid learner, Dr. Preston has a doctorate in psychology from the University of Virginia, an executive coaching certificate from Georgetown University, advanced leadership training from Center for Creative Leadership, NLP and Neurostrategies certification from SRI, and is certified to administer numerous assessments.

Questions, comments, or more information contact Camille directly at cp@aimleadership.com.

Please visit <http://www.aimleadership.com/aim-resources/ebooks1> and download other ebooks.
(free code: Citrix*stars)

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AIM Leadership provides services catered to both profits and non-profit organizations. Camille and her associates thrive on helping individuals, teams and organizations leverage their unique strengths while developing their leadership capacity. AIM develops specific programs catered to individuals, small firms, and large organizations. Contact us for more information.

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