![Harvard Business Publishing]

Leading Virtual Teams to Real Results

by Jeanne C Meister and Karie Willyerd

If a leader is like a conductor, as Peter Drucker said, then are virtual leaders like virtual conductors?
In this video, Eric Whitacre conducts a virtual choir in a performance of "Lux Aurumque."
This moving virtual symphony, a collaboration between more than 185 singers from 12 countries, has been viewed more than a million times since it was uploaded in March.
As Whitacre describes in his blog, "I made my own conductor track, filming it in complete silence, hearing the music only in my head. Then I watched the video and played in the piano accompaniment part to my conductor track. Then I offered the sheet music as a free download. As singers began posting their individual tracks, I called for 'auditions' for the soprano solo." Whitacre had already created a different video, called "Sleep," where he cut different tracks of remote singers together. The goal with "Lux Aurumque" was to have the singers—none of whom could hear each other, of course—actually *responding* to his direction.

"There is a lot of rubato in my conducting (slowing down, speeding up) and some very specific dynamic gestures. And the singers responded beautifully...When I saw the finished video for the first time I actually teared up. The intimacy of all the faces, the sound of the singing, the obvious poetic symbolism about our shared humanity and our need to connect; all of it completely overwhelmed me."

If a conductor can work virtually, bringing over 100 musicians together in a way that recognized the individuals even more than a live performance might, what can virtual managers do to create such excellence of performance while touching our "shared humanity?"

The reality of virtual leadership is apparent. Teams are increasingly spread across space and time, providing the benefit of obtaining talent anywhere in the world and allowing 24-7 work progression. However, virtual workers can feel a sense of isolation, and building bonded teams becomes more difficult when there are few opportunities to meet face-to-face.

Here are some tips of how leaders are using social technologies to work virtually:

- Rich media, such as live virtual meetings, can make virtual interactions feel more realistic;
- Frequent contact keeps connections to virtual workers fresh;
- Mixing media, such as the use of forums, vlogs, blogs, and discussion groups allows people to interact in a style most comfortable to them
- Meeting face-to-face at least once helps create a bond that can be connected virtually;
- Simple technologies, such as a personal phone call can help motivate a virtual worker, knowing they are not out of sight, out of mind.

Surely many of you are facing this new world of either working or leading virtually. What has worked for you? What do you wish your manager/team leader would do to help you feel more connected to the rest of the team? Share your experience here so we can learn collectively on how to build a high-performing virtual team.

Comment and read the complete article at http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2010/06/leading_virtual_teams_to_real.html

Additionally, here are three essential resources to manage and lead your virtual teams:

1. **[white paper] Improving the Productivity of Virtual Employees**
   by Citrix Online, GoToMeeting
   How web conferencing enables managers to get virtual employees and teams on the same page faster, move projects along more efficiently and make employees more productive

2. **[webinar] Five Strategies for Leading Diverse, Distributed Teams to Success**
   by Forrester and Citrix Online
   Learn why managing modern teams challenges most leaders, best practices for managing diverse, distributed teams, and what you can do in the next 90 days to improve diverse, distributed team dynamics

3. **[white paper] Managing People You Can't See: Connecting and Engaging in a Distributed Workforce**
   Learn about the contemporary work experience and current shift in corporate hiring Understanding a team's connectivity and technology support requirements (including video), and how managers enhance the engagement of distributed employees

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