



Telework and Telecommuting



Parts 1 & 2

Participant Guide

Columbus Technical College
Economic Development
Corporate Training Materials

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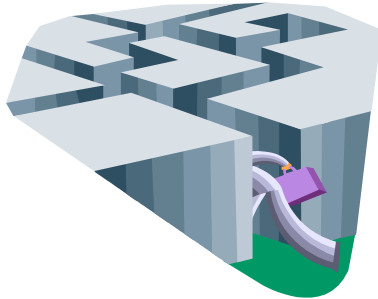
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Teams should be able to act with the same unity of purpose and focus as a well motivated individual.

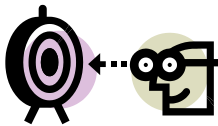
Bill Gates

Module One: Getting Started



For some people, working from home can seem like a dream opportunity. But they may not realize that this opportunity comes with a great amount of responsibility and challenges. There are certain advantages to working at home such as flexible schedules and shorter, or no commute time. Unfortunately, there are also some disadvantages to telecommuting such as no face-time with your supervisor and no direct feedback and, communication issues with teammates. This workshop will help you stay motivated in your 'office' while still feeling connected to the rest of the team.

Workshop Objectives



Research has consistently demonstrated that when clear goals are associated with learning, it occurs more easily and rapidly. With that in mind, let's review our goals for today.

At the end of this workshop, participants should be able to:

- Know the skills required for working outside the office
- Learn keys to proper self-management
- Learn ways to manage time efficiently
- Know different methods of organization and planning
- Identify various forms of communication and their proper use
- Address and resolve challenges that teleworkers often face



Pre-Assignment

Complete this worksheet before the class begins. Make note of what you hope to learn or goals you want to address after the class.

1.) Have you ever been a part of a teleworker or virtual team?

2.) What do you think are the benefits of having teleworker teams? Disadvantages?

3.) What obstacles do we face when we try to communicate with a teleworker team?

4.) What do you hope to learn from this course? _____

Any other thoughts: _____



All of the top achievers I know are life-long learners, looking for new skills, insights, and ideas.

Denis Waitley

Module Two: Core Skills Required



As with any job position, certain skills and abilities are needed to be a successful teleworker and member of a virtual team. Two of the most important skills for the successful teleworker are time management and organization skills. The ability to work well under minimal supervision and function with different types of technology are also important!

Self-Management



Whether working from home because of choice or out of necessity, you must learn to self-manage. A manager cannot always be present and cannot always watch over your shoulder. You must be able to monitor your own progress and be able to keep track of your assignments and deadlines. If you do not have basic self-management skills, then you won't be able to function effectively in a virtual office.

Common tools for self-management:

- Make a schedule and stick to it
- Keep a calendar of important dates and deadlines
- Check in with team members periodically to stay in the loop



Time Management



When working with little supervision, it is important that you are able to manage your time effectively. This does not necessarily mean you must manage every minute or try to force yourself to stay focused. Time management means recognizing when you have deadlines and knowing how long it will take you to finish a project or assignment. Sometimes you can let in too many distractions or try to take on too many duties at once. This in turn can cause you to manage your work time poorly and fail to do a good job. Your manager cannot completely manage your time and resources for you. Instead, he/she should provide support and offer advice on ways to stay focused and on track. Many employees have the knowledge to manage their time effectively but may need a reminder on how to use them.

Organizing and Planning



When working in your home office, you need to be sure that all files and assignments (paper or electronic) are fully organized, which is a form of self-management. Ensuring that the office is always organized can boost productivity and reduce errors made by misplaced files or a forgotten assignment. Planning is also an important part of organization because you need to be able to manage your time and resources – especially since you do not have a manager to supervise you at all times. Consider utilizing a universal or adaptable filing system to organize your work for easy access. Also feel free to utilize different methods of planning and organizing your time, such as day planners, email timers, or reminder systems.

Common tips for better organization:

- Create a pattern in your day to organize and plan different tasks
- Keep a calendar or planner with important dates and reminders
- Plan ahead and know what assignments or deadlines are approaching
- Set up your email account to remind you periodically of important dates
- Use a filing/storage that can be adapted in case there are any changes or modifications



Communication



Communication can be difficult with a virtual team. You will not only deal with traditional communication issues among team members and management but will probably face additional problems resulting in added stress. Because your peers can't come to you when they need to talk (or vice versa), the extra time and effort needed to communicate can be a cause of friction. It is important for everyone to be aware of the various methods of communication available to them, including email, phone, video conferencing, etc. Employees should know how to use each method of communication and what kind of information they can be used for. Be open and clear about what you want from your teammates and let them know of ways they can reach you if they have a problem.

Example forms of communication for teleworkers:

- Email
- Instant messaging
- Phone call
- Text messaging
- Video conference (i.e. Zoom, Skype, WebEx, etc.)

Case Study

Jason is trying to select a new employee for his team of teleworkers. He knows that the candidate must have great skills in self-management and communication. The employee must be able to work from home with minimal supervision. Jason interviewed Stacey, who was from a different department. Her manager had given her a good recommendation based on her self-management and time management skills in her current position. She has managed many of her own projects and works great with other employees.

When Jason asked about how she felt working from home, Stacey was excited and said she already had a home office she uses when not at work. Jason felt as though Stacey would make a great addition to his teleworker team and welcomed her aboard.



Module Two: Review Questions

1. Why is self-management important for teleworkers?
 - a) They have to work on their own
 - b) They have to work odd hours
 - c) They have to work in groups
 - d) They have a test on it
2. What is one tool of self-management?
 - a) Creating different stacks of work
 - b) Throwing unneeded items in a box
 - c) Piling files on top of the desk to do
 - d) Writing deadlines on a calendar
3. What is one aspect of time management?
 - a) Learning about the assignment
 - b) Recognizing deadlines
 - c) Completing the weekly reports
 - d) Conserving energy
4. What is one tool of time management?
 - a) Filing reports in a cabinet
 - b) Ordering more office supplies
 - c) Creating a daily schedule
 - d) Changing the copy paper
5. What is a benefit of making plans ahead of time?
 - a) It reduces errors in plans
 - b) It gives the employee something to do
 - c) It creates room for chaos
 - d) It makes the employee feel more important
6. What is one form of organization?
 - a) Hanging up your coat
 - b) Moving files to another desk
 - c) Modifying your desk area
 - d) Emptying the trash can



7. Why is communication important to teleworkers?
 - a) They have to talk to their teammates even if they don't want to
 - b) They want to make lots of friends
 - c) They want to work alone
 - d) They must work together although they're separated
8. Which of the following is a common tool of communication?
 - a) Scrapbooking
 - b) Emailing
 - c) Reading
 - d) Blogging
9. What position was Jason trying to hire for?
 - a) Administration secretary
 - b) Virtual team manager
 - c) Office manager
 - d) Teleworker team member
10. Stacey said she already had what at home?
 - a) A home office
 - b) Her own copier
 - c) A spare bedroom
 - d) A filing cabinet



Module Three: Self-Management (I)



While self-management can mean different things in different professions, teleworking requires the ability to manage job duties and responsibilities on your own, with very little supervision from management. A great deal of self-discipline and self-awareness is required when working from home.

Solving Problems on Your Own

Teleworkers often face many obstacles when working in an office away from the central location. With no immediate access to management, it is necessary to learn how to solve problems independently. For minor issues, such as computer malfunctions or even an unhappy customer, you should be prepared to solve the problem and try to prevent it from happening again. The key is to make sure you have the necessary resources to solve difficulties that can and will arise. Work with your supervisor and team members to create action plans covering common issues. Seek guidance regarding which problems you are allowed to address and which ones require assistance from a manager.

Some questions to ask when trying to solve problems might include:

- “What has happened?”
- “What would it take to resolve this?”
- “Can I do this on my own – or do I need help?”
- “What is the next step I should take?”



Being and Staying Motivated



Motivation is one of the key aspects of being successful at work, especially as a member of a virtual team. It has been shown that motivated employees are happier, more enthusiastic, and more productive. Lack of motivation reduces your ability to function in your home office and the ability to be a good team member. It's not uncommon for our motivation to wane after beginning an assignment—but think about what you've accomplished and the positive impact the assignment might have. Periods of low motivation are normal, but it is important to make sure it is only temporary. Do not allow yourself to remain unmotivated for an extended length of time.

Keys for staying motivated:

- Establish your goals
- Create a plan of action to achieve these goals
- Feel good about your achievements and build on them
- Review any mistakes made and learn from them

You Have More Freedom – Don't Abuse It

Any truthful employee will tell you that when management is not present, productivity can often be a challenge. Many of us become less focused on current assignments or duties – similar to “when the cat’s away, the mice will play”. Whether a manager is present or not however, assignments are still due, and employees are still subject to reviews and evaluations. Company supplies still belong to the company and are not for personal use. Do not use the company copier to print flyers or the phone to make personal calls. It is important to manage your time and activities in the same manner as you would in any other office. Do not abuse the new freedom you have been given.



You and Only You are Accountable

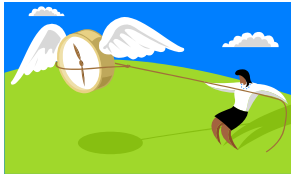


Working from home can seem like a leisurely job with few problems, but that is not always the case. You are working as an individual entity (when not working as a team player) and are held accountable for your work, or lack thereof.

Unfortunately, you cannot just fade into a sea of faces or blame someone else when a mistake is made. Do not allow outside distractions or problems to affect your work performance. Remember, you are accountable for actions and conduct in the office. Remain focused on all of your duties. Working at home should not

diminish your job performance!

Case Study



Kathy is a teleworker who works at home several miles away from the office. She's had her fair share of problems in her home office that she had to know how to handle, such as the time her phone line went down or the time her computer froze all her files. Kathy knew things like that would be part of working at home. She admitted to her manager that she was having trouble

staying motivated and asked for some advice and guidance. She realized she was spending too much time doing non work-related tasks and needed to make better use of her time. After speaking with her manager, Kathy made herself a daily schedule to stick with and better manage her activities. "Now I know I'll stay on track!" she told herself.



Module Three: Review Questions

1. Teleworkers can solve problems on their own if they have what?
 - a) Resources
 - b) Copy supplies
 - c) Up to date telephones
 - d) A company car
2. What is an example of a problem an employee can handle on his/her own?
 - a) A computer crashes
 - b) The office catches fire
 - c) A paper jam in the copier
 - d) The internet server goes down
3. A lack of motivation in employees can lead to what?
 - a) Decreased absences
 - b) Decreased productivity
 - c) Increased anger
 - d) Increased vacations
4. What is one method of staying motivated?
 - a) Writing sticky notes
 - b) Taking on more assignments
 - c) Taking a vacation
 - d) Establishing clear goals
5. When management is not around, employees tend to be _____.
 - a) Happier
 - b) More productive
 - c) More laid back
 - d) Lonely
6. Teleworkers should be able to manage their time without what?
 - a) A big calendar
 - b) A set schedule
 - c) A computer
 - d) A manager present



7. Only _____ can be held accountable for their work.
- a) The employee
 - b) The manager
 - c) The coworker
 - d) The CEO
8. The employee cannot blame _____ for not being accountable.
- a) Themselves
 - b) Outside distractions
 - c) Their performance
 - d) Their time management
9. What was one instance that Kathy had to handle on her own?
- a) Her phone line went down
 - b) Her printer ran out of ink
 - c) Her copier stopped working
 - d) Her monthly report got rained on
10. What did Kathy do to help manage her day better?
- a) Hire a personal trainer
 - b) Create a schedule
 - c) Wake up earlier
 - d) Eat a bigger breakfast



With self-discipline, anything is possible.

Theodore Roosevelt

Module Four: Self-Management (II)



Self-management can cover a wide range of aspects and situations. Self-discipline plays a large factor in how we handle our everyday activities and actions. Often, we may ignore what needs to be fixed first since we do not want to admit our own faults or shortcomings. But a part of self-discipline is being able to realize what must be done to correctly manage ourselves.

Recognize and Remove Bad Habits

Honestly, when someone asks us to name one of our bad habits, many of us will answer that we don't have any. This type of defensiveness, however, prohibits personal and professional development and



often impedes our progress towards goal attainment. When considering a typical workday, make a list of the bad practices you exhibit, such as procrastinating or taking short cuts when writing a report. Identify ways these habits are hindering completion of assignments or how they are affecting your overall work. Then create an action plan as to how you can eliminate these practices from your work routine.

Plan ways to finish work ahead of time or to reduce the amount of time required to enter a report.

Sometimes admitting what we do wrong can be a challenge, but once we do and take the steps needed to fix them, we'll not only feel more confident about ourselves, but our job abilities as well. Sometimes acknowledging bad habits can be a challenge, but it is a critical first step in personal improvement, building self-confidence, and increasing job performance.

Ask yourself:

- "What am I doing that is hindering my work?"
- "Is this something I can change?"
- "How does this habit affect me?"



Reflect on Mistakes and Learn from Them



Many of us have been led to believe that making a mistake is a bad thing and should be avoided at all costs. However, the opposite is true. Making mistakes is something that will always happen and can serve as a learning tool when viewed from the right perspective. In the office, when we make an error, one of the first steps is to determine what caused the mistake. Was it something you did or something that could have been changed? Then, reflect on it and determine what you can do to learn from the mistake. Is this something you can avoid in the future? Is this something that you can handle differently the next time it happens? Don't let mistakes make you feel like a failure – instead, view them as a source of continued learning and growth.

Establish Good Habits



After identifying our mistakes and bad habits at work, we are ready to engage in some positive thinking! Establishing good practices at work is just as important as identifying the negative ones. The key to establishing good habits is in knowing how to control yourself in your environment and maintaining these practices over time. First, determine what beneficial habits you want to establish at work, such as trying to complete projects on time or remembering to run software checks on your company computer. Determine what you need to do to make this a routine, such as writing it down or adding it to a schedule. Don't be afraid to put your new plan into action. Repetition is the key to all learning, so by repeating your new action plans and improving old behaviors, you will eventually develop persistently good habits.

Tips for creating good habits:

- Identify what you want to change
- Write reminders to follow in the beginning
- Fit new actions into your routine until they become habit
- Give yourself ample time to adjust, usually between 30-60 days



Be Assertive with Yourself



A manager or supervisor will not always be present, so it is important to be assertive with yourself to ensure that work gets done. When planning your work schedule, make decisions about what needs to be done and how it will be accomplished. Be mindful that failing to be assertive and focused will lead to incomplete assignments, tasks, and duties. You control your own actions and must independently make assertive decisions to manage your time to ensure success.

Keys to being assertive:

- Say what you are going to do and stick with it
- Remember to focus on the task at hand – don't get side-tracked
- Hold yourself accountable for these actions or mistakes that can occur

Case Study

Joshua was enjoying his new position as a teleworker. He liked working from home and worked well



without being supervised. But Joshua knew he had a bad habit of coming in a few minutes late or taking a few extra minutes at lunch. It always affected his daily schedule and his ability to stay on track. When Joshua reviewed how his days had been going, he decided to make an effort to change this habit. The next week, he came into work ten minutes early and only took his allotted lunch time. He was assertive with himself and stuck to his routine. At the end of the week, Joshua noticed a big improvement with his productivity and found extra time in the day

to stay ahead. He was very happy with what was accomplished by a slight change in his work practices.



Module Four: Review Questions

1. How can removing our bad habits make us feel?
 - a) Depressed
 - b) More bored
 - c) More confident
 - d) Angry
2. What is one way to identify a bad habit?
 - a) Wait for someone else to point it out
 - b) Make a list of the consequences from it
 - c) See if we find them on our own
 - d) Do nothing
3. A common myth about making mistakes is that they should be _____.
 - a) Done in public
 - b) Done in private
 - c) Done all the time
 - d) Avoided
4. After making a mistake, the employee should do what?
 - a) Reflect on what happened
 - b) Try to hide it
 - c) Blame it on someone else
 - d) Claim it won't happen again
5. What is the key to developing good habits?
 - a) Controlling others around you
 - b) Controlling yourself in your environment
 - c) Stop making mistakes all the time
 - d) Make sure your work is perfect
6. What is the first step to begin developing a good habit?
 - a) Stopping the bad habit altogether
 - b) Getting someone else to do it for you
 - c) Waiting for the right idea
 - d) Determining what you want



7. What is one consequence of teleworkers not being assertive?
 - a) They will begin to not like themselves
 - b) Their assignments may be ignored
 - c) Their coworkers may not like them
 - d) They will become bored
8. What is one way an employee can be assertive?
 - a) Say what you're going to do and then do it
 - b) Write ideas down in a journal
 - c) Talk to a friend about it
 - d) Email the idea to everyone
9. What was one bad habit that Joshua had at work?
 - a) Leaving early
 - b) Taking a nap on his desk
 - c) Coming in late
 - d) Forgetting to refill the copier
10. What was one benefit Joshua saw after creating his good habit?
 - a) More energy
 - b) Increased productivity
 - c) Less stress
 - d) A pay increase



Module Five: Time Management (I)

Managing our time effectively is a choice we must make in our professional lives. Managing our time successfully can make the difference between completing projects and falling behind in our responsibilities. Teleworkers need to be especially aware of time management because they are solely responsible for their work and productivity. Working from home generally means you are even more accountable for ensuring your assignments are completed as required.



Build a Little Flexibility into Your Schedule

Teleworkers can not always have a schedule that is set in stone. Many things in life are beyond our control, but we can learn to cope with and adjust our daily work schedule accordingly. Things will happen at work, such as the computer malfunctioning or the phone lines going down, but the key is to not let it affect your work—accept it and adapt. We can each control how we react to a problem or situation. That's why it is important to have a flexible schedule and to be mindful that things can, and probably will, change. Be prepared to change or adjust plans accordingly and don't rely on anything being permanent. By having an alternative/back up plan and accepting what you can control rather than what you can't, you will feel more empowered and less likely to let it affect your job performance.



Identify and Remove Time Wasters

When working remotely, it is easy to become distracted and waste time on trivial things. Time wasters can occur at any time and often without our awareness. These diversions can be personal, such as checking text messages or making personal calls, or even professional in nature, such as taking extra time to look for a file or project sheet. Take a few minutes to identify what actions or activities are distracting you during the day and wasting your valuable time. Set a reasonable goal for eliminating these distractions from your workday. Identifying and removing these distractions will improve your focus and productivity.



Four common time wasters and distractions:

- Excessive checking of email/text/phone messages
- Making personal phone calls
- Extra time spent away from your work area
- Extra time spent looking for things

Different Time Zones



Virtual teams can have a hard time working together due to logistical issues such as different locations and/or time zones and different work schedules. In many cases, time zones can range from 1-2 hours apart to almost a 12-hour difference! Working different hours and in different time zones, can throw off any employee's schedule. It helps for employees and managers to keep a log or chart of their team

members' locations and time zones, as well as potential hours they work during the day. This can serve as a 'cheat sheet' to keep up with optimal times to reach others. Learn the approximate time differences of each zone to accommodate members you are trying to reach. Remember that your 9:00 AM may not be the same for everyone else!

Using Free Time Wisely



In any position, there are often slow times or times when there isn't much work to be done. However, time is our most valuable asset and should not be wasted. One of the most over-looked aspects of time management is managing the extra time we may have. When the workday has slow times or periods of down time, this is not an excuse to goof off or take extra breaks. There is always something to be done in the office – the key is identifying it. Ensure that all projects and tasks are completed.

Next, focus on tasks that may have been pushed aside earlier or placed on the back burner. Finally, take another look at projects you've already completed to ensure accuracy. You may need a new balance of job duties if you have a great deal of free time each day. If this is the case, talk to your colleagues to see if they need any help. Also, talk to your manager to see if more work can be shifted to you; it may be a great opportunity to inquire about a raise or promotion.



Case Study

Alex and Nick are working together on a team project. Although they are in different offices, they work together through email, shared files and phone calls. Nick lives in a time zone that is two hours behind Alex's, so they know they have to work together during early hours and make sure the other one is on the same page. When Alex is working, he removes any food items he may have on his desk, since he knows this will distract him while working. Since Nick normally finishes his tasks faster than Alex, he uses that spare time to go over his assignment and study the upcoming project. Together, they efficiently manage their time to successfully finish their project without having to rush or worry about overlooking any details.



Module Five: Review Questions

1. Why is flexibility important in any schedule?
 - a) Short attention spans
 - b) Mean coworkers
 - c) Unexpected events
 - d) Late managers
2. Having a back-up plan for when things go wrong can make an employee feel _____.
 - a) Frustrated
 - b) Empowered
 - c) Worried
 - d) Happy
3. Removing time wasters from the day allows employees to do what?
 - a) Make more time for fun things
 - b) Add more things to their schedule
 - c) Take more breaks
 - d) Concentrate on work tasks
4. Which of the following is an example of a time waster?
 - a) Checking our cell phone for personal text messages
 - b) Filling the copy machine with more paper
 - c) Changing the empty ink cartridge in the printer
 - d) Adding labels to your file folders
5. The maximum number of hours between various time zones is what?
 - a) One hour
 - b) Twelve hours
 - c) Ten hours
 - d) Four hours
6. How can teleworkers cope with working in different time zones?
 - a) Trying to not talk to each other
 - b) Moving locations in the same time zone instead
 - c) Contacting teammates whenever they feel like it
 - d) Keeping track of the time difference for teammates



7. What is one thing employees can do during slow periods at work?
- a) Take more breaks
 - b) Surf the internet
 - c) Check over already completed assignments
 - d) Clean out the refrigerator
8. If an employee has a lot of downtime, they may need more _____.
- a) Responsibilities
 - b) Discipline
 - c) Complicated tasks
 - d) Time off
9. Nick lives in a time zone that is _____ hours behind Alex.
- a) Two
 - b) Three
 - c) One
 - d) Four
10. Alex removes what from his desk because it is distracting to him?
- a) Colorful pens
 - b) Scented candles
 - c) Food items
 - d) Old reports



Until we can manage time, we can manage nothing else.

Peter Drucker

Module Six: Time Management (II)



Effective time management results in numerous benefits. Teleworkers and virtual teams can benefit even more from these skills since they are responsible for managing their own time and assignments. By understanding what we spend our time on and creating goals to improve upon, employees can learn to prioritize and better manage their time.

The Urgent/Important Matrix



Great time management means being effective as well as efficient. Managing time effectively, and achieving the things that you want to achieve, means spending your time on things that are important and not just urgent. To do this, you need to distinguish clearly between what is urgent and what is important:

Important: These are activities that lead to achieving your goals and have the greatest impact on your life.

Urgent: These activities demand immediate attention but are often associated with someone else's goals rather than our own.

This concept, coined the Eisenhower Principle, is said to be how former US President Dwight Eisenhower organized his tasks. It was rediscovered and brought into the mainstream as the Urgent/Important Matrix by Stephen Covey in his 1994 business classic, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. The Urgent/Important Matrix is a powerful way of organizing tasks based on priorities. Using it helps you overcome the natural tendency to focus on urgent activities, so that you can have time to focus on what's truly important.



The Four Quadrants:



Urgent And Important: Activities in this area relate to dealing with critical issues as they arise and meeting significant commitments. *Perform these duties now.*

Important, But Not Urgent: These success-oriented tasks are critical to achieving goals. *Plan to do these tasks next.*

Urgent, But Not Important: These chores do not move you forward toward your own goals. Manage by delaying them, cutting them short, and rejecting requests from others. *Postpone these chores.*

Not Urgent And Not Important: These trivial interruptions are just a distraction, and should be avoided if possible. However, be careful not to mislabel things like time with family and recreational activities as not important. *Avoid these distractions altogether.*



Setting and Sticking to Deadlines



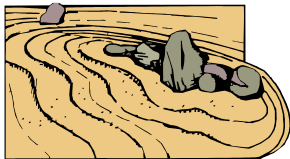
Every person responds to deadlines differently, but they are a key tool to better time management. When scheduling our time, deadlines provide a sense of structure and balance. By setting these goals, you are scheduling a concrete need, and it helps prevent the task from being forgotten or pushed aside. These target dates can provide a sense of accountability when it comes to things that need to be done, such as work assignments or projects. The next time you plan to do

something, set yourself a deadline first and stick to it. Write it on a calendar or program a reminder in your cell phone. You will find that when you take the time to establish a completion date, you will make the effort to stick with the task and see it through to completion.

Tips when setting deadlines:

- Determine what you want to finish and the completion day/time
- Set reminders for yourself – before the deadline arrives
- Pad the actual deadline – give yourself some extra wiggle room just in case
- Keep your deadlines in arm's reach – place reminders where you will regularly see them

The Glass Jar: Rocks, Pebbles, Sand and Water



There is a story about time management that uses a glass jar, rocks, stones, pebbles, sand, and water to illustrate how to plan your day. The glass jar represents the time you have each day, and each item that goes into it represents an activity with a priority relative to its size.

- **Rocks:** The general idea is to fill your glass jar first with rocks. Plan each day around your most important tasks that will propel you toward achieving your goals. These represent your highest priority projects and deadlines with the greatest value, often *important, but not urgent* tasks that move you toward your goals.
- **Pebbles:** Next, fill in the space between the rocks with pebbles. These represent tasks that are *urgent, and important*, but contribute less to important goals. Without proper planning, these tasks are often unexpected, and left unmanaged, can quickly fill your day. Working to reduce these tasks will give you more time to work toward your goals.
- **Sand:** Now add sand to fill your jar. In other words, schedule *urgent, but not important* tasks, only after important tasks. These activities are usually routine or maintenance tasks that do not directly contribute to your goals.



- **Water:** Finally, pour water into your jar. These trivial time-wasters are neither important nor urgent and take you away from working toward high return activities and your goals.

Many believe that this exercise demonstrates that no matter how full our schedule there is always room for more work. That is certainly not the case! This exercise demonstrates how when we manage our time, we need to put our 'big stones' (projects, assignments, responsibilities) in first and handle them first. We can then slowly add in our smaller problems and tasks that can fit in between. Take time to identify the 'big stones', pebbles, and sand in your job.

Recognize When You Are Procrastinating



Procrastination is a self-sabotaging behavior. It is often difficult to recognize when procrastination is costing valuable time and resources. As a result, you can easily persuade yourself that it's alright to delay a task because there is plenty of time. But this often results in rushing to finish assignments or struggling to turn things in on time. Instead, the next time you are given an assignment or other deadline, get to work on it right away. The first minor step to completion can

motivate you to keep going instead of continuing to delay.

Signs of procrastination:

- Waiting until a deadline approaches to begin a project
- Making excuses for delaying work

Nine Ways to Avoid Procrastination



Your ability to select the most important task at any given moment, and then to start on that task and get it done both quickly and well, will probably have the greatest impact on your success than any other quality or skill you can develop! If you nurture the habit of setting clear priorities and getting important tasks done quickly, most of your time management issues will simply fade away.

Here are some ways to get moving on those tough tasks.

Delete it. What are the consequences of not doing the task at all? Consider the Urgent/Important Matrix; maybe it doesn't need to be done in the first place.

Delegate. If the task is important, ask yourself if it's really something that you are responsible for doing in the first place. Know your job description and ask if the task is part of your responsibilities. Can the task be given to someone else?



Do it now. Postponing an important task that needs to be done only creates feelings of anxiety and stress. Do it as early in the day as you can.

Ask for advice. Asking for help from a trusted mentor, supervisor, coach, or expert can give you some great insight on where to start and the steps for completing a project.

Chop it up. Break large projects into milestones, and then into actionable steps. Huge things don't look as big when you break it down into small parts.

Obey the 15-minute rule. To reduce the temptation of procrastination, ensure each actionable step on a project should take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

Have clear deadlines. Assign yourself a deadline for projects and milestones and write it down in your day planner or calendar. Make your deadlines known to your team members who will hold you accountable.

Give yourself a reward. Celebrate the completion of project milestones and reward yourself for getting projects done on time. It will provide positive reinforcement and motivate you toward your goals.

Remove distractions. You need to establish a positive working environment that is conducive to getting your work done. Remove any distractions.

Case Study



Angela was feeling very overwhelmed with her stack of assignments that were about to be due. She had several projects due in the next few days and some due at the end of the week. She wasn't sure how to manage them all. Angela realized she had been procrastinating too long and needed to do something about it. So she took a few minutes and made a list of everything that needed to be done and marked which ones were urgent and which ones were more important. Looking over the list, she gave herself a deadline for each task and made a plan on how to stick to each one.

Angela knew she could only handle one at a time so she began to tackle each project one by one. By the end of the week, Angela let out a sigh of relief when she realized she had gotten everything finished on time. She was glad she did not let the growing pile of work make her feel too overwhelmed!



Module Six: Review Questions

1. How many boxes are used in the Urgent/Important Matrix?
 - a) Three
 - b) Four
 - c) Eight
 - d) Six
2. How does the Urgent/Important Matrix help us with time management?
 - a) It takes time out of our day from doing other things to create it
 - b) It creates a chore list for us to follow
 - c) It helps us decide what is important and what is not
 - d) It allows us to see what needs to be done and when
3. Setting deadlines for ourselves provides us with what?
 - a) Discipline
 - b) Boredom
 - c) Free time
 - d) More friends
4. One way to help stick to your deadline is to do what?
 - a) Try to remember on your own
 - b) Rely on a friend to remind you about it
 - c) Set a reminder system
 - d) Write a sticky note about it
5. What is said to go in the glass jar before anything else?
 - a) Tiny pebbles
 - b) The sand
 - c) Our 'big rocks'
 - d) The water
6. What is the last item that goes into the jar in the glass jar exercise?
 - a) Sand
 - b) Water
 - c) Pebbles
 - d) Rocks



7. Why can procrastination be hard to recognize?
 - a) We can see the consequences right away
 - b) We like it so much
 - c) We don't have time to stop and think about it
 - d) We make excuses why it's alright
8. What is one classic sign of procrastination?
 - a) Waiting to start on a project
 - b) Researching a future project now
 - c) Changing the ink in the printer before it runs out
 - d) Finishing an assignment early
9. Why was Angela feeling overwhelmed?
 - a) She had a big meeting coming up
 - b) She had to deliver a speech in front of an audience
 - c) She had to write a long essay
 - d) She had several projects due
10. How did Angela decide to manage all of her assignments?
 - a) Write them down in alphabetical order
 - b) Create a list and prioritize them
 - c) Finish each project at random
 - d) Ask a coworker to help her out



Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now.

Alan Lakein

Module Seven: Organizing and Planning (I)



Keeping track of our office activities makes efficient use of our time and keeps us focused throughout an assignment. For teleworkers, organizing and planning the workday plays a big role in time management and productivity. Being well organized allows progress to be planned and you can monitor how well you are doing. It also improves communication and collaboration among teammates.

Plan for Additional Stress



When we make our schedule, we often try to keep it as tight as possible thus leaving very little 'wiggle room'. But this can cause panic when something goes wrong, a last-minute task comes up, or a new project or ramp up is being implemented. Extra stress can come out of nowhere and if we do not plan or prepare for it, additional problems might emerge. When making your schedule or a list of upcoming assignments, take a few minutes to anticipate any challenges that can (and probably will) come up. Be sure to give yourself some 'wiggle room' in case something unexpected occurs. Being prepared for obstacles or sudden changes is valuable for planning and organization.



When to Seek Help



As employees, we often want additional work and responsibilities so we can demonstrate our capabilities and talents. Many of us want to exhibit that we can handle a large workload and produce great results. But on occasion, it is necessary to admit that we need help and must allow others to assist. When that happens, it is important to know who to contact and by what method. If you are a team member, you must know the appropriate person to contact based on the circumstances.

Signs you might need help include:

- Projects are piling up or becoming too numerous
- Job quality begins to decline
- Despite time management, projects are not being completed
- When you have no knowledge of a current project or assignment

Being Proactive – Not Reactive



Being prepared is a big part of planning and organizing, which is why it is best to be prepared for any mishap before it happens - be proactive rather than reactive. If we wait for something to go wrong before we act on it, it is difficult to think clearly about a solution and it may be too late to fix the problem. When planning and organizing your schedule, take time to recognize areas where you can be proactive. If you know the copier is low on paper or toner, replace both to avoid inevitable work disruptions. If the forecast calls for storms, be sure to back up all files in case of a power outage. Taking these steps will help prevent the problem from getting worse and eliminates disruption later. Being proactive will help keep you one step ahead and increases the odds that you will experience success.



Establish Priorities and Attainable Goals



Establishing priorities is a good method for keeping track of work. Setting goals is always a good practice, but we want to ensure that they are not so large and daunting that we scare ourselves away from trying to accomplish them. Focus on goals that you can realistically achieve and set attainable expectations for yourself. Start with small steps and after accomplishing those, set larger goals. Talk to your manager and team to determine what they want to achieve over a set amount of time (i.e. increased productivity, decreased absences). You can then set some personal goals (i.e. decreased data errors, increased sales quota) based on the team

objectives.

Tips for setting attainable goals:

- Start small – you can work up to the big stuff later.
- Decide what you want to change/obtain now.
- Determine what is in your power to change or control.

Case Study



Sheila was brand new to the teleworker team and was feeling anxious about starting some new assignments. After speaking with her manager, she decided to make some new goals and set her priorities for working in this new environment. Her manager told her what to do if she ever needed help and told her not to wait until she was too overwhelmed before saying something. When Sheila set up her home office, she went through and looked for anything that could cause problems later. She cleared off her desk area and ensured that she had plenty of supplies. Sheila knew unexpected problems would come up, but felt she could handle them on her own, and if not, she knew how to reach her manager.



Module Seven: Review Questions

1. Planning for additional stress means allowing what?
 - a) More problems
 - b) More discipline
 - c) A lunch break
 - d) "Wiggle room"
2. What is one way to prepare for additional stress?
 - a) Ask someone else what they think
 - b) Identify situations that could cause stress beforehand
 - c) Dive into projects without planning
 - d) Take more time off
3. When we need to seek help, we must know what?
 - a) Who to contact
 - b) What color car the manager drives
 - c) What the other coworkers are doing
 - d) Where to send office reports
4. What is one sign that could mean the employee needs to seek help?
 - a) They finish the project early
 - b) They try to take on more assignments
 - c) They don't understand the content of the assignment
 - d) They take too much time to finish assignments
5. What does it mean to be reactive?
 - a) Act after a problem happens
 - b) Examine a problem beforehand
 - c) Know the consequences of a situation
 - d) Take time to prevent something from happening
6. What does it mean to be proactive?
 - a) To award your top team performers
 - b) To fix a problem when it comes up
 - c) To act before a problem happens
 - d) To support your team players



7. Establishing priorities helps a teleworker do what?
 - a) Work faster
 - b) Finish projects on time
 - c) Set clear goals
 - d) Communicate with teammates
8. What is one tip for setting attainable goals?
 - a) Include your coworkers
 - b) Start small
 - c) Ask the manager for help
 - d) Plan big
9. How did Sheila prepared herself for working on the teleworker team?
 - a) Created a new home office
 - b) Established new goals and priorities
 - c) Made friends with the other teammates
 - d) Decided to transfer positions
10. What is one thing Sheila did that was proactive?
 - a) Made a list of assignments
 - b) Bought new uniform clothes
 - c) Redecorated her office area
 - d) Ensured she had plenty of supplies



Organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it's not all mixed up.

A. Milne

Module Eight: Organizing and Planning (II)



Organizing our home office or other workspace can have great benefits for our productivity. When we organize and plan for the physical space, we can access our materials sooner and don't have to search for things. When we organize our workflow, productivity increases, and we accomplish more throughout the day.

Setting Up Your Home Office

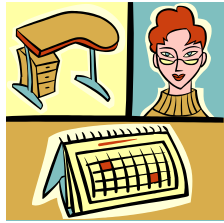


Organizing your office means more than just keeping pens and pencils together or putting things in a filing cabinet. The layout and design of the office can play a key role in how organized we can keep our work and projects. When in your workspace, design the layout so everything is within arm's reach. This can reduce time spent looking for items that are in another location. Keep your desk more organized by only keeping current projects in your work area.

Finished projects should be filed away in the appropriate place, while projects not yet started should not be in the work area. Ensure that all technical devices, such as computers and phones, are nearby and fully charged. If possible, keep them on a backup system in case of a power or server failure. For teleworkers, the flow of their home office can impact how they function since it is their main environment and only workspace.



Remove Unneeded or Distracting Items



Even after setting your mind to completing a task and checking it off your to do list, the smallest distraction can make you lose focus and stop working. Many teleworkers often have personal items everywhere, such as photos, personal bills or even a pile of laundry. It is important to remove any unneeded or distracting items from the work area and ensure that it is for professional use only. This can be hard to do when working from home, since your personal life is just on the other side of the door. When setting up a home office, evaluate the space and look for any items that could be distracting or that do not belong. Removing distractions will increase production and reduce the amount of time required to complete the same projects.

When Technology Fails



Teleworkers and virtual teams highly depend on technology and technological devices. They rely on them for information, research, and communication. But when technology fails (and it will at some time or another), it can seem like a disaster. Managers and virtual teams need to create a backup plan for technical problems—something that states what to do and how to handle certain situations. This plan should include all emergency contacts, any shift changes or rotations needed and all backup material for projects and assignments that may have been lost on computers or electronic files. This information is often kept in a large notebook or manual in each employee's office and placed in an easy-to-access location.

Common items in backup materials:

- Emergency contacts for managers and team members
- Office locations for other team members
- Project/assignment/client information
- Alternate work schedules or shifts needed



Develop a Normal Working Day



Teleworkers and virtual teams are accustomed to planning their days and weeks, and one of the ways to be successful is to develop a daily routine, or 'normal working day'. When following a routine or regular day, the workflow can run smoother and it's easier to adjust to new responsibilities. It can take time to develop a routine that works, but it is doable. Determine the best time of day to complete specific tasks to ensure that your day runs smoothly.

Tips for building a routine include:

- Determine tasks you normally do or that need to be done
- Make a schedule or list of tasks
- Factor in extra stress or surprises
- Make it doable and leave room for changes or adaptations

Case Study



Phillip has changed offices and is now a teleworker who is working from home. He knew that the first thing he needed to do was establish a home office space. One of his empty bedrooms was turned into an office and let his family know that it was for office use only. A few framed photos were on his desk, but he removed everything else such as photo albums, laundry baskets, storage boxes and other possible distractions.

Phillip was worried about the power going out, so he made sure to have a backup source of contacts and files in a notebook on the back shelf. He also had surge protectors and back up batteries for devices that may go out or fail. Last, but not least, Phillip sat down and made a tentative schedule to follow while working in his new office. It included tasks and possible break times. His new routine allowed him to quickly adapt to his new space.



Module Eight: Review Questions

1. The _____ can affect how a home office is organized.
 - a) Equipment
 - b) Layout
 - c) Supplies purchased
 - d) Wall color
2. What is one aspect of setting up the home office?
 - a) Installing computer equipment
 - b) Moving shelves
 - c) Stacking paper in the trays
 - d) Installing the carpet
3. Which of the following can be considered an unneeded item in a home office?
 - a) Photo printer
 - b) Filing cabinet
 - c) Supply cabinet
 - d) Personal utility bills
4. Which of the following can be considered a distraction in a home office?
 - a) Wall art
 - b) Colorful pens
 - c) Television
 - d) Excessive books
5. Why can technical failures pose a challenge for teleworkers?
 - a) They depend on it for everything
 - b) They don't like traditional methods
 - c) They have to start from scratch
 - d) They have to do everything manually
6. When creating a hard copy back up plan, which of the following should be included?
 - a) A number to the local pizza place
 - b) A list of nearby hotels
 - c) A list of emergency contacts
 - d) A list of alternate work to do



7. What is a benefit of building a daily routine at work?
 - a) The employee finishes work sooner
 - b) The day goes by faster
 - c) The work seems more fun
 - d) The work flow runs smoother
8. The key to building a normal working day is what?
 - a) Knowing what needs to be done
 - b) Scheduling the time right
 - c) Having the right tools
 - d) Starting on the right day
9. Phillip removed items from his home office that could be distracting, such as _____?
 - a) Shelves
 - b) Laundry baskets
 - c) Pens and pencils
 - d) Alarm clock
10. What is one thing Phillip obtained to prepare for a technology failure?
 - a) An electronic phone book
 - b) A back up computer
 - c) A notebook of contacts
 - d) A written calendar



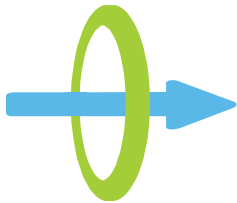
Electric communication will never be a substitute for the face of someone who with their soul encourages another person to be brave and true.

Charles Dickens

Module Nine: Communication (I)



Communication is one of the most important aspects of any workplace. Whether team members are in the same office or several miles apart, communication is the key to having a successful team. With so many technology options available (email, text messaging, phone calls, video conferencing), the team should be aware of, and proficient with the best way to communicate with each other.

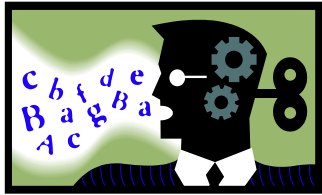


Stay in the Loop

One of the primary challenges faced by teleworkers is not being present in the same location as their coworkers and managers. Many people find this difficult, especially when it comes to communication! Therefore, ensure that you always feel 'in the loop' and connected with your colleagues. Not only should team members be aware of the tools of communication available to them, they should also know which tools to use and when. Technology platforms that allow face-to-face communication, such as Facetime or video conferencing can ease the feeling of isolation. Regardless of the platform used, team members need to be aware of, and proficient with the technology. Further, regularly scheduled updates with team members and/or the entire team will help everyone stay 'in the loop' and the workflow moving smoothly.



Use the Correct Medium



The various mediums of communication each have pros and cons associated with them. The medium with which team members communicate mostly depends on whether the information exchanged is formal or informal and what kind of response is needed. Informal methods of communication such as instant messages or text messages are great when a quick and short answer is needed, rather than a long and drawn out response. Team members can quickly exchange questions and answers without much interruption to their work. However, formal methods, such as conference calls or video conferencing, are preferable when a longer or more in-depth answer is required. It also gives participants a chance to ask questions or provide feedback. To choose the best medium, determine how urgent or necessary the message is, how quickly an answer is needed and what kind of response you are looking for.

Be Clear and to the Point



When team members are not communicating face to face, words or meaning can often be lost in long phrases or extended stories. Emails can rattle on and phone calls seem prolonged when people are unable to speak face to face. When speaking with other employees via email or phone (especially conference call), keep the topic short and clear and try to get right to the point. Do not beat around the bush or try to have a long 'introduction' story. Be mindful that your colleagues cannot stop you or ask you to repeat what you said when communicating via email or text message. State the purpose of the communication and then follow up with questions to ensure comprehension.

Some helpful communication tips are:

- Be clear about what you want/need
- State your point from the beginning
- Follow up to make sure the other person understands



Virtual Communication Can Be Impersonal



With the growing popularity of electronic communication, people are finding more ways to communicate without being face-to-face. Although convenient, communicating via electronic means can seem rather impersonal. Emotions can be misread or ignored when communicating virtually, causing phrases to be taken the wrong way or tones to be assumed. With a lack of body language or visual cues, virtual communication can seem flat and lack personality, making it harder for employees to convey meaning and build trust.

When possible, try to hold in-person meetings. If the distance is minimal, try to arrange periodic group meetings to keep employees engaged. If distance is too great, or other circumstances prohibit an in-person meeting, use a video conferencing service that allows people to see each other, such as Zoom, Skype, Webex or Google chat. While not as effective as in-person meetings, virtual communication is a great tool for teleworkers and virtual teams.

Case Study



Zach was communicating with one of his teleworkers, Bob, about upcoming projects and assignments. When he gave the original assignments, he spoke with Bob in person to go over everything in detail. He continued to communicate by text message or email when they had questions for each other. He didn't want to seem too impersonal when communicating with Bob, so he made sure to be open and up front when they spoke. Bob expressed that he was feeling left out since he is so many miles away and was worried he may not be able to keep up with everyone. Zach told Bob that the key is to stay within the loop of the whole group, so they set up protocols and plans to talk regularly and socialize using video messages and conference calls.



Module Nine: Review Questions

1. When can staying in the loop of the virtual team be difficult?
 - a) Employees don't usually like each other
 - b) Communication can be too hard
 - c) Managers don't do enough to help
 - d) Employees are in many different locations
2. One method of staying in the loop is to do what?
 - a) Send letters or emails
 - b) Hold individual meetings
 - c) Have regular group meetings
 - d) Create an office newsletter
3. What is one tool to use for formal communication?
 - a) An email
 - b) A group meeting
 - c) A fax message
 - d) A telephone call
4. What is one tool of to use for informal communication?
 - a) An email
 - b) A board meeting
 - c) A phone call
 - d) An employee evaluation
5. When communicating with teammates, it is important to do what?
 - a) Clearly state your point
 - b) Give lots of hints
 - c) Compliment them
 - d) Use small words
6. As a manager, when communicating with your teleworker team, it is important to do what?
 - a) Contact employees by phone
 - b) Follow up to ensure comprehension
 - c) Speak in small sentences
 - d) Talk with an accent



7. Virtual communication can seem impersonal because of what?
- a) The emoticons
 - b) People can use different methods
 - c) People do not have to see each other
 - d) The length of electronic conversations
8. Virtual communication has a lack of _____.
- a) Fonts
 - b) Methods available
 - c) Clipart
 - d) Body language
9. How did Zach deliver projects and assignments to Bob?
- a) Over the phone
 - b) By email
 - c) In person
 - d) By written itinerary
10. What was one concern Bob had about working so far away from everyone?
- a) Having too much work
 - b) Not knowing how to use email
 - c) Having too little work
 - d) Feeling left out



The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

George Bernard Shaw

Module Ten: Communication (II)



Even when we learn (or know) how to communicate effectively, we can forget to put what we have learned into action. When we want to communicate with our teammates, it is important to determine how to do it and how to get the desired results. Effective communication is the tie that bonds a team together.

Open and Frequent Communication



A virtual team needs to stay in constant contact, so open and frequent communication is important. When communicating, be clear about your needs or share if you have a problem that requires assistance from others. Open channels of communication make employees feel less hesitant to approach one another, even if by electronic means.

Make yourself available to everyone as much as possible and make sure they know how to reach you. Try to participate in every regularly scheduled meeting or group session to stay ‘in the loop’. Check in with your colleagues periodically and take notice of progress and accomplishments. Ask questions to see how they are doing and if you can help in some way.

Tips for staying in contact include:

- Participate in regularly scheduled conferences or one-on-one phone calls with colleagues and supervisors
- Provide the best time and ways to be reached
- Send an email, or call colleagues periodically to see if they might need help



Share Your Information



Unfortunately, shy people, or introverts often struggle as a member of a virtual team. Even though the work situation provides for a lot of time apart or working alone, it still requires employees to stay in touch and constantly share personal and business information. Team members often need to have the personal cell numbers of other members for times they cannot be reached another way. If team members feel free to share information with one another, it can lead to a more cohesive unit, promote social skills, and result in an environment whereby everyone feels more connected and comfortable enough to share ideas, provide input, and contribute to group assignments and projects.

Have a Collaborative Attitude



The old saying is that there is no 'I' in TEAM, is true even with a virtual team. Although team members generally work individually on many projects or assignments, the key to bringing things together is collaboration. Individual assignments are blended to achieve a common goal. Instead of having the mentality of "it's every man for himself", teams should embrace a collaborative attitude and seek to work together as much as possible. When members work together, it can spark motivation and inspiration, which can boost confidence and productivity. A collaborative attitude can improve communication among team members. It encourages them to connect with one another to not only achieve the group's goals, but their own personal goals as well.



Setting Expectations with Family and Friends



Working in a home office can prove beneficial to employees who cannot travel or who want to stay close to their family. However, this can be problematic if the employee cannot separate business from personal matters. Speak with family members and friends to create some ground rules for your working space and situation. Many employees have a set number of hours they work, so a ground rule can be that you are not to be disturbed during this time and cannot leave the work area. Just as if you were in a regular office, company hours should not be used to make personal calls or run errands. This time should be task oriented and job focused. Your manager may not need to become directly involved in the rules and guidelines you set with your friends and family, but it is important to keep them in the loop so they can support this process.

Tips:

- Establish home and work guidelines with friends and family
- Explain the need for structure in the 'office', even though it is at home
- Treat work time as you would at the actual office...that is, don't use it for personal calls or errands

Case Study



Sandra is working with three teammates on a project for a new client. The team does not get to make a lot of phone calls, so they instant message or video conference to communicate and share ideas. They must be open with each other, so they make sure to communicate often to share opinions and ideas. Sandra suggested that everyone exchange personal phone numbers in case they need to speak outside of business hours. But she reminded them that the team needs to stay focused on the project and not to let family and friends interfere in the work. Throughout the project they had daily sessions where they shared ideas and information to stay up to date on the project as a whole and keep the goal of completing it altogether.



Module Ten: Review Questions

1. What is one way to have frequent communication with employees?
 - a) Send a mass text to the team
 - b) Make regular phone calls
 - c) Send an email every now and then
 - d) Call employees randomly
2. Why is it important to maintain open communication with employees?
 - a) To keep an eye on their behavior
 - b) It lets them know you are always around
 - c) To show support for each other
 - d) It gives you something to do
3. How do teammates feel when they share information with each other?
 - a) Annoyed with each other
 - b) Bored with each other
 - c) More like family
 - d) Smothered by teammates
4. How can teleworkers build social skills among each other?
 - a) Share ideas
 - b) Send more emails
 - c) Share demographic sheets about each other
 - d) Talk on the phone with teammates
5. What does collaboration between team members encourage?
 - a) Hostility
 - b) Frustration
 - c) Tardiness
 - d) Communication
6. Although teleworkers often work very far apart, collaboration helps _____.
 - a) Bring them together
 - b) Keep them apart
 - c) Work independently
 - d) Transfer offices



7. One guideline to establish with family and friends about the home office is what?
- a) They must have an appointment to come in
 - b) Not entering the office during work hours
 - c) They cannot bring food into the office
 - d) They should not knock before entering
8. Setting expectations for friends and family adds what?
- a) Anger
 - b) Chaos
 - c) Structure
 - d) Harmony
9. What is one way Sandra and her teammates stay in touch?
- a) Steady emails
 - b) Instant message
 - c) Lots of phone calls
 - d) Reading blog sites
10. What did the group do to exchange ideas and opinions about the project?
- a) Sending emails
 - b) Writing them down in a journal
 - c) Draw them on a dry erase board
 - d) Hold daily meetings



The moment you stop accepting challenges, is the moment you stop moving forward.

Anonymous

Module Eleven: Additional Challenges



We have discussed how communication and organizational issues can cause problems for a teleworker, or teleworking team. Now, let's explore some other challenges. Some of these obstacles can be addressed beforehand and possibly prevented. Others, however, can occur suddenly and range in severity. The key is to be prepared for anything and have the resources needed when a problem occurs.

Building Trust and Rapport



Trust is a key component in any relationship, either professional or personal. Teleworkers can have additional problems with trust since they are rarely, if ever, in the group's company and there is no daily interaction. As a result, building trust between members of a virtual team may take longer than for one with face to face interaction. Self-doubt can creep in when you are unsure of your abilities and how you appear to the other members. It is important to stay in contact with everyone and build a rapport with each person. Maintain open lines of communication to show that you trust them and their abilities. Showing a personal interest in others at work and in the office, builds a better relationship and boosts their confidence and trust in you.

Tips for building trust include:

- Be open and honest with colleagues
- Don't be afraid to share opinions and ideas
- Offer advice, insight, and your opinion
- Listen to questions and opinions of other



Feeling Isolated



An office can feel cozy when employees work together or meet with each other during a coffee breaks. The feeling of closeness unfortunately, is usually absent for teleworkers. As a result of the isolation or distance from the group, productivity can decrease and there may be greater emotional distress. While the problem cannot be entirely solved, there are ways of helping everyone feel less isolated and make them feel more like a part of the team. Initiate various forms of communication with your colleagues periodically to see how they are doing personally and professionally. Ask them how they are feeling in their work and if they are having any problems. When possible, arrange a conference call or video group meeting where everyone can come together and talk to one another.

Always in the Office



Teleworkers on a virtual team are afforded the opportunity to work from a home office. This eliminates the usual commute and stress associated with getting to and from work every day. Unfortunately, when working from home, it may feel like you are always in the office with no place to go on a lunch break or when the workday is finished. The office environment tends to blend with the home environment, making it difficult to distinguish personal time from work/business time. Designate a place at home or nearby where you can get away from the workspace when you take a break or need to get away. When the workday is done, close the 'office' and try not to mix personal and business matters. With dedication and perseverance, you can strike a healthy balance between your work and personal life.

Lack of (or inconsistent) Feedback



One important element for any employee, whether working in an actual office or virtually, is receiving timely feedback on job duties and performance. Feedback communicates how well we are progressing and identifies areas that need improvement. For teleworkers, feedback may not be provided as frequently as we might wish. If we do not receive the feedback consistently, we might begin to feel left out, ignored, or detached. When (and if) this happens, it is important to reach out to your manager. Soliciting and receiving feedback from your supervisor will likely prevent you from questioning your abilities or job performance.



Tips for soliciting and receiving feedback:

- Ask your manager to make a schedule for providing feedback
- Be open to accepting feedback, even if it isn't completely positive. This could lead to a learning situation.
- Use the feedback to adjust your performance



Case Study

Cheryl is working with her newest teleworker, Deb, and is trying to get her accustomed to working in a different type of office. She knows that teleworkers can often feel alone or isolated since they are not surrounded by their coworkers. Cheryl stayed in contact with Deb and provided opportunities for her to socialize with the rest of the team. She also made a point to remind Deb to take her breaks away from the office so that she did not have that 'always in the office' feeling. Over time, Cheryl began to build Deb's trust and she felt that Deb would come to her if she needed additional help or advice.



Module Eleven: Review Questions

1. What do employees do when they know they can trust each other?
 - a) Act like a team
 - b) Work by themselves
 - c) Carry on as normal
 - d) Go out to eat together
2. What is one way teammates can build trust with one another?
 - a) Buy lunch for everyone
 - b) Play trust games
 - c) Offer advice and opinions
 - d) Talk online more often
3. What can make teleworkers feel isolated from the group?
 - a) The large group of people
 - b) The separate offices
 - c) Their lack of talent
 - d) The lack of management
4. What is one way a manager can help prevent the feeling of isolation in teleworkers?
 - a) Email them once in a while
 - b) Fill them in on meetings they may have missed
 - c) Transfer them to a new office
 - d) Include them in more group activities
5. Why do teleworkers often feel as though they are always in the office?
 - a) They love their job
 - b) They work where they live
 - c) They have to work weekends
 - d) They work on holidays
6. What is one way employees can separate work and home?
 - a) Use two different computers
 - b) Sleep in a separate house
 - c) Take breaks and lunches away from the home
 - d) Move the office somewhere else



7. How may the employee feel if the manager does not provide feedback?
 - a) Hopeful
 - b) Proud
 - c) Bored
 - d) Unconfident
8. What is one way a manager can ensure timely feedback to the employee?
 - a) Prepare feedback ahead of time
 - b) Deliver feedback once a year
 - c) Keep the feedback short
 - d) Type it up in an email
9. What is one problem Cheryl was worried about Deb facing as a teleworker?
 - a) Having too much work
 - b) Feeling bored
 - c) Feeling isolated
 - d) Having trouble with computers
10. What was one tip Cheryl gave Deb in order to help her as a teleworker?
 - a) Take breaks outside the office
 - b) Work long hours
 - c) Email teammates often
 - d) Buy comfortable furniture



*Individual commitment to a group effort--that is
what makes a team work, a company work, a
society work, a civilization work*

Vince Lombardi

Module Twelve: Wrapping Up



Although this workshop is coming to a close, we hope your journey to understanding the unique challenges and benefits of telework and telecommuting is just beginning.

We wish you the best of luck on the rest of your travels!

Words from the Wise

- **Margaret Carty:** The nice thing about teamwork is that you always have someone on your side.
- **Anonymous:** Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision - the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.
- **Henry Ford:** Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is a success.
- **Babe Ruth:** The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime.

