

## Tips for Successfully Managing Hybrid Teams by Erica Dhawan

Do you want to master your hybrid work leadership skills? I want to share five best practices that any great hybrid work manager can start implementing today.

A great hybrid manager has a command of both digital 🖥️ and traditional body language 👍 They understand how value can be destroyed in a hybrid model and mitigate the problem before it happens, and they understand how to create value for their team members first in order to drive value to other key stakeholders later.

Let's walk through the five best practices:

### Align and Communicate Your Needs 🗣️

Everyone's schedules have changed, and they have new norms in their professional and personal lives. Understand what those norms are and plan your team's work around these commitments for both in-person and virtual work. In our hybrid workplace, reading carefully is the new listening and writing and speaking clearly is the new empathy. Further, thriving at work will be much easier if you communicate your expectations and needs with your team and leaders.

Create communication norms around collaboration. Here are some examples:

For smaller meetings, leaders should review the employees' availability on their calendar before scheduling a call as a sign of respect

If someone can't do a call on Friday afternoons, make sure that is noted in yours or the team's calendar and respected.

If you need the daily 15 min touchpoint at 10am ET instead of 4pm ET because you are picking your kids up from school, make that known!

If you want a response to an urgent message after hours, agree on using a phone call or labeling an email with URGENT to align. But if it's really urgent, then text and let them know who you are (texts don't have caller ID) instead of leaving a voicemail.

If you have 3 reply all emails and haven't resolved an issue, switch to a phone call.

Be sure to keep in mind the importance of communicating what you need from others to achieve your productivity goals while maintaining a good work-life balance.

### 2. Create Moments that Matter 🤝

A team functions better when everyone supports each other. As leaders, owning the moment whether it means acknowledging good work, saying thank you, being flexible for others, working together around inconveniences, and covering for others when they need it will go a long way in building trust in your team and maintaining a strong culture. Here's a few examples:

Host cross-functional hybrid lunches or gatherings to break down silos and reach out to people on other teams to learn what they are working on.

Beyond the in-person office discussions, create social connections with virtual water cooler moments (virtual happy hours, lunch-and-learns, etc.). Ask your team for ideas to foster collaboration and to support inclusion.

Send personalized emails, or when welcomed by the team, inspire others with your creativity (newsletters, a picture with your team, maybe a fun song or video, etc.)

Continue to show appreciation for others with regular shoutouts or moments of gratitude.

Encourage yourself and others to take mental health breaks (e.g., taking walks, meditation sessions, reading a page or two from your current book, etc.)

### **3. Put Performance and Great Outcomes at the Center of the Day** 🗓️

At the end of the day, all of the flexibility and opportunities that are made available comes with a high degree of trust and responsibility. It's challenging to shift the way that we work when the business outcome is uncertain. So, remove the uncertainty. Approach the work with an ownership mindset and always think about how to drive or even unlock greater value. It's important to recognize that setting expectations with your team is a key component of generating great outcomes and instilling an ownership mindset. What this means is that you align on what is to be expected in terms of meeting coordination, individual responsibilities, and the resulting work outputs. This will reduce confusion and mistakes while instilling confidence in your team to get things done.

Here are some examples:

At the beginning of projects, start by answering these three questions as a group: What does good look like? What does done look like? What is out of scope?

If a meeting is by default 30 minutes long, but it can be done efficiently in 10 minutes, make that happen. Value Visibly by respecting everyone's time, schedules and inboxes. Don't be the person who makes people come in for a short meeting. Use everyone's time effectively.

### **4. Make the Most out of Meetings** 🤝

It can feel difficult to engage colleagues both in a room and those coming in on a screen or on a phone line. Remember, in a hybrid meeting, if you have 10 people in person and two people attending virtually, the dynamic is going to benefit the in-person group. On the other hand, if you have two people in person and, say, 12 people attending virtually naturally the group is going to benefit remotely. How can you make the most of these meetings? Here are meeting tips:

**Decide on Meeting Format:** We've all been in meetings that could have been emails, had too many people, or commuted to be in person when it could have been done virtually. Asking the following questions will make your meetings more intentional and deliberate:

Why am I having this meeting? Is this the right format? Have I clarified why everyone is in this conversation and what success looks like at the end of the meeting?

**Choose Facilitators:** When running hybrid meetings, have a virtual host and an in-person host and have them co-facilitate the meeting to remove potential disengagement of remote attendees. Proximity bias is a real challenge that we must fight to engage all colleagues.

**Align to a Common Purpose:** Spend time at the beginning connecting people to each other, both in the room and across, and spend time, the last 5% of a meeting, closing in a way that that again helps people understand what transpired here, what are our marching orders, and how do we close. Specifically, that could be starting the meeting with the purpose of a meeting by considering the desired outcome of that time together.

**Start each meeting by answering these three questions:** What does success look like at the end of the meeting? Why are you all here? How would I like you all to contribute? (will you use the chat in a virtual meeting or a whiteboard in person to engage attendees?). End the meeting with everyone answering: Who is doing what by when?

**Break the Ice:** Depending on the meeting length, consider spending the first five minutes in breakout groups or in smaller groups, or asking a question in the chat that just gets everybody warmed up for the day. Keep it simple. For instance, ask in the chat, "What did you do over the weekend?" Or "What does success look like for you today?" Or "What's a win of the week?"

**Ensure Engagement:** Studies show that people are much, much more likely to participate if they have participated in the first 5% of a meeting. So, if you are wanting people to create a norm that they will speak up; that they're going to engage

in the chat; that they're going to tell you what's going on, create a mechanism for them to do it within the first 5% of the meeting.

With this you're creating a norm of openness ahead of time and not just hoping for a positive result. Otherwise, the same people who feel comfortable will talk and the people who don't feel comfortable for any reason, won't. Call on those you haven't heard from or who are remote first. Be cognizant of the dynamic in the room and adjust your interactions so that everyone is engaged is crucial. If you are in a hybrid meeting, make sure everyone can hear (e.g. test the microphone, avoid sidebar conversations), and check in with people on the phone by asking directly for their inputs also improves engagement.

## **5. Experiment and Adapt to Challenges**

In hybrid work, many people have fallen out of old habits and into new ones. First, as you think about how your team works together going forward, remember that this needs to be a time of experimentation. Think of these first three months as an iteration and, afterwards, do a post-mortem with your team around the last three months and adjust your norms.

Commit to a year of experimentation done in quarters. Carve out space for experimenting, reflect, and then, keep doing what's working or try something different. Set expectations for how to handle ambiguity and new (or old) challenges in a new environment. However, remember to be conscious of potential remote worker bias when the majority of team members are in-person. Give the benefit of the doubt and use what you learned in digital work to your benefit. As you experiment and adapt, try the following:

Use the virtual chat tool during a hybrid meeting for everyone to brainstorm ideas and write them down before you discuss. Use Microsoft Teams or even a whiteboard app. Be willing to try hybrid brainstorming in new mediums.

Have champions who are assessing what works and what needs to be refined.

Rate your meetings and always ask: what went well? What could be improved? Continue to prioritize what could / should be a quick phone call instead of a broader video or hybrid meeting.

In summary, as hybrid work leaders and team members, find ways to measure success in results, not hours, set clear norms, roles and expectations, agree on what success looks like, and be available for your team. Further, it's important to remember that what was implicit in in-person meetings must now be explicit in digital body language. Following these best practices can help you achieve more clarity, and they will also be useful as you refine your team agreements.

In the end, setting clear norms for your team can help everyone achieve great results with a great work-life balance and keep employee engagement high and culture strong.