



INNOVEST SME
Accelerating Small Business

A man with a beard and short hair, wearing a blue and white checkered shirt and a black headset, is smiling slightly while holding a white mug. The mug has the text "Adventure BEGINS" and a small mountain icon. He is sitting at a desk in an office environment with blurred background elements like a plant and office equipment.

Working Remotely *or* Commuting

Rick Chisholm and Tala Chisholm

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30/192A Kingsgrove Rd
Kingsgrove, NSW 2208
Australia

Phone: +61 2 8007 2907

E-mail: admin@innovestsme.com.au

Website: www.innovestsme.com.au

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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

PREFACE

For some people, working from home can seem like a dream opportunity. But they may not realize that this kind of position comes with a great amount of responsibility and challenges. Since these employees are not working in a centralized office, they may have the advantage of having flexible schedules and shorter or no commute, they can have disadvantages when it comes to receiving feedback and being able to communicate with teammates.

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

DENIS WAITLEY



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. Common skills needed are ways to manage your time and organize all assignments and duties. When building your virtual team, remember to find employees that can work well under minimal supervision and can function with different types of technology.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

More employees are choosing to work from home or outside the standard office. It not only saves the company money, but it allows them to expand into other areas and cover more ground. But when working outside of a standard office, 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 skills of self-management, then you won't be able to function 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 you work with little supervision, it is important that you are able to manage your time on your own. 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 they will give support and offer advice on ways to stay focused and on track. Many employees have the knowledge of good time management skills and methods, but may need a reminder on how to use them.

ORGANIZING AND PLANNING

When a teleworker has to work in their own 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. Be encouraged to adapt 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 a difficult aspect to master with a virtual team. You will not only deal with traditional communication issues among team members and management, but you can face additional problems that can cause you to feel additional stress. With your peers not being able to directly come to you when they need to talk; this extra time to reach

out to teammates 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, fax, mail, 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 call

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

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.

*The first and best
victory is to conquer self.*

PLATO



SELF-MANAGEMENT (I)

While self-management can mean different things in different fields, for teleworkers it means being able to manage your job duties and responsibilities on your own, with very little supervision from management. This requires a lot of self-discipline and a sense of self-awareness as to what the employee is capable of and accomplishing it. Remember that while many things can be managed by the teleworker, nothing replaces the manager's role in their professional development.

SOLVING PROBLEMS ON YOUR OWN

Teleworkers often face many obstacles and problems when working in an office away from the central location. Since they are not always in reach of management, these workers will have to learn how to solve many problems on their own. For minor problems, such as computer malfunctions or even an unhappy customer, you should be prepared to solve the problem and possibly prevent it from happening again. The key is to make sure that you have the resources needed to solve problems can and will arise. Lay out action plans with your teammates regarding what to do when a problem arises. Determine how much they should handle on their own and at what point they need to reach out for help.

Questions for solving problems:

- “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 on a virtual team. It has been shown that employees who are motivated in their work are happier, more enthusiastic, and more productive. If you are not motivated in your work, you will not be able to function in your home office, much less with the rest of the group. Sometimes at the beginning of an assignment, you can feel highly motivated, but that motivation can wane if you do not take action. Review what has happened so far and realize how far you’ve come and how far you need to go. While periods of low motivation can happen now and again, it is important to make sure it is only temporary and do not sink into a permanent situation.

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, they will be more lenient in their current assignments or duties – similar to “when the cat’s away, the mice will play”. But teleworkers will not always have a member of management around them, so they must avoid that feeling of wanting to play and should remain focused on their work. Whether a manager is present or not, assignments will still be due and the employee will still be subject to reviews and evaluations. Company supplies still belong to the company, so the employee should not be using them for personal use, such as making personal calls or printing flyers with the company copier. You should be able to manage your time and activities in the same manner as you would in any other office and not abuse the new freedom you’ve 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. You cannot fade into a sea of faces or cannot pass the blame to a member of management when a mistake is made. Do not allow outside distractions or problems to hinder what you do inside the office. You are the only one that can be held accountable for the actions you take and what you do in the office. Because of this, you should focus on all duties, job performance, and ensure that you keep a ‘clean nose’ at all times.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Kathy is a teleworker that 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.

*With self-discipline,
anything is possible.*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT



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 times 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 has to be done to correctly manage ourselves and succeed.

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. But this type of attitude does not help us improve or develop through goals and work. When we look at our typical work day, make a list of the bad habits you have been exhibiting, such as procrastinating or taking short cuts when writing a report. Identify ways these bad habits have been hindering either how assignments are completed or how they are affecting your overall work. Then create an action plan as to how you can remove these bad habits from your work routine. Plan ways to finish work ahead of time or how you can improve how long it takes 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.

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 in the right direction. In the office, when we make a mistake, one of the first steps is to see what happened to cause the mistake. Was it something you did or something that could have been changed? Then, reflect back 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 method of continued learning and growth.

ESTABLISH GOOD HABITS

After determining our mistakes and bad habits at work, we are definitely ready for some positive thinking! Establishing good habits at work can be just as important as simply identifying the negative ones. The key to establishing good habits is in knowing how to control yourself in your environment and sticking with it over time. First, determine what habits

you want to establish and would benefit you at work, such as trying to complete projects on time and remembering to run software checks on your company computer. Determine what you need to do to make this a habit (write it down or add it to a routine). Then don't be afraid to put your plan into action. Repetition is the key to all learning, so by repeating your new action plans and improving old behaviors, they will eventually become good habits that you will not have to remind yourself about.

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

You will not always have a manager or supervisor present, so it is important that you are assertive enough with yourself to ensure that your work is done. When planning out your work schedule, make decisions about what needs to be done and how you will do it. However, if you fail to be assertive and make yourself focus, all of your assignments, tasks, and duties will fall apart and will not be completed. You can only control your actions, so you are the only one that can make assertive decisions and ensure that you are managing your time well enough to succeed.

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

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

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 made his daily schedule delayed and made his time feel off track. When Joshua reviewed how his days have been going, he decided to make an effort to change this habit and create a better one in its place. The next week, he made a change to come into work ten minutes early and only take his allotted lunch time. He was assertive with himself and made sure he 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 a little change could do for him.

*Your greatest resource
is your time.*

BRIAN TRACY



TIME MANAGEMENT (I)

Proper time management is a choice that we all have to make in our professional and personal lives. Managing our time successfully can make the difference between completing projects and falling behind in our duties and activities, which can lead to disciplinary actions. Teleworkers need to be especially aware of their time management because they are responsible for their work and their productivity. Only they can know what needs to be done and how they can manage to complete it all.

BUILD A LITTLE FLEXIBILITY INTO YOUR SCHEDULE

Teleworkers do not always have a schedule that is set in stone. There are many things in life that we cannot control, but we can learn to cope with them and adjust them into our daily work schedule. Things will happen at work, such as the computer malfunctioning or the phone lines going down, but the key to not letting it affect your work is to accept it and move with it. You cannot control what happens, but you can control how you react to a problem or situation. That's why it is important to be flexible in your schedule and realize that things can, and probably will, change. Be prepared to change or move plans if necessary 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 in your work and less likely to let it affect how you perform.

IDENTIFY AND REMOVE TIME WASTERS

When working remotely and away from other coworkers, it is easy to become distracted and waste time on minor things. Time wasters can occur any time and often times we don't even realize we're taking part in them. When we identify and remove these time wasters, it can improve concentration and help you stay focused. Time wasters can be personal, such as checking text messages or making personal calls, or even professional based, 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 through the day and wasting your valuable time. Give yourself a set time that you will not let these things distract you or take away from your current duty. You'll be amazed how taking these small steps will improve your time management.

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

WORKING WITH TIME ZONES

Virtual teams can have a hard time working together due to the different time zones and various locations. In many cases, time zones can range from 1-2 hours apart to almost 12 hours difference! Employees can work different hours and in a different time zone, which can throw off any employee 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 help keep up with optimal times to reach other team members. Learn the approximate time differences each zone has in order to help accommodate members you are trying to reach. Remember that your 9:00AM may not be the same as 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. But 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 work day has slow times or periods of down time, don't use them as an excuse to goof off or take extra breaks. There is always something to be done in the office – the key is just knowing how to find it. Ensure that all projects are completed and tasks are taken care of. When they are, focus on tasks that may have been pushed aside earlier or placed on the back burner. If those are complete, take a second look at projects you've already done to ensure accuracy. You may need a new balance of job duties if your

free time is a large percentage of your daily tasks. 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.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Alex and Nick were working together on a team project. Although they are in different offices, they work together through computer 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 it will distract him while trying to work. Since Nick normally finished his part faster than Alex, he uses that spare time to go over his assignment and study the next one coming up. Together, they are able to efficiently manage their time enough to successfully finish their project without having to rush or worry about overlooking any details.

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

PETER DRUCKER



TIME MANAGEMENT (II)

Effective time management can have many benefits for any employee. 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 overcome them, employees can learn to better manage their time and realize what should be taken care of first.

THE URGENT/IMPORTANT MATRIX

Sometimes at work we confuse our urgent priorities with our important ones, which cause us to be confused about what to take care of first. The Urgent/Important Matrix is a tool that we can use to think about our priorities or tasks and how we handle them. Before using the matrix, write down everything you want to accomplish in a certain period of time, such as daily, weekly, or even further and assign their priority in which we want to get them done.

The matrix is divided into four quadrants, each ranging in importance, and allows for activities and projects to be plotted in each one based on their need. Using a list of your activities and duties, plot each job in the corresponding quadrant. After all of the tasks have been plotted, we see all of the things we want or need to do and how urgent they are. This

leads us to make better choices regarding our time management and overall organization.

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 for us. By setting deadlines, you are putting a concrete need in your schedule, and it helps prevent it from being forgotten or pushed aside. It gives the employee a sense of accountability when it comes to things that need to be done, such as work assignments or projects. So 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'll find that when you take the time to schedule them, you'll make the effort to stick to them and see them through all the way to completion.

Tips when setting deadlines:

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

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.

If you commit to this approach to planning your days, you will see as time goes on that you are able to achieve more in less time. Instead of finishing things in a mad rush to meet deadlines, each day will be organized and become more productive and profitable. You will also notice yourself spending less time on activities that are of little to no value. And because you have a clear vision for dealing with competing priorities, the level of stress in your life will diminish, which will allow you to become even more focused and productive.

RECOGNIZE WHEN YOU ARE PROCRASTINATING

Procrastinating is definitely a self-sabotaging behavior. Many times you may not even recognize that you are procrastinating and lose valuable time and resources. You can often persuade yourself that you have plenty of time and that you have good reasons for delaying. Because we trick ourselves into thinking we had more time, we find ourselves rushing to finish assignments or struggling to turn things in on time. Instead, the next time you are given an assignment or other deadline, begin on it right away. Even by taking the first minor step to completion, you can feel motivated to keep going instead of putting it off for another time.

Signs of procrastination:

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

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

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!

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

ALAN LAKEIN



ORGANIZING AND PLANNING (I)

Keeping track of our office activities helps us make efficient use of our time and can keep us focused throughout our assignments. For teleworkers, organizing and planning their work days plays a big part in their time management and their productivity. Organization allows the employee to plan their progress and monitor how they are doing. It also improves communication among teammates and forms better collaborations with them.

PLAN FOR ADDITIONAL STRESS

When we make our schedule, we often try to keep it as tight as possible and don't leave much for 'wiggle room'. But this can cause us to panic when something goes wrong, a last minute task comes up, or a new project or ramp up of projects is being implemented. Extra stress can come out of nowhere and if we don't plan for it or even prepare for it, it can cause more problems down the line. So when you make your schedule or a list of upcoming assignments, take a few minutes to think of any additional stress that can (and probably will) come up. Identify situations that can cause extra stress and may need more attention. Give yourself time to work in some 'wiggle room' in case something unexpected comes

up. Being prepared for any additional stress or sudden changes can help the employee in the long run of their planning and organization.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

As an employee, we often want to take on more work and responsibilities in order to reflect our job capabilities. We want to be able to show that we can handle a large workload and produce great work in whatever we do. But sometimes we have to admit when we need help and let someone assist us. When that happens, it is important to know who to contact and by what method. As a manager, determine at what point the employee needs to contact you and by what method. Outline if other employees can be contacted as helpers or team leaders.

Signs you need some help:

- Projects are piling up or becoming too numerous
- Job quality begins to decline
- Even with 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, we cannot think clearly about what to do and it may be too late to

fix. 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 them before running out and setting you behind. If the forecast calls for rain, 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 having to use more damage control later. Being proactive will always keep you one step ahead and ready to help the employee succeed.

ESTABLISH PRIORITIES AND ATTAINABLE GOALS

Establishing our priorities is a good practice to follow in order to keep track of work. Setting goals for ourselves is always a good practice, but we want to ensure that our goals 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 then make later goals to go from there. 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 about what you want to achieve (i.e. decreased data errors, increased sales quota).

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.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Sheila was brand new to the teleworkers team and was feeling anxious about starting some new assignments. After speaking with her new 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 to say something. So when Sheila set up her home office, she went through and looked for anything that could cause problems later, such as clearing off her desk area and ensuring that she had plenty of supplies. She knew there would be times when unexpected problems come up, but she knew she could handle them on her own, and if she couldn't she knew how to reach her manager.

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

A.A. MILNE



ORGANIZING AND PLANNING (II)

Organizing our home office or other work space can have great benefits for our productivity. When we organize and plan for the physical space, we are able to access our materials sooner and do not waste time trying to sift through them. When we organize our workflow, our productivity runs smoother and we're able to accomplish more in our workday.

SETTING UP YOUR HOME OFFICE

Organizing your office means more than just keeping your 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 work space, design your work layout so that everything is within your arm's reach. This can reduce time spent looking for items that are in another location. Keep your desk more organized by only keeping projects that you are currently working with in your work area.

Projects that you have finished should be filed away in the appropriate place, while projects that you haven't yet started should not be in the work area until you do. 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 work since it is their main environment and only work space.

REMOVE UNNEEDED OR DISTRACTING ITEMS

Even after you have set your mind to completing a task and checking it off of your to do list, the smallest distraction can make you lose focus and stop working. For teleworkers, many of them work from home and usually have personal items everywhere, such as photos, personal bills or even a pile of laundry. It is important that you remove any unneeded or distracting items from the work area and ensure that it is a professional area only. This can be hard to do when working from home, since your personal lives are just on the other side of the door. When setting up a home office, you should evaluate the space and look for any items that could be distracting or that do not belong. When we eliminate these distractions that can make us lose our focus, we will see an increase in production and spend less time trying 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 they fail (and they will at some time or another), it can seem like a disaster. Managers and virtual teams need to create a backup plan for when technology fails – 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 kept 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 daily routine, or 'normal working day'. When an employee follows a routine or regular day, the workflow can run smoother and can help employees adjust to their responsibilities. It can take time to develop a routine that works, but it is doable. Find time during the day where activities work best and what can help your day run the best.

Tips for building a routine:

- Determine tasks you normally do or 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

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Phillip has changed offices and is now a teleworker that is working from home. He knew that the first thing he needed to do was establish a home office space. He decided to use one of his empty bedrooms as an office and let his family know that it is for office use only. He kept a few framed photos on his desk, but removed everything else such as photo albums, laundry baskets, storage boxes and such that he knew would be distracted or take his attention away from his work.

He was worried about the power going out, so he made sure to have a backup source of contacts and files and kept them in a notebook on the back shelf. Phillip also made sure to have surge protectors and back up batteries for all of his 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. He included tasks to do and possible break times. The sooner he got into a new routine, the sooner he knew he would better adapt to his new space.

*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



COMMUNICATION (I)

Communication is one of the most important tools in the workplace. Whether in the same office or several miles apart in remote locations, communication is the key to having a successful team. With so many options available in the workplace (email, instant message, phone calls), the team should be aware of the best way to communicate with each other and stay in constant contact.

STAY IN THE LOOP

One of the challenges teleworkers face is not being able to be in the same location as other coworkers or managers. Some people find this difficult when they cannot reach out and physically touch the person they are trying to contact. Therefore, ensure that you always feel ‘in the loop’ and connected with your colleagues. Allow forms of communication that give instant responses, such as instant message or video phones, when they are needed. Inform every one of various ways they can communicate with each other for various needs, such as email, IM, SMS, and direct extension numbers. Check in with every one periodically to check on their progress and inform them of any changes or updates.

USE THE CORRECT MEDIUM

Every form of communication has a certain way it can be shared and used. Every piece of information that needs to be sent has an appropriate channel it can use to ensure it is reached. The medium in which people communicate mostly depends on whether the information is considered formal or informal and what kind of response is needed. Informal methods of communication, instant message or a text message are great when a person needs quick and short answers 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 group meetings or phone calls, are better used when the person needs a longer or more in-depth answer. It also gives recipients a chance to ask questions or give their input. 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 communicating across a distance, words or meaning can often be lost in long phrases or extended stories. Emails can rattle on and phone calls can begin to drone out when people are unable to speak face to face to keep the attention. So when speaking with other employees keep the topic short and clear and try to go right to the point. Don't beat around the bush or try to have a long 'introduction' story. Your colleagues won't have a chance to stop you when they get lost or ask you to repeat what you said when communicating over email

or instant message, so think about what you want to say or get across. State the purpose of the communication and then follow up with questions to ensure comprehension.

Tips:

- 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 actually having to be in front of the person. Although this can be convenient in many cases, in others it can cause people to feel impersonal with one another. 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 build trust among each other.

When possible, try to hold face to face. If the distance is small enough, try to arrange a group meeting periodically to keep employees sociable. If distance is too great, try to use some sort of video message service that allows people to see each other, such as Skype or Google chat. Virtual

communications is a great tool for teleworkers and virtual teams, but never underestimate the power of talking face to face.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

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 speak him 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 speak to Bob openly and up front with anything they had to talk. Bob expressed that he was feeling left out since he is so many miles away and worried he may not be able to keep up with everyone. He told Bob the key is to stay within the loop of the whole group, so they set up protocols and plans to talk regularly and socialize, such as video messages and conference calls.

*Communication--
the human connection--
is the key to personal
and career success.*

PAUL J. MEYER



COMMUNICATION (II)

Sometimes even when we learn how to effectively communicate, we can forget to put what we've learned into action. When we want to reach out to our teammates, it is important to determine how we do it and how we can get the results we need. We can't be afraid to open up or share. Effective communication can be 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. Be clear about your needs or if you have a problem you need help with. By keeping a channel of communication open, employees will feel less hesitant to approach one another, even if it is over the electronic wire. Make yourself available to everyone as much as possible and make sure they know how to reach you. Try to schedule regular or scheduled meeting or group sessions to keep everyone 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:

- Schedule regular conferences or one-on-one phone calls with people you are working with

- Provide the best time and ways to reach you
- Send an email periodically to allow employees to respond back at their convenience

SHARE YOUR INFORMATION

Unfortunately, shy people do not function well on a team of teleworkers. Even though the position can call for a lot of time apart or working alone, it still requires employees to stay in touch and constantly share personal and business information. Employees often need to have personal cell numbers of other employees or home/office addresses for times when employees cannot be reached another way. Encourage everyone to be open and make them feel free to share information with one another. Not only can it make the team feel more like a family, it can help build their social skills even though they are not able to socialize in person. Teams will feel more connected without feeling as though they are being forced to work together. Employees need to be able to share ideas and opinions and give their input on assignments and projects, so encourage everyone to share what they know and contribute to the group.

HAVE A COLLABORATIVE ATTITUDE

The old saying is that there is no 'I' in TEAM, which is true even with a virtual team. Although team members generally have to work individually on many projects or assignments, the key to bringing things together is collaboration. Each individual assignment comes together 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 they can. When members work together, it can spark motivation and inspiration, which can boost confidence and productivity. Having a collaborative attitude can improve communication among team members and encourage them to reach out to each other to not only achieve the group’s goals, but their own personal goals as well.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

All teleworkers or virtual team members work in some sort of home office. This can prove beneficial to employees who cannot travel or want to stay close their family, but it can also cause a problem if the employee cannot separate business from personal matters. Speak with your loved ones and people in the house or sharing an office and create some ground rules for when they are at work. Many employees have a set number of hours that 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 errands and 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:

- Encourage employees to establish home and work guidelines with friends and family

- Explain the need for structure in the office, even if it is at home
- Offer assistance when it is needed

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Sandra is working with three of her teammates on a project for a new client. They don't get to make a lot of phone calls, so they instant message or video phone to communicate and share ideas. They have to be open with each other, so they make sure to communicate often and always be open with each other's opinions and ideas. Sandra had the idea of everyone exchanging 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.

*Accept the challenges so
that you may feel the
exhilaration of victory.*

GENERAL GEORGE PATTON



ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

Many factors such as communication and organization can cause problems on a team of teleworkers, but there are many other things that can cause a challenge in the 'office environment'. Some of them can be addressed beforehand and can even try to be prevented. Others, however, can occur suddenly and can range in severity. The key is to help employees be prepared for anything and give them the resources they need when they do have a problem.

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 not always able to be in the group's company and interact with them on a daily basis; therefore, building this trust may take longer than if that face to face interaction was present. You can begin to feel self-doubt 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 individually with them. Keep communication open with them and show that you trust them and their abilities. By showing an interest in

them at work and in the office, you build a better relationship with them and help boost their confidence and trust in you.

Tips for building trust:

- Be open and honest with your colleagues
- Don't be afraid to share opinions and ideas with them
- Offer advice, insight, and your opinion
- Allow them to ask questions and listen to their opinions

FEELING ISOLATED

An office can feel cozy when employees are able to group together to complete their work or meet with each other on a coffee break. But since teleworker employees can be spread over several miles, the feeling of closeness is usually absent. Employees can begin to feel isolated or distant from the group, causing a decrease in productivity and a greater distress of emotions. While the problem cannot be entirely solved, there are ways of helping everyone feel less isolated or alone and making them feel more part of the team. Check in with your colleagues periodically and give them any updates or changes that have recently happened. 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 have the opportunity to work from a home office so they don't have the usual commute or hassles with getting to and from work every day. Unfortunately, when you work from home, you can often feel like you are always in the office and do not have a place to go on a lunch break or when the work day is finished. The office environment tends to blend with the home environment, causing you to have trouble distinguishing personal time from work/business time. Try to designate a place at home or nearby where they can go to get away from the office when you take a break or need to get away. Remember that when the work day is done to close the 'office' and not to mix personal and business matters, when possible. With dedication and perseverance you can have a healthy balance between work and your personal lives.

LACK OF OR LESS FEEDBACK

One important aspect of any team is to make sure you are receiving timely feedback on your job duties and performance. Feedback helps everyone know how they have excelled while at the same time tells them where the need improvement. With teleworkers, it can be more difficult to deliver this feedback. One of the biggest mistakes a team manager can make is to wait to deliver the employees feedback due to the inconvenience of time or distance. If you don't receive the feedback you deserve, you can begin to feel left out, ignored, or just plain isolated. Recognize when and if this happens and reach out to your manager. You may begin to

question your own abilities or job performance, which can decrease your confidence and productivity.

Tips for delivering feedback more often:

- Ask your manager to make a schedule when to deliver feedback
- Prepare feedback in advance and have it ready before their scheduled time
- Determine how the feedback should be delivered (by phone, email, etc.)

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

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, so she made an effort to stay in contact with Deb and make sure she had enough opportunities to socialize with the other team. She also made a point to remind Deb to take her breaks away from the office so that she doesn't have that 'always in the office' feeling and that she can never get away. Over time, Cheryl began to build trust with Deb and she felt as though Deb could come to her if she needed additional help or advice.

*The secret to winning
is constant, consistent
management.*

TOM LANDRY

CLOSING THOUGHTS

- **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.



Rick Chisholm made history when he single-handedly changed the professional Audio Visual industry by breaking all the rules and capitalised over 50% market share in Australia with very little capital, no partners, mergers or lenders and set up the first franchise operation of its kind in the world in the late 1990's and early 2000's.

As a 7x founder of companies and 30x businesses such as Innovest, AI Machine, Lightsounds, LSW, Light Emotion with revenue in excess of \$300 million and having employed more than 1,000 staff over the last 35 years. Rick is known as the Start-Up and SME Guru and is Author of a number of books including Business Success for Life. Unlike many mentors, he actually walks the talk and has a number of businesses under management in such areas as Automation, Events management, Importing, Distribution, Retailing and E-commerce.

His BIG passion is Business Education empowering Businesses Owners through knowledge and skills. Whilst Rick has experienced great success, he has also endured many failures. Rick has faced and overcome the exact same challenges you are facing now.



Tala Chisholm is an SME specialist who has owned and managed several small to medium sized businesses in the last 20 years, several of which were eventually sold. She has extensive experience in the fields of retail, franchising, licensing, dealerships, education, importing, distribution and consulting.

Her expertise lies in building and implementing customised cross-platform database and software solutions for businesses, automation, IT, web marketing, advertising, graphic design, business administration, process refinement and implementation. Her business experience ranges from bricks-and-mortar Giftware retailing to highly technical fields such as Security, CCTV, Entertainment Lighting and Audio sales, hire and installations as well as e-commerce.

Throughout her career she also trained and mentored Franchise business owners as well as internal division managers. Some areas of training included retail operations, management practices, business strategy, accounting, cash-flow, marketing, customer service and IT. She has also headed up the drafting of Operating Compliance Manuals for Franchise operations and implementation of all the elements involved.

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Phone: +61 2 8007 2907
E-mail: admin@innovestsmc.com.au
Website: www.innovestsmc.com.au