

Effectively Managing Remote Employees

**Thomas Preston
IBM Corporation
Business Unit Executive
Software Technical Sales**



As a Manager ...

- ... are you challenged with unlocking the secrets of teamwork among colleagues who have never met?
- ... do a majority of your coaching sessions occur long distance using the telephone?
- ... are you on a first name basis with a co-worker in India who you have NEVER MET?
- ... are your behaviors sending a message of team unity?

Session Objectives

- What common traits are shared among successful virtual teams
- Why one virtual team becomes a hot spot of innovation and energy while another stumbles
- Why some virtual teams do not develop the desired chemistry due to physical separation, lack of familiarity and distant time zones
- How to make your virtual team work better and get the most productivity out of your dispersed work force

Dimensions of Remote Work

Same Time, Same Place

Team members work a single shift in the same physical space such as a building, floor or group of cubicles.

Different Time, Same Place

Team members work different shifts in the same location.

Same Time, Different Place

Team members work a single shift in different cities within nearby time zones.

Different Time, Different Place

Team members work in different geographies, shifts and time zones.



IBM Profile



- 7 of every 10 managers have remote employees
- More than one third of IBM'ers work outside of the traditional office
- Work-At-Home employees have highest Employee Satisfaction Index scores of all IBM work environments
- Free to work wherever, so long as work gets done

Why the increase in remote employees?

- Workers want flexible work arrangements
- Customer support
- Urban congestion
- Financial savings
- Growth of broader, richer channels of communication



Keys to Effectiveness as Remote Manager

- Relationship and feelings of fairness
- Isolation and being disconnected
- Performance Management
- Understanding and responding to employees
- Technology is Your Friend

Remote Relationships & Fairness

- Trust
 - Professional regard
 - Personal regard
 - Relationship
- Get Personal
 - Emphasize “commonality”: backgrounds, interests
 - Spend time getting to know personal details
 - Family, hobbies, major life events
- Give all employees the same opportunities
 - Performance and ability, not local proximity
 - Be generous with praise when it is earned
 - Support alternative work options

Keeping People Connected

- Create a sense of belonging
 - Let people know where they fit into the bigger picture
 - Look for natural ways to connect employees
 - Face-to-face meetings are important
- Get the entire team together at least once per year in person
- Communicate. Communicate. Communicate
 - Talk with everyone routinely
 - Meet new employees face-to-face during their first week on your team

Performance Management

- Difficult when you don't directly observe an employee's daily work
- Take the following actions:
 - Focus on results, not activities
 - Quantitative, objective performance measurements
 - Increase the number of periodic reviews
 - Eliminate barriers inhibiting performance
 - Observe employees when possible
 - Technology and training are keys to success

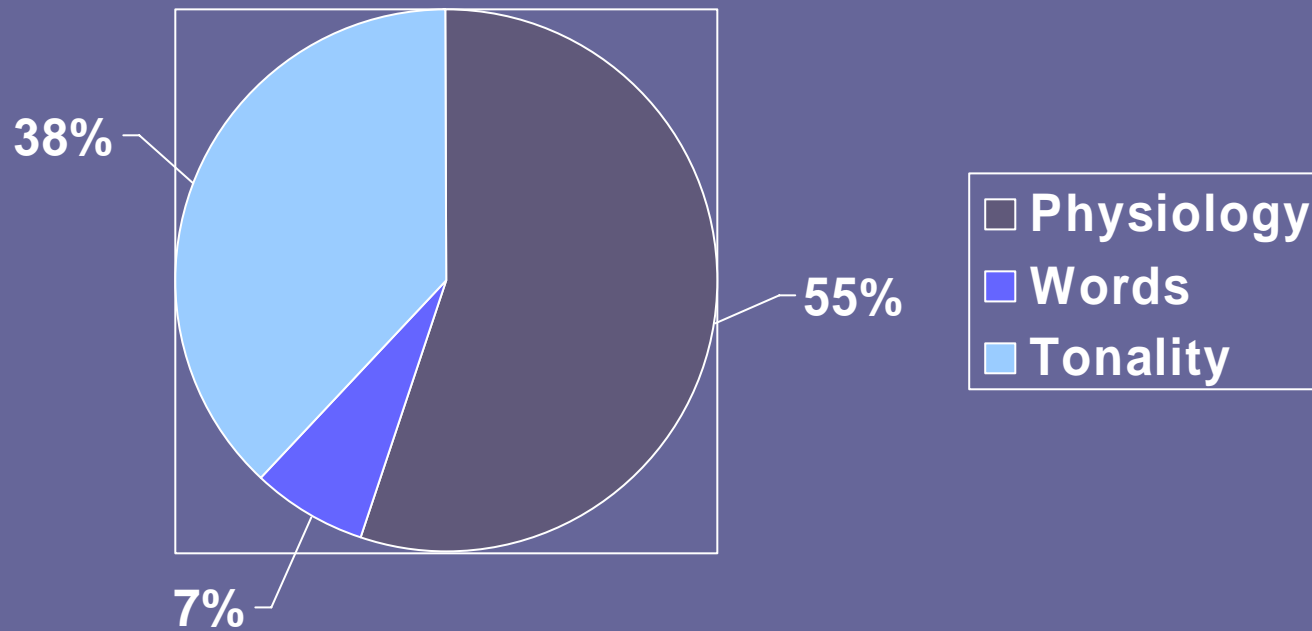
Understanding & Responding

- Be sensitive to time zone differences
- Access to additional company resources
- Make Life as Easy as Possible
 - Respond to requests in a timely manner
 - Administrative support
- Follow through on commitments

Tools: Technology is Your Friend

- More connected than ever
 - Instant messaging, e-mail, cell phones and voicemail,
 - Ongoing communication is essential to understanding your remote employees
 - Use technology to recognize people's work
- Ensure remote workers have right tools, “office environment”, technology and training

How Do We Receive Information



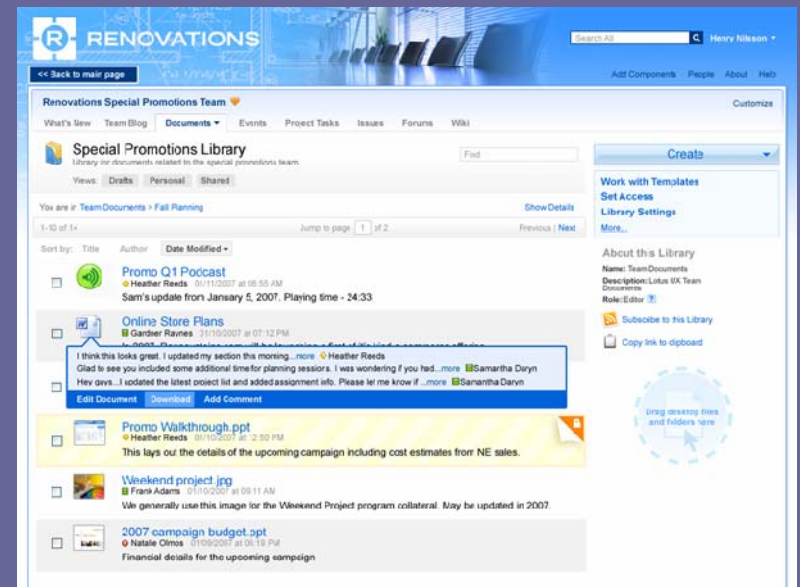
Source: Professor Albert Mehrabian

Tools: Instant Messaging / eMail

- Instant Messaging is the new water cooler
 - Supports the business and builds rapport
 - Be available and open to quick IM chats
- Treat IM as your “office door”
 - Online = “door open” & available
 - Offline = “away from office” & not available
 - If necessary, consider online “office hours”
- Send team e-mails
 - Copy members of the team, even if they are not directly involved

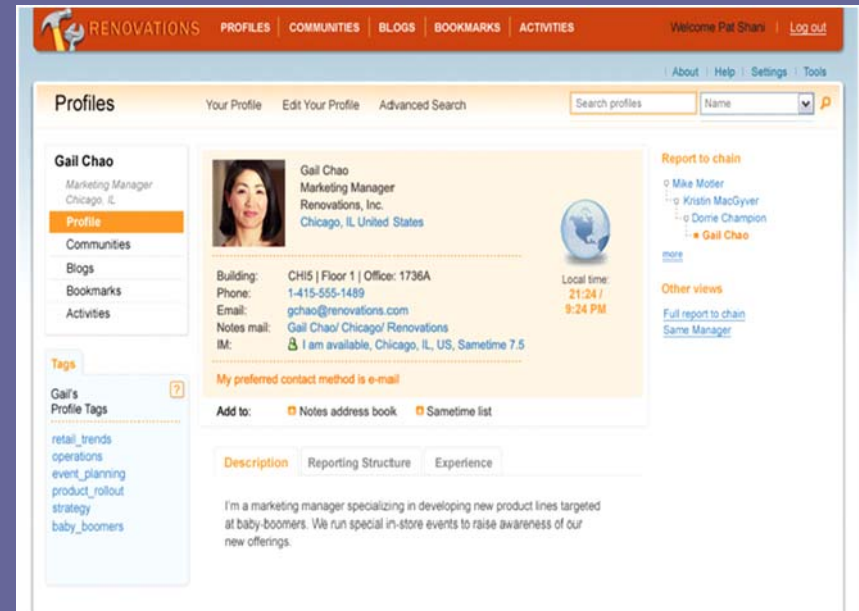
Tools: Team Collaboration

- Shared content libraries
- Collaborate with ad-hoc teams
- Web 2.0
- Team places
- Wiki's



Tools: Social Networking

- “Facebook”
- Communities
- Blogs
- Bookmarks



Tools: Conference Calls / Web Conferences

- Focus on employees
- Start every conference by engaging the team
 - Ask employees what they would like to discuss or share with the team
- Priority and focus must remain on employees
 - Distractions can be numerous (eMail, IM, home office)
- Listen more attentively for voice inflection
 - No body language or facial expressions in mobile environment

Keys to an Effective Conferences

- Choose appropriate timeframe
- Use appropriate technology
- Build/Circulate agenda
- Keep Meeting Objectives Focused
- Best Practices
 - Collaborative Web Conferences for 5 or less
 - Moderator-controlled for more than 5 attendees
- Preparation is KEY!

Tools: Web Conferences / Conference Calls

“We've all had managers who talk for the first 30 minutes of a conference call, then pout when nobody asks questions. Instead, I try to set the groundwork as quickly as possible and move right to interactive teamwork. People are engaged and they share more. It makes a big difference.”

..... IBM Manager

Conclusion

Tips

- Invite employees to make decisions
- Encourage employees to give you feedback
- Be comfortable not knowing the details
- Trust your people to do it right and accept the risk
- Recruit globally minded employees
- Focus on results!

Traps

- Doing your employee's job because you know how to do it better
- Doing your employee's job because of a crisis
- Technology has made it harder to get away from our jobs
 - A managers behaviors set expectations
- Mobile Management must never be 100%
 - Spend time observing your employees
 - MBWA (Tom Peters) applies for remote management

Q & A