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Leadership Series

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Leading While Working Remotely

It's like that movie "Groundhog Day," right? Every weekday morning, I make the trek down to my basement office and follow my same routines to begin my "solo" day again. Sound familiar? So how do we push past the "Groundhog Day" syndrome for not only ourselves, but also for our teams? How do we maintain direction, organization, connectivity and productivity when we are missing that all-important face-to-face time together to share stories and experiences?

For me personally, it all starts with being organized, including ending every day with a "hot" list for the next day. This puts my mind at rest for the night and makes me feel ready to (re)start the following day with a productive mindset. When leading a team, knowing specifically where you are headed each day gives your team members a sense of direction and responsibility for their own part in reaching short- and long-term goals. Having weekly or daily touchpoints, depending on the team member, their responsibilities and current projects, is even more critical now while working remotely.

During the touch base calls, consider making more of an effort to spend time socializing with the team. Since we don't have the opportunity to be together at meetings or events, it's even more important to use that time to show active caring. For many of us, our days are filled with calls and video conferences, so we feel extremely connected to others within our organization. That may not be true for all of our team members, so this added time together is important. Beyond this, it is important to ensure that while working remotely, we are still meeting our work obligations. Tracking projects and asking for updates at each touch base opportunity doesn't only make sure the project is getting done – it's a reminder to team members of their value and that their work is meaningful and necessary. This is more important than ever!

It's time to seize the moment in a positive way by both suggesting and supporting professional learning opportunities. Teams can continue to progress in their knowledge and experiences without the need for time-consuming travel by participating in virtual roundtables, lunch-and-learn sessions and other online opportunities hosted by organizations, such as the National Safety Council and the Campbell Institute. Additionally, internal opportunities for cross-training can give team members new skills and experience, while letting them know they are an important part of the team. It's a real benefit to the organization as a whole.

Lastly, leading is very much about the right attitude. This is even more critical when trying to capture and understand team members' thoughts without the benefit of being in the same room. As a leader, give thought to how you approach communicating with others. Acknowledging their frustration, isolation and concerns in a constructive way will give them a release, and hopefully some solutions to help combat these feelings. The same routine, office location and lack of face-to-face interaction can take a toll on anyone. But you can make a difference by being a positive influence. In the end, remember to reinforce how fortunate we are to be able to contribute and make a difference in helping our organizations' teams work safely so they can go home to their families each day.