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5 Ways to Make Virtual Teams More Productive

While the arguments for face to face meetings are valid (i.e.: the ability to have deeper conversations, create a higher sense of community, being able to see the non-verbal signals, etc) the reality of today's globally distributed marketplace, many teams are having to figure out how to do their business effectively and in a distributed fashion. And the fact also is that many teams can increase their productivity if they just followed a few principles:

1. **Make Building Trust #1 Priority:** Because virtual teams are so dependent upon unseen ways of communications which build trust, finding alternative ways to do this among geographically distributed teams is imperative. Some of these ways include members following through on their commitments, delivering on results and acting with integrity.
2. **Create a Solid Team Identity:** Humans are meant to be in community and those in distributed teams need to be connected to their co-workers and leadership. Find ways to create a team identity and establish a sense of pride for what they are accomplishing. Embrace ongoing learning and hold folks accountable.
3. **Establish Standards and Meaning of Terminology:** Unshared meanings and lack of consistent communications a source of frustrations, decreased morale and decreased productivity. Be sure to clearly define acronyms and terminology for the work the team is doing. Use email conventions to facilitate work completion and reduce communications overload. Establish project plans that are accessible to all that are impacted.
4. **Clearly Articulate Expectations:** Make goals, objections and expectations clear. The criticality of this is elevated more when individuals are geographically distributed. Set measurement targets (how will know it's a success when completed) and conduct review processes often as projects are a work in process and need to be continuously reviewed. As a leader, you cannot blame individuals for not meeting productivity if you've not set the expectations.
5. **Integrate Technology Into Work Processes:** Use available technologies to reduce cycle times of deliverables including project planning software and graphics tools. Ensure that all have the same access to the same versions of the tools and became experts in the use of them. Embed collaboration technologies into your meetings that provide environments of brainstorming, data gathering and informed decision making.