

BES467617-R

## **Evolving Soft Skills for Remote Management**

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### **Learning Objectives**

- Discuss various techniques to be a better manager
- Hear real experiences (good and bad) and discuss what is the best management approach
- Discuss soft skills that are surprisingly as important as our technical skills
- Engage in an open discussion to learn from each other

### **Description**

As technical professionals we spend years in school, then years studying for licensing exams and we spend our entire careers pouring over code books and technical manuals. By the time we reach management positions we are technical experts and excellent project managers...but we never learned how to manage people. As it turns out, soft skills are just as important as technical skills, and in the current world climate, much of these management activities are now at a distance. This session will offer a forum to discuss various management skills and techniques that will help us all improve our management skills, especially now in a remote environment.

### **Speaker(s)**

Desirée has been in the AEC industry since the 1990s. She holds a bachelor's degree from University of California, Davis and a master's degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Desirée has worked in construction and as a structural engineer, and now is the Design Technology Practice Leader for GEI Consultants. Desirée is a regular speaker at many conferences, she co-founded the Rocky Mountain Building Information Society, was the Chair of the Structural Engineers Association of Colorado's BIM Committee, served as an AUGI board member, Treasurer, and Vice President, serves on the AU Advisory Council, and is a member of the BILT North America Committee.

## Introduction

This session is intended to be a guided, open discussion about management skills and how we have had to adapt and evolve to managing remotely. We will explore a few topics and ideas and will learn from one another.

This handout is intended to be a place for you to take notes if you wish, and has been updated with notes taken during the session.

## Discussion Topics

1. What are the challenges you face with the people you manage? How have these challenges changed (better or worse) with remote management?
  - Challenge to let them fail, easier to do it myself than to let them struggle – is that easier remotely?
  - Record interactions for future reference
  - Checking in on them more often
  - Harder to get a sense for how folks are doing remotely
2. What management activities are you unable to do like you used to (when we were in person)? How have you adapted?
  - Casual interactions, Customized
  - It is all about building a healthy relationship
3. What do your direct reports value the most? Has this changed?
  - Positive feedback
  - Personalized approach
  - Autonomy
  - Stress relief
4. What do you value the most? Has this changed?
  - Honesty
  - Trust
  - Drive and proactivity
  - Productivity
  - Open communication, ask for help
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5. How has communication with your direct reports changed, medium and frequency? What do you do in place of wandering around to check on your direct reports?
  - Adjusting medium per person
  - The content of the conversation may dictate the medium of communication
  - Recording meetings and going back

- Promote use of camera
  - Running the meeting vs meeting host
  - Walks and Talks
  - Dedicated social space updated for COVID requirements
6. Do you spend time with each of your direct reports, one on one? If so, is this time as effective remotely?
- Weekly, morning check ins
  - Zoom drop in
7. How do you give feedback, both formal and informal? How do you deliver this remotely?
- Avoid the “do you have time to talk” / “do you have a minute” etc.
  - Approach different people in different ways
  - It is about creating the correct environment
  - Be more clear about goals of interactions – formal/informal mesh
8. How do you coach your direct reports? Have coaching topics evolved?
- Remote is easier less embarrassment
9. How do you delegate work? What do you delegate?
- Remote makes some items harder to manage, so easier to fall into the doing it myself
  - More of a nuanced effort now than before
  - Harder to read understanding
  - What is driving the ask? Explain why the delegation
  - Point out the value and how it contributes to the overall picture, prompts taking ownership
10. What are your interviewing preferences? How have you adapted them to working remotely? How has onboarding changed?
- “onboarding has been a disaster”
  - Interviewing is more comfortable because everyone is more comfortable. It is more authentic.
  - Need to make extra effort at connections and relationships for the newbies...they don’t have the already established relationships the rest of us do.
  - More explicit whats and whys
  - Have to create vulnerability to allow space for the new person’s discomfort
  - New arrivals need to be more engaged more quickly
11. Have you had to fire/lay off anyone? How do you do that remotely?
- Remote made it easier, sadly

- Feels less personal
- Still difficult
- One thing to note, many on Zoom will possibly have other family members in the room when it is being discussed (spouse, child).

12. How do you conduct annual reviews? Has this changed?

- Remote has made fewer surprises

13. How have meetings evolved? What do you do differently to run an effective remote meeting?

- Meeting agendas

## References

While many of the topics and ideas included in this session originated simply from experience, I have drawn a great deal of inspiration, language, ideas, and practices from the following source:

Manager Tools

<https://www.manager-tools.com/>

I listen to the podcast, use the tools on the website, and maintain an individual license subscription. I encourage you to check it out!

Other resources mentioned by attendees: Baldrige, Predictable Success, BIM Manager Bootcamp, Global Leadership Summit

## Conclusions

At the end of this discussion, the hope is for each manager to depart with a few new ideas, and perhaps a fresh perspective on people management.