8. SHARING SUCCESS IN REMOTE TEAMS

'Blowing your own trumpet' and celebrating personal success might be more difficult on a remote team, and requires calling things out yourself rather than getting noticed by others. In this chapter, Pilar examines some of the ways you can mitigate this with thoughtful action.

In the article '3 Ways You Are Failing Your Remote Workers',[11] Gallup researchers note that "fully remote workers are 29% less likely to strongly agree that they have reviewed their greatest successes with their manager in the past six months".

The reasons given by the study are that:

- Workers don't want to look like they are blowing their own trumpet by sharing their success, which often results in managers and other team members not being aware of the great things that people are doing.
- Managers do not want to take up too much of their people's time, and so tend to keep their catch-ups short.

As with all communication in the remote space, we need to be deliberate when we talk about success. Employees cannot rely on managers and others just picking up on the fact that they are competent at their jobs; and managers cannot always rely on others telling them the great things they have been up to – team members need to inform, and managers need to ask questions.

Fuelling intrinsic motivation and learning from success

Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory[12] suggests that people's desire to do their best is driven by a sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

11   Annamarie Mann (2017) '3 Ways You Are Failing Your Remote Workers', Gallup, 1 August. Available at: www.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/214946/ways-failing-remote-workers.aspx

12   See 'Self-Determination Theory', available at: http://selfdeterminationtheory.org

Reviewing our greatest success with someone else can increase our sense of connection with others, as well as helping with our feeling of competence.

It is not only satisfying to be able to share that we are doing our job well, but during our conversations with others we might identify ways of learning from, or building on, those successes that we had not thought of in the first place.

Don't ask, don't tell

If we don't inform others of our results, they might never find out. If we don't ask people what they have recently achieved, or the aspect of their work of which they are most proud, they might never tell us.

It is an effort to remember to have these conversations, so why not make them part of your team's commitments to each other? Find regular ways of catching up with each other's achievements so that it becomes part of your team's practice.

The Gallup article recommends carrying out this recognition in team meetings, weekly emails or scheduled check-ins. Here are some other suggestions:

- Committing to posting recognition of someone else's achievement once a week in your collaboration platform (for those of you who enjoy incorporating bots into your tools, you could even have a bot that reminds you once a week to post).
- Highlighting or using a different font colour for successes when 'working out loud' or reporting on work done.
- Having a regular slot in review meetings where individuals share something they have done, of which they are proud.

"But I don't like sharing so much"

Think about it: it's good for you that other people know what you are achieving, and to share why you are proud of a piece of work – it might take you closer to identifying what you want to work on next. Plus others can learn from hearing someone talk of success.

However, not everyone is comfortable sharing their achievements. If that is the case and you want to shift the focus away from yourself, place it

instead on what you have achieved. Talk about your process, not just your results. For example:

- What helped you?
- What stood in your way?
- If you have tackled similar tasks or projects before, what did you do differently this time?

Similarly, as a manager, if you want to show appreciation for somebody's good work, don't just stop at 'Well done!' Find out more about the conditions which helped your team member be successful, what helps them to do a great job. Turn it into a learning opportunity to help the whole of your team's performance.

Let technology help you

Some of us are happy to have these personal conversations on video (I consider talking about how I work quite personal, even if it's work-related), while others prefer to use audio-only. Meanwhile, some are only really comfortable typing these conversations.

So, review your communication methods:

- What do people prefer?
- What do individuals prefer for their one-on-ones?
- What can you agree on using as a team?

Your preferences as manager might well be taking over how the team operates, so be aware of what they are, and make sure that you are not imposing on others what works best for you.

Don't forget: you are a team

It's a shame to restrict the 'success conversation' to the manager–employee relationship. One of the opportunities that virtual teamwork offers is that of creating flatter structures in organisations. People can work autonomously (provided that they have the information and resources they need),

and should require less hand-holding and supervision than in traditional workplaces.

Opening up the 'success conversation' to the whole team can lead to shared learning, high morale and a team culture of responsibility and accountability. (Please note that I say '*can* lead': this might not work with team members used to rigid hierarchies, or who are not comfortable sharing their work.)

When operating as a remote team, we have permission to formalise the spontaneous, so why not deliberately create the conditions for success conversations to take place?

Agreeing on a simple way for team members to share their achievements with each other is one way of letting people know that it's OK to blow your own trumpet, and keep everyone updated on the progress of the work. (I have added this last one for those managers who like to keep their conversations short. In this way, you don't need to ask your team member if they have something successful to share with you – you can go straight into congratulating them for it.)

An example of how some 100% distributed companies are already doing this comes from Convert.com. Morgan Legge, Holacracy® Bootstrapper and Facilitator and HR Champion at the company, once shared with me:

> We recently started a #humblebrag channel and also a casual weekly Wins & Miseries video chat with the whole team. Even though we had Buddy Calls, we needed a more structured approach to solicit and implement feedback on the work we produce.[13]

Working in a remote team is not always easy or fun. As with all teams, at some point our communication will break down: we might disagree with others and have uncomfortable conversations; we might even start wondering why we put up with building working relationships through technology at all.

Sharing success is rewarding: it boosts our morale, reminds us of our potential and can even increase trust. Reviewing our success can uncover hidden strengths, help us in the future, even be of use to someone else. Sharing and reviewing our success is one of the easiest parts of working with others, so it should not be left to chance.

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13   Quoted from conversation in the private forum of the Virtual Team Talk community, 27 July 2017. Reproduced here with kind permission of Ms Legge.

Leadership reflections

Here are some things to think about.

1. When was the last time you shared and reviewed
your greatest success with someone else?

If you don't lead by example, getting out of your own comfort zone
as necessary, then you are not helping others to follow. So, get out
that trumpet and give it a long blast when the time is right!

2. Would a structured way of doing this, such as a dedicated, success-
sharing channel in your communication system or standard meeting
agenda, enable people to share their achievements more broadly?

3. Are you learning from successes?

Abstracting from and modelling the conditions connected with success
is a powerful way to both create continuous improvement, and reinforce
behaviours and mindsets which serve everyone's motivations and goals.

However, don't let this detract from the moment of celebration
itself! Savour the popping of champagne corks (or metaphorical
online equivalent), before you dig into the analysis of it.

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So, what next?

While the subtitle of this book is 'inspiration for leaders of distributed teams', and we hope to have inspired you to define your next steps and actions – we also hope to have given you some specific guidance.

Perhaps the reflection questions in particular have helped you to zero in on specific areas which you already knew needed attention, or in other cases they might have surfaced new issues that you were not aware of at all. Either way, we hope to have nudged you closer towards resolving any areas of your remote leadership practice which could be improved.

We never said it was easy, though. Both of us run small businesses, and are in regular contact with enough managers to know that leading teams always brings plenty of challenges. However, we also know that the most joyful way of bringing a service or a product into the world is through collaboration.

If we have added a little bit of joy, or if we have helped you to remove a little bit of your pain, we would love to hear from you. And if you have found the book inspiring, we would love to stay in touch with you.

As well as our regular content made up of podcast episodes and articles (which you can find over at www.virtualnotdistant.com), we have created an email series to follow up *Thinking Remote*. This is aimed specifically at those with leadership responsibilities or inclinations, who are determined to take their remote collaboration capabilities to the next level. You can easily sign up to this over at: www.virtualnotdistant.com/thinking-remote.

And if you have got this far in the book, we are pretty sure you will be interested in our services and products, as well as our numerous blog posts and podcast episodes. On our website (www.virtualnotdistant.com) you will find all of this additional information and guidance, and a form to contact us directly with your feedback, suggestions and input.

Meanwhile, if you are ready to start a conversation about what you have learned with your colleagues or peers, use the leadership questions to start you off, or pick the article that you found most helpful and talk through it with them.

The future's bright, the future's flexible!

Pilar Orti and Maya Middlemiss