

You're in Jersey. They're in San Jose.


Maximizing productivity and
motivating teams from afar.





Patty Azzarello — best-selling author, speaker and CEO/business advisor

Patty became the youngest general manager at HP at the age of 33. She ran a \$1B software business at the age of 35 and became a CEO for the first time at the age of 38 (without turning into a self-centered, miserable jerk). She's the founder of the Azzarello Group, which works with CEOs and leadership teams to help them get better at what they do.

Watch the [on-demand webinar](#) 

Distance isn't
the problem.

Fuzzy expectations are.

Managers ask me about this all the time, “How do I optimize motivation and productivity when my team is spread across multiple sites?”

Here are the two most important things to consider:

1. Individuals can be more productive working at home, but TEAMS can't. Teams are always LESS productive when people are not together. As leaders of virtual and remote teams, we need to find a way to deal with this reality.

2. Individual productivity declines most often because management is unclear on expectations and measures—not because people working remotely are slacking off.

To motivate top performance, one of the most important things you can do is to get very clear about both individual and team goals.

Figure out what things the team must work on together and what things will be optimized by individuals working on their own. Establish clear desired outcomes, schedules, and priorities both for the individuals and the team. Then schedule team time and individual time according to the goals and measures you set.

Use this simple checklist to keep your dispersed team working together.

1. Are you maintaining a presence?

Just because you are not physically present, does not mean you can't exert your presence.

Look at ways to replicate physical presence by optimizing limited face time, using video, photos, and better managing conference call behaviors.

Remote team building is possible. It's true. You can still do team building activities even when people are not in the same room. At my business, we cover some great techniques and best practices to do this.

You must find ways to exert your presence whether you are the remote employee or the remote manager. With my teams, I talk about ways to make this a habit and to think of exerting presence as a fundamental part of everyone's job.

2. Are you taking a people-first approach?

Sadly, "out of sight, out of mind" often takes hold in remote working relationships. It is vitally important to treat people like people in business, even if you can't see them — especially if you can't see them!

Focus on how you can increase the personal connection so that the distance does not make remote people and teams feel like they count less.

Managers need to reach out personally.

Making the effort to connect the dot's for people about why their work matters increases motivation and performance. We talked about ways to include people in different locations in team events and celebrations.

Individuals need to build a network of support. Talk about different ways that remote relationships go bad and make people feel powerless and cut off. We shared ideas for remote employees to take initiative to connect with their peers and manager in a personal way to build more visibility and support.

3. Do you communicate consistently and clearly?

Regular communication is important in any organization. But when dealing with dispersed teams, time zones, languages and cultures, it becomes even more critical. So you need to put extra effort into an on-purpose communication program.

Augment your communications to reinforce connection and progress.

We talked about how workflow can stall, slow, or go in the wrong direction with time-zone and language issues, and how to create a highly effective and inclusive communication plan for remote colleagues.

4. Is your performance management game on point?

While individuals can be more productive working remotely, teams can't be. It's vital in remote working relationships that you get very clear and outcome-oriented with performance objectives and expectations for individuals and teams.

“Before anything else, you need to develop a strategy that gets your dispersed team working together.”

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Here's how to get started:

Get clear about needs and goals.

Have your team work together to define clear team goals. What things must be worked on as a team? How often? What does the team need to learn? Plan and structure team meetings to achieve those specific outcomes.

Team time is important for collaboration and idea generation. It's important for problem solving and process improvements. Team time is also important to have discussions about what people are worried about, answer questions, and calm uncertainty.

Defined outcomes.

They drive individual productivity.

If you define clear desired outcomes for content, schedule and quality—it should not matter when or where employees do the work—as long as they deliver.

If you've given someone clear direction on required outcomes and defined stretch goals, you never have to make a personal judgment about whether someone is working hard enough. Clearly defined and measured results tell the whole story. But if you are vague on expectations, productivity will decline. You get what you measure.

Create an atmosphere of flexibility.

One of the reasons people like working outside the office is that they feel in control and they feel trusted. That is good for motivation and productivity. I am a big believer in treating

people like humans (not as resources) and acknowledging that they have a life that matters outside of work.

If you give people schedule flexibility to deal with daily daycare drop-offs and pick-ups and school events, or allow them time away to care for sick family, in my experience, they become much more motivated, loyal, and productive.

People will move mountains for you if you respect them as people, and don't force them work on a very specific, lock-down schedule when it doesn't matter.

Don't fall hostage to physical boundaries.

I used to think that I could only do team building activities during the moments when I could get my team together physically. But then I realized that I was being uncreative and that there are actually many possibilities.

You can't let a lack of physical presence keep you from establishing team camaraderie, and building team performance. With a little bit of effort and the use of technology, there are many ways to do team building virtually.

First get your head around having a virtual meeting just for the purposes of doing team building. Schedule it and don't talk about status or projects. Create a template ahead of time that everyone fills in with things like, photos related to their favorite hobby or vacation, favorite books, movies, music. Better yet, let the team crowd source what they want to put on the template.

Then have a team building meeting where everyone shares what they prepared and the whole purpose of the meeting is to have fun and get to know each other better. Get in the habit of using video instead of audio only.

I was pleasantly surprised at how this type of effort could create such strong personal relationships and that trust could be built even if people had never met.

Keep open dialogue around career development.

Another important factor in motivation is that people feel that there are career development opportunities. When you don't work in the same place as your boss, or if you are working from home, sometimes the idea of a career path seems absent, or people assume they are on their own.

If you want to build motivation and loyalty, don't forget to include career development conversations with your employees. Investing in your employees' development is motivating and shows them there is a reason to continue to invest their best efforts in making your business successful.

Want to hear
more from Patty?

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