



# Dentists: How to Lead Remote Teams

*By Kristine Berry, RDH, MSEC, Founder, Getting It Done Remotely™*

The popularity of remote and/or virtual teams has grown exponentially. According to a Gallup State of American Workplace 2016 survey, 43% of employees work remotely with some frequency. Out of the 43%, only 22% had training in the area of working remotely. The flip switched in March 2020; in a period of nine days, more than 1.5 million reported working from home.

Dental organizations looking to proactively shift some of their team members toward the remote space need to provide the right tools, infrastructure and teaming skills to support them in the field.

This guide offers a peek at what you need to get set up for success.

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### Terms: Remote, Virtual and Mobile

**Working Remote:** Remote teams are geographically dispersed. Remote dental workers range from a call center team member to an entire team that works from home several days a week or month, traveling to the office or corporate headquarters when needed.

**Working Virtually:** Many organizations work in a virtual space, without the traditional brick and mortar building. Leveraging technologies, virtual work can occur from almost anywhere, bringing together the skills and players as needed.

**Mobile Work:** Mobile work has already been embraced by workers who access their files or practice software (analytics, dashboards) while on the road, at home, or in the sky.

### Which Jobs Can Be Remote?

There is a variety of dental professionals working in the remote space: remote team leader, regional or district manager, salesperson, contract partners and anyone who “logs in” remotely from a home office or laptop.

With the proper equipment and HIPAA-compliant software, more positions can work remotely, including practice managers, receptionists, insurance coordinators, collections representatives, and marketing team members.

Dentists can even perform teledentistry consultations to determine whether a patient needs to come into the office for urgent care. Other considerations of teledentistry include teaching, mentoring, calibration, research, specialty consultations, pre and post-operative care, follow-up and medical/ dental collaborations. There are several teledentistry services that provide the tools needed to perform this critical function.

### Teamwork Skills: Remote and Virtual Teamwork and Leadership

Whether a one-person show or a team of 1,000, all dental professional in the remote space need certain knowledge, skills and abilities. As you read through the below list, take the pulse of where you are on a scale of 1-10 in each of the areas:

#### Communication

- Includes verbal communication skills by phone and VOIP, texts, Instant Messages, streaming conversations, chat and annotation
- Determine your preferences around communication channels, frequency and directness

### **Holding Accountability**

- Ways of working
- Develop team contracts or written agreements

### **Listening**

- What is being said and not said in virtual communication
- It's highly recommended that you create an agreement with your team that cameras will be on so everyone can each other and read visual cues such as body language, just as you do during in-person meetings

### **Conflict Resolution**

- Conflict in virtual and remote teams may be further nuanced by cultural, time and geographic differences
- Do you compromise, collaborate, compete, accommodate or avoid conflict?

### **Holding Difficult Conversations**

- In a remote environment, difficult conversation may be ignored or forgotten, until the conflict grows in size
- What frameworks and skills do you have to navigate difficult conversations?

### **Relationship Building**

- In a virtual space, we need to be proactive and take ownership to build relationships with peers, managers, mentors, coaches, partners, other matrix team members and internal and external members

### **Emotional Intelligence**

- EI skills are essential in the virtual space

### **Building Trust, Respect and Physiological Safety**

- In a remote environment, your culture (behaviors, standard of care, language, agreements) is not visible, and team norms, values, narratives, beliefs and assumptions need to be explicit
- Take time to clarify and internally shape how things are done, what is acceptable; clarification of unacceptable behavior, roles and responsibilities, job descriptions and team agreement becomes unwavering for remote performance (see Hold Accountability)
- Create a handbook that outlines expectations

### **Collaboration & Intercultural Effectiveness**

- Be clear on common ground, shared goals, requirements and roles

### **Technology Skills**

- Navigating different platforms for communication, meetings, from chats to learning management systems, to Intranet

### Technology: Setting Leaders and Teams Up for Success

When working remotely, it is vital for team members to have a clear understanding of human resources (hours, breaks, levels of connection), operational policies, network security and processes and technology. Although some may want to let employees use their own devices, there are many cyber security and HIPAA concerns with unmitigated network access and device usage.

#### **Checklist for what one needs in a home remote space:**

- A dedicated workspace
- PC/Laptop
  - Computer supplies: cords and chargers, surge protector bars, extra ink
- Smartphone
- An ergonomically comfortable chair
- High Speed Internet Connection
- VoIP or softphone
- Ability to remotely access network
- Web cam (internal/external)
- Printer/Scanner (optional)
- Cybersecurity measures

### Virtual Collaboration & Communication Tools

There are many applications and tools available to help your team work remotely. Here is a partial list.

**Applications:** Slack Chat, Whatsapp, Telegram, Skype, Rocket Chat, Flowdeck

**Video Conferencing:** Zoom, Webex, GoToMeeting, Fuze

**File Sharing:** Dropbox, Google Drive

**Project Management:** Basecamp, Monday.com, Teamworks Projects, Trello, Microsoft Teams, Asana

### 5 Common Mistakes to Avoid

**1. “I can do it all myself.”** Remote work does not mean operating in a vacuum. Actually, higher level collaboration skills need to be cultivated. A strategy of engagement can help managers keep remote workers connected.

**2. Unclear expectations.** Developing shared expectations and agreements are key to remote work success. Examples include: hours of work, level of connection with the office,



the team, manager; device use, security and confidentiality; boundaries (personal and professional); team behavioral norms and agreements.

**3. Micro-managing instead of micro-monitoring.** Trying to control or micro-manage a remote team is the kiss of death. High levels of trust and outcome focus are required. Micro-monitoring means that you keep an eye on the results while allowing people to do their best work in the best way they can. Micro-monitoring means developing solid timelines, due dates and when assignments or projects are to be completed.

**4. Out of “site” out of mind.** It takes a community to be successful in the remote space. One of the benefits of working in an office is that you get to know your team members and what’s going on in their lives. So they do not feel cut off, it’s important to keep the human connection and having meaningful conversations with your remote teams. For instance, in one study involving a customer-facing organization, the time between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. Eastern was noted as the time of greatest risk for isolation and loneliness. Include virtual daily huddles (morning and afternoon) and hosting a few virtual lunches and well-being breaks go a long way in keeping team members engaged.

**5. NOT providing the tools, resources and support to make remote work sustainable.** The move to working remote needs a plan, a point person or consultant that understands the role as an agent of change for developing a sustainable remote model. Make sure the remote workers not only have the tools and resources but also the recognition and support (personally and professionally) that they need to ensure their successful transition.



### About Kristine Berry

Kristine Berry, RDH, MSEC is a coaching executive who trains, coaches and supports team leaders and teams who work remotely or virtually. She has been in the oral care space for over 30 years, first as a clinician and now a successful accountability coach and speaker. Kristine understands many businesses have limited time, resources or capability for training & development and or coaching. For the time-crunched, results-orientated professional, she hosts remote and virtual coaching sessions and programs. She can be reached at [www.kristineberry.com](http://www.kristineberry.com) or via email at [kristine@kristineberry.com](mailto:kristine@kristineberry.com)





## Additional Resourcees

It's more important than ever to make sure your team has the tools and training to effectively communicate with patients.

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