



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: TWEAK (AND PUBLICIZE) THE OFFICE MODUS OPERANDI

When we coach executive teams in Strategic Team Coaching®, we usually recommend they create Team Agreements or Team Commitments governing how they operate together. See: [Leadership Effectiveness: Boost Performance - executivecoaching.com](https://www.executivecoaching.com/leadership-effectiveness-boost-performance) and [Leadership Effectiveness: I Am Speaking - executivecoaching.com](https://www.executivecoaching.com/leadership-effectiveness-i-am-speaking). Right now, Team Agreements may need to be tweaked or emphasized in a different way due to workplace fears that have been magnified by pandemic-induced work from home (WFH) mandates. And psychological safety has probably taken a hit...

Having Team Agreements can go a long way toward improving communication and understanding, and toward diminishing fears, misunderstandings, and unease. Mandated WFH has only heightened the fears that many workers already had. And personal sensitivity is an overlay. (See [Managing your WFH paranoia - hbr.org](https://hbr.org/2020/04/managing-your-wfh-paranoia).)

You must lead differently now if your team is not only remote but also super stressed due to the pandemic. And how could they not be!? They do not know if they and theirs will be able to remain safe and healthy; if their kids are in school or out—or half and half; if their jobs are secure; if the company is strong enough to survive the pandemic stressors; and so on.

Layered on top of all of those challenges are fears fueled by these types of thoughts: what am I missing out on; how am I perceived by others; are my colleagues Zooming without me (since I can't see the closed conference room door); am I missing any gossip (since there is no water cooler); am I the subject of gossip; did my boss really mean it when he said I did well on the last assignment (his email was open to multiple interpretations); *is someone else getting better assignments than me.... ???*

The Team Agreements you have in place may need some temporary modifications due to current circumstances. What may have worked in business as usual may not be working in business unusual – like now. Would anyone dispute that we are in business unusual?

How you can modify your Team Agreements to help allay fears:

- **Ensure there are clear, open parameters about who is in which meetings.** The risk right now is that the quantity of meetings is amped up, as there are no elevator conversations or chatting over a cubicle wall. Clarify principles about reducing the amount of time everyone is in meetings. This level of transparency will result in fewer doubts about “Why am I not in this meeting.”
- **Set response time guidelines.** This can work two ways. Let everyone know that they should respond to emails or phone messages within a specific time frame, say 24 hours, and make clear that getting anxious before 24 hours, or whatever the standard is, is not productive because the responder knows they have 24 hours!
- **Monitor meeting cadence:** Pay particular attention to how often one-on-ones should be conducted and put it in Team Agreements. When you do that, you have publicly committed that you will meet with your team members at x frequency. One-on-ones allow for time to address sensitive issues, if there are any, privately. At a minimum, it is an opportunity to reinforce a connection weakened by lack of face-to-face interaction.
- **Promote candor:** Invite others to voice their concerns swiftly. The “Agreement” item might be: “Ask. Don’t imagine the worst.” And/or: “Talk *to* the other party, not *about* them.” This Agreement goes a long way toward cutting down on gossiping and festering.

Do you know if fears in your workplace are heightened due to pandemic-induced WFH? What additional ground rules might you need to deploy now?