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TACKLING THE REALITY OF VIRTUAL



50 Tips for Amplifying Human Engagement
in a Remote Work Context

Deloitte
Greenhouse

BREAKTHROUGH

— MANIFESTO —

STRIP AWAY EVERYTHING
SILENCE YOUR CYNIC
MAKE A MESS
LIVE WITH THE PROBLEM
GET REAL
ENLIST A MOTLEY CREW
CHECK YOUR EDGE
DON'T PLAY "NICE"
DIAL UP THE DRAMA
MAKE CHANGE

Today's teams are a different animal from the teams of the past. They are more "virtual" – digital channels and tools are standard operating equipment, "virtual" places and spaces are the new office, and capacity is a "virtual" measure with teams growing, shrinking, interconnecting, and recombining as needed.

In this new reality, human engagement becomes more important than ever. And the principles for how to amplify human engagement through experiences – our Deloitte Greenhouse® Breakthrough Manifesto principles – carry over beyond face to face interactions to remote work environments.

This playbook translates the Deloitte Greenhouse® Breakthrough Manifesto principles into practical tips to help individuals, teams, and leaders be more connected and productive across the five faces, or roles, today's "virtual" professional is expected to play.

The Five Faces of a “Virtual” Professional



The Individual

The first face is our self. Our own unique needs, challenges, perspectives, skills, voice, and personality. Our authentic being.



The Social Animal

The second face is our role in seeking and creating meaningful human connection. Forming relationships and bonds with others that often blend work and life.



The Teammate

The third face is being an active contributor to the team. Being a responsible and accountable member of the group contributing to the team’s goals.



The Facilitator

The fourth face is when we are shaping strategic conversations and creating experiences to help get an individual or a team to Breakthrough. Our role includes diagnosing issues, revealing insights, and creating experiences that yield ah-ha’s.



The Leader

The fifth face is when we are leading a team, whether we’re the official Grand Poohbah or the aspiring leader practicing our leadership skills. Here we are stepping up and into a role to serve our teams and organizations.



Strip Away Everything

The first step into business-not-as-usual is a mindset shift to avoid 'lifting and shifting' face-to-face habits into virtual places and spaces – especially the bad habits!

With a new reality comes the need to learn new etiquette, create new rituals, and shed the conventions that may hold us back in our new reality.

The Five Faces of Strip Away Everything



The Individual

STRIP AWAY EVERYTHING IS A CONCEPT, NOT A FASHION CALL TO ACTION:

Working from home doesn't mean working in pajamas. While you may choose to be 'business on top' and 'party on the bottom', getting dressed-up for a virtual meeting can not only provide the appearance of being work ready but also create a boundary between your work life and your home life.



The Social Animal

VIRTUAL DOES NOT EQUAL ALONE:

Social skills are like a muscle; the more you use them, the better and stronger they'll become! When working with a virtual team don't assume you are abolished to the wilderness or defined by the screen. Set yourself a social challenge; reach out and talk to one new person every day even if it's a simple phone call. Phones are still good.



The Teammate

MORE IS NOT MORE:

If you use screen sharing to show slides, make the slides as simple as possible. Attending a meeting online demands even more attention than an in-person meeting, and different size screens can make detailed information hard to consume. Avoid content-dense presentations.



The Facilitator

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU:

In remote settings, it's essential to design around conversations not presentations. Encourage human interactions during virtual meetings to make up for the lack of personal touch. In the virtual environment the more you can share the facilitator mic the better. Spreading facilitation across multiple people provides much-needed variety and increases engagement.



The Leader

QUALITY NOT QUANTITY:

Communication is already one of the biggest problems for virtual teams - people can develop FOMO of information as well as information overload. It's a balancing act that needs attention. It can help to stand-up a Tiger Team to develop a thoughtful approach, and monitor information flow.

UNREALISTIC
NO / IMPOSSIBLE
DIFFICULT / BUSY
EXPENSIVE / BUT...
TIME CONSUMING
WE DON'T DO THAT
I DON'T THINK SO
CAN'T / WON'T
BE REALISTIC
I WISH

SILENCE YOUR CYNIC

Silence Your Cynic:

Now's the time to get comfortable with being uncomfortable, by being open to opportunity and possibility even in the strangest of places and moments. Ideas can, and do come from anywhere and everywhere. Creativity comes from observation and the liberating "yes"!

It's time to look for silver linings!

The Five Faces of Silence Your Cynic:



The Individual

MANAGE YOUR "RESTING SKEPTIC FACE" :

For video calls, be aware of your expression and posture, and how that could be interpreted. Turn off notifications, close competing apps, and try to minimize temptations in your work environment that will make you seem disengaged or tuned out (resist those cat memes). Be aware that your energy can be felt through the screen, keep up your energy with quick and simple workouts between meetings.



The Social Animal

VIRTUAL GET TOGETHERS CAN BE COOL ... NO, REALLY:

Seek out interesting events and share the experience even from different locations; watch a TV show, movie, or cultural highlight together with your "closest" friends and family. Get active online with virtual happy hours, virtual trivia nights ... almost anything you can do in person you can do virtually!



The Teammate

NO NEED FOR ONLINE ALL THE TIME:

With the blurring of boundaries inherent in remote work, it can be easy to feel pressure to be constantly checking email, or Teams, or IMs. But if you're not taking care of yourself, you won't be much use to the team. Remember to step away from your screen and get some movement in when and where you can, keeping yourself fit and giving you an endorphin boost. And positive energy is infectious, so you'll create a cycle of positivity your teams will feed off!



The Facilitator

CALLING ALL CYNICS:

Elicit questions and concerns by canvassing team members before a meeting to identify issues they think need to be discussed on the team call. Issues raised by team members can be the most useful part of a virtual meeting. They can prompt needed process improvements and spur re-alignment around disagreements.



The Leader

E-DEFINE PRODUCTIVITY:

Provide clear objectives and trust the team to execute. Trust should be the basis of the relationships between team members especially when working virtually. Create processes to see the progress of the work, not the people. The feeling of being watched can create an environment of insecurity.

MAKE — A — MESS.

Make A Mess:

Talk is cheap! Roll up your sleeves and get doing! The solution won't be perfect – yet – but getting stuff down on paper, prototyping, practicing can accelerate the path to success.

And it's a lot more fun!

The Five Faces of Make a Mess



The Individual

BUILD NEW MUSCLES:

If you're new to remote work, it may feel like there are so many new things to juggle. From technologies, to processes, to personal and professional schedules, things can get messy, fast. Make a personal plan for how you're going to tackle the chaos and get yourself up the learning curve fast, including daily rituals that will help you get in the groove. And in the meanwhile, try not to sweat the small stuff – instead sweat that new guided yoga course between meetings!



The Social Animal

THE MORE COOKS THE MERRIER:

Even though you might be out of sight, don't be out of mind or out of creative gatherings. You have access to a world of people. Harness the chaotic energy of multiple minds and explore collective creative powers through virtual Labs, virtual hackathons, and virtual meeting of the minds. Reap the functional and social benefits of co-creation, crowd sourcing, and buy-in.



The Teammate

ESTABLISH NORMS:

With the variety of communication channels available, teams can easily get overwhelmed with all of the information coming in. Talk to your teams about the norms for your group, and be open to vehicles (like MS Teams) that let team members consume information on their own time.



The Facilitator

PLAN FOR PLAN B:

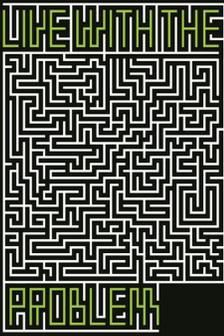
Make a mess in advance so game day can be magnificent. Experiment, mutate, review - live and controlled experimentation involves playing with multiple alternative courses of action and anticipating different scenarios. Especially in virtual environments, Murphy's Law is alive and well, so be ready to pivot when something doesn't go as planned.



The Leader

GIVE PERMISSION TO MAKE A MESS:

Rather than have team members protect themselves against mistakes by establishing layers of permission which must be granted before someone can take action, bring permission structures down to a minimum. Ensure accountability through team transparency and reputation versus strict control.



Live With The Problem:

Avoid the trap of speed equating to good.

Trust the process of spending the time upfront to define the problem, understand the implications, and shape decisions before working through it.

Good things really do come to those who ... well, not wait, perhaps, but who take the time to figure out what they're really solving for.

The Five Faces of Live With The Problem



The Individual

BE A PROBLEM ANTHROPOLOGIST:

Take the time to observe and steep yourself in the problem at hand. Take notes, turn observation on it's head to find the opportunity. Even better, create a collective for insights and perspectives for others to benefit from.



The Social Animal

REFLECT TOGETHER:

Take the time to regularly reflect on what people are learning. For example, invite them to write something in a chat box, create a group journal, track the experience journey to help learn from the recent past and project into the future. It gives everyone a sense of shared experience and amplifies what really matters.



The Teammate

FOCUS, FOCUS, FOCUS:

In the virtual world, there's a lot of competition for attention. Be sure to focus on the things that really matter. What's the one essential "objective" (UNDERSTAND, BRAINSTORM, SHAPE, PRIORITIZE, CONNECT) you're trying to achieve? Don't try and pack everything into one call, meeting, email, deck, one conversation.



The Facilitator

SILENCE IS GOLDEN:

That long pause on a call or video session may feel awkward, but it's important to not jump into it. Strategically use silence and pauses to allow people to fill the uncomfortable void with their opinions. For people who like to think before they speak (Guardians for instance), this also allows them more opportunity to get a word in edgewise!



The Leader

MIND YOUR ASAPs:

A constant sense of urgency can generate stress and frustration, and can negatively impact a team. ASAP (As Soon As Possible) is one of the main culprits for daily interruptions and loss of productivity. Create the space and time to allow focus on the important not just the urgent.



Get Real:

Is there a “work you” and a “real you”? Why?

Just because the virtual meeting is displaying you in hi-resolution, there’s no need to try to project a perfect, buttoned-up image! Don’t lose your real self. Your real image, thoughts, feelings, and perspectives are the special sauce of breakthrough.

Stay personal, real and connected in the virtual world.

The Five Faces of Get Real



The Individual

YOU'RE A STAR:

Most of us hate hearing our own voice, let alone seeing ourselves on screen. Some practical advice – get used to it! Turn that video on, and if you don't like looking at yourself, scroll away from your own image so you're looking at others. And remember, bad audio is a showstopper. Keep your microphone muted unless you're sharing your genius!



The Social Animal

LET YOUR BODY TALK:

Once you've gotten over your virtual stage fright, there is a whole world of self-expression to explore and share when you're all on video! Not just via digital tools, but through your voice (intonation, pauses), facial expressions (sometimes exaggerated), hand gestures, and projected energy – people can “get a sense” of the virtual room and make decisions on engagement, reactions without needing to say anything!



The Teammate

A STRANGER IS A FRIEND YOU HAVEN'T MET:

Fun facts about people, short bios, one-liners of why each person is excited to be on a project and what they will specifically be responsible for can go a long way to build familiarity. Use ice-breakers and inspiration to get the team talking and grooving in any environment.



The Facilitator

MI (VIRTUAL) CASA ES SU CASA:

People are more willing to speak authentically when they believe they belong. Be a good host. Greet people as they arrive into the virtual meeting. From the invitation forward, use language, images, delivery approaches that make it clear you appreciate their participation.



The Leader

GET R.A.W:

Recognize that before the team can solve a problem, they need the right Team Alchemy: are they Ready – have clarity and alignment, are they Able – armed with capacity and resources, and are they Willing – committed with motivation and purpose. If you invest in getting the foundation in place they can be much more successful in the long term.



Enlist a Motley Crew:

Just like the perfect party can start with a wacky guest list, the biggest breakthroughs happen when diverse thinkers, domains, and disciplines collide.

It isn't always easy—but when you can get the pop-collar prepster to mix it up with the out-there hipster...when the seller and the sold-to have a heart-to-heart...or when the CEO rubs elbows with the 20 year-old YouTube star...interesting things happen.

The Five Faces of Enlist A Motley Crew



The Individual

LEAN INTO YOUR BUSINESS CHEMISTRY:

Teams typically need diversity to excel – so don't be a spectator! Lean in, speak up, and bring your Business Chemistry, perspective, questions, challenges, and experiences to create a richer experience for all.



The Social Animal

TAKE CARE OF THE INTEGRATORS:

Working virtually may hit our Integrators the hardest. Schedule group calls for catch-ups, send IM's just to stay connected outside of work topics. Let them know they are not alone and offer them an outlet for all their thoughts and feelings!



The Teammate

AVOID THE SIDE BAR:

Ah the temptation of the IM – that side conversation that often addresses what people are really thinking. Don't keep those potentially divergent thoughts to yourself. A sidebar chat can be great if it's visible to all (for instance using the in-platform CHAT feature versus a separate IM). Just be careful that the chat doesn't distract from the main thrust of the conversation.



The Facilitator

REPRESENTATION WITHOUT PARTICIPATION:

You can't always get everyone in a meeting, but their contributions still matter. Collect ideas from participants or teammates who are unable to join so you can take their inputs into account when addressing a certain issue or raise something their behalf. This will allow you to incorporate their points into the discussion and make them feel included as they watch the recording later (because of course everyone will).



The Leader

NURTURE THE NETWORK:

Pay attention to the collective networks and relationships of each team member. This is to ensure they have adequate "strong ties" to get the work done well and that they can 'call in short-notice favors' as needed from external parties.



Check Your Edge:

It's easy to get stuck in a rut rather than push to new places, particularly when rapid change continues to redefine the world around us.

Push past old patterns, paradigms, and ideas and seek something new and surprising. That's where you can find breakthrough.

The Five Faces of Check Your Edge



The Individual

DISRUPT YOURSELF:

Grooves are comfortable, but can also be constraining. Force yourself to step out of your groove before it becomes a rut. Change your virtual backdrop, change your work spot, mix up your work times, listen to new background music, change your routine in small and big ways. Open yourself up to new experiences and you can find inspiration in unexpected places.



The Social Animal

TAKE THE PLUNGE:

Get out there and encourage others to do the same. The social barriers to starting and joining virtual groups is relatively low. Share your interests, adopt new ones, and seek out new communities. You never know what you'll discover out there or within yourself.



The Teammate

PASS THE BATON:

The beauty of being part of a team is the ability to share responsibilities. Divvy up tasks and meetings to allow fresh perspectives and variety for everyone's sake. Passing the baton gives everyone the valuable opportunity to try out different roles and stretch out of their comfort zone.



The Facilitator

MANAGE SHORT ATTENTION SPANS:

Research shows in a virtual setting, attention lags every 5-7 minutes. So for everyone's sanity, mix it up and make meetings 80% active and only 20% passive. Passive means just watching or listening, for example, PowerPoint presentations, listening to speeches or reviewing documents. Active means participants are engaged in a multi-directional activity, for example, engaging with each other, polls, thumbs up/down, small breakout group discussions, large group discussion, go-arounds to check where everyone is on an issue, writing responses in the chat, and raising hands. Planning for spontaneity and surprises is a brilliant way to keep people challenged and engaged.



The Leader

COMMUNICATE OBJECTIVES NOT INSTRUCTIONS:

Empower the team to find their edge by communicating differently. Instead of laying out detailed checklists, make sure they understand your intent and expectations and then empower them to move fast and judge for themselves what they should do in the best interests of the team.



Don't Play Nice:

Elephants and 800-pound gorillas can and do squeeze themselves into virtual rooms.

Alas, to achieve Breakthrough, you need to stop dancing around issues. Give yourself and your team permission to call out anything—and have the bravery to do something about it.

Results won't come out until the truth does.

The Five Faces of Don't Play Nice



The Individual

GOT FEEDBACK?

In a virtual setting, the natural opportunity for candid discussions and heart-to hearts can be more limited and sometimes feels awkward. Make the time to proactively ask for and graciously receive input from others. And remember that feedback is a gift that can be returned as well.



The Social Animal

JUST SAY NO:

When working remotely it's easy to say yes to everything only to find you've overcommitted and over stretched. With a proliferation of communication channels and constant online presence, it can feel like you're expected to stay constantly connected. Take a breath and remember it's ok to opt out. Even the most social of animals can use a little "me" time.



The Teammate

REMEMBER, NOTHING IS OFF THE RECORD:

Creating opportunities for people to provide honest opinions can help foster an environment of creativity and openness. However, with virtual meetings, rarely are things "off the record," as most meetings are captured on some sort of recording device. Try to keep discussions focused on team tasks and not on office (or world) politics. Humor should be used, but with care! And please be aware when your webcam is on!



The Facilitator

CALL PEOPLE OUT:

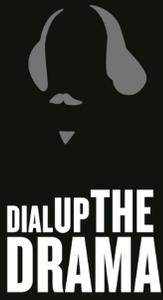
Turn-taking is more difficult in virtual settings. A facilitator can help a lot by establishing ground rules and directing traffic. Call out individuals explicitly for input – cue up in advance that you will be asking someone to contribute on a topic (great for Guardians), or thoughtfully call someone or something out in the moment, particularly if you sense disengagement or unvoiced disagreement.



The Leader

MANAGE CONFLICT:

Dealing effectively with group conflict can be especially difficult in virtual environments because of the limited time the team can spend interacting to resolve conflict and the increased time needed to manage conflict in virtual channels. One idea is to ask team members to engage in an activity called "What I Need From You", whereby each team member requests out what they need from one another in order to be successful and minimize conflict.



Dial Up the Drama:

Human engagement is best elicited through emotion. There's an art to creating full-sensory experiences – a little bit theater, a little bit instinct – but the payoff is enormous.

The good news: full-sensory experiences can be created in tiny spaces with limited time and investment. The result is the kind of moment that etches itself into your memory and creates the passion and momentum that can drive not only results, but legacy.

The Five Faces of Dial Up the Drama:



The Individual

ENGAGE YOUR SENSES:

Play music, walk your dog, grab a blanket and have everyone cover themselves for a blanket-fort meeting, take a tour of your space, have a virtual tea or wine tasting, do some yoga moves! Simple or silly, engaging more of our senses improves our own engagement, and gives an opportunity to be more multi-dimensional with others.



The Social Animal

UP THE STAKES:

Create a little friendly competition and incentives to get others engaged, active, and playing. From trivia to bingo to group singing to artistic endeavors to word games to solving puzzles. Have real stakes or rewards – bragging rights or the satisfaction of group acknowledgement is a good starting point.



The Teammate

MIX IT UP:

Explore engaging formats for content (e.g. TED Talks, AR/VR, etc.) as well as changing the modality every 5-7 minutes to hold attention (e.g. switch from presentation to video, ask a polling question, etc.). Use virtual backdrops to add interest, humor, or a personal touch – encourage others to do the same. Try blending physical and digital engagement formats, like sending “surprise boxes” to participants locations for them to open and use during online sessions.



The Facilitator

START A MOVEMENT:

Design to get people moving. Have people shake and stretch together. Ask people to find objects in their spaces through a scavenger hunt. Dial up the physicality any way you can. If you are having a meeting that does not require people to be on their computers, give them permission to take a walking/moving meeting.



The Leader

BE VULNERABLE:

Don't be afraid to share your personal story or give people a glimpse behind the curtain by introducing your own workspace and family members. Encourage others to do the same to rapidly build team rapport.



Make Change:

The whole reason we are doing whatever it is we are doing is to make a difference – to ourselves, our teams, our business, our world.

But if it doesn't stick, it didn't happen. Adapt as needed to make a difference.

Nothing matters unless it matters.

The Five Faces of Make Change:



The Individual

FIND YOUR PURPOSE:

As you adjust to a new “virtual” reality, don't lose sight of what matters. Let your values guide you to your purpose. When you love what you do, you won't “work” a day in your life. Share your talents and help others to find their purpose. This digital, connected world provides a much larger stage to share and inspire.



The Social Animal

MAKE MOMENTS MATTER:

Algorithms, automated processes, artificial intelligence ... in the shift to digital, don't let being human fall by the wayside; ask people how they are, be flexible with calendars and calls. Help change people's outlook and perspective by just being there. Recognize moments as opportunities to connect with others, and make those moments matter.



The Teammate

RE-DEFINE SUCCESS:

Define success in terms of ‘lasting transformations’ — not short term outputs. See the broader perspective that takes project goals and people goals into account. Optimize the work experience to make the team experience memorable and rewarding.



The Facilitator

NAIL DOWN THE NEXT STEPS:

Summarize the key points and meeting outputs. You can share these in writing after the meeting with those who attended as well as those who couldn't join. Don't forget to record your virtual meeting for those who were unable to join live. After the meeting, send a follow-up email with a thank you note to everyone who attended; include the relevant materials, such as the link to the meeting recording, meeting outputs, tangible next steps, etc. This helps keep focus, momentum, and maintain team cohesion and inclusion.



The Leader

NURTURE SHARED BELIEFS:

Change can be hard. Find a deeper cause that will motivate and inspire the team to push past their edge for the benefit of the greater goal. When the team feels aligned to a shared purpose there's no stopping them!



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