Top hints for Leading Virtual Teams.

The 'why' of your teams

The enemies of your team's success

What 'trust' means for your team

Understanding

The culture in which your team can thrive

How your role as leader differs

The nature and complexity of your team

1) Understand the 'why' of your virtual teams.
   - Virtual teams are essential for the networked organisation (or more realistically organisational layers) to succeed.
2) Understand the enemies of successful virtual teams.
   - The barriers of geography, isolation, time, history, culture and language, technology and people
3) Understand how the role of virtual team leader differs.
   - Trust, not power.
   - Coaches, not bosses.
   - Leaders face the greatest challenge in virtual teams.
4) Understand the nature and complexity of your virtual team.
   - There are different levels of complexity in different types of virtual teams.
   - The degree and nature of team complexity impacts on the difficulties the team will face in functioning effectively.
5) Understand the important of trust in virtual teams.
   - Distance breeds mistrust. Communication reduces distance.
6) Understand the type of organisation culture in which virtual teams can thrive.

Building Trust
1) Create strong visible symbols of the team – a name, an identity, etc.
2) Celebrate success with visible symbols – badges, cups, etc.
3) Commitment stems from involvement. When people are isolated they will only do what is important to them personally. Identify what will help individual team members to commit and what will cause them to lose commitment.
4) Ensure members understand the relevance and importance of the team for the organisation and their individual part in contributing to the team. Ensure members understand what benefits a successful team will have for them as individuals.
5) Tap into team-members' local networks.
6) All parts of the virtual team do not need to be the same – create a team of diverse leaders.
7) Address the issue of trust immediately. Everything follows on from trust. Trust is maintained through a virtual loop of reciprocity. Ideas must be listened to and be seen to be listened to. Create the conditions for openness to flourish.
8) The depth and breadth of relationships in a virtual team can be described as 'social capital.' Social capital accumulates in trusting virtual teams.

Management best practice
1) To succeed, virtual teams need sponsorship, preparation and infrastructure.
2) Remember that failures in virtual teams are 90% about people and only 10% about technology. Social factors not technology derail virtual teams.
3) Successful teams are aligned emotionally, intellectually, symbolically and through processes. Team bonds need to be emotional *and* intellectual.
4) Set up a way for people to learn more about each other – an outlet for common interests and experiences, internet bios, photos, accomplishments, favourite types of work, etc.
5) Be aware of your electronic 'body language' – i.e. speed of response, sentence structure.
6) Consider a regular no agenda virtual meeting for anyone to bring ideas to the table.
7) Everyone needs equal opportunities to contribute. Make sure everyone gets basic information at the same time. Give the same level of responsibility to distant members as to local members. Ideas should be judged on how much they contribute to the goal, not on who makes them or where they are made.
8) Everyone needs to be publicly recognised for their contribution.
9) Everyone needs to be held equally accountable to the team

Virtual meetings
1) Ensure everyone leaves virtual meetings with the <u>same</u> interpretation of what has been agreed and what is required. Differing interpretations may not show up until months later.
2) Directions and agreements must be clear up-front. Clarity builds trust. Build in a system of checks. Have one or more virtual team members describe what has been agreed in their own words.
3) Give teams shared 'anchors' to ensure they have precise clarity about shared outcomes

and to help team members stay focussed.

4) Create a specific communication plan to tackle out-of-sight, out-of-mind mentality.

5) Consider creating a database of shared information. Access to shared information provides a core sense of identity. Team socialisation involves controlled access to this.

6) Agree on which communication media should be used for high, medium and low priority communication, and agree on associated response times. This means agreeing on process <u>before</u> starting on task.

7) Establish agreed times / days to send out important news, feedback, etc.

8) Agreed on message format and how to specify a response is required. Brief messages are more likely to be read.

9) Agree on which type of communication requires a call or visit. Never send negative feedback by email as this requires synchronous communication.

10) Face to face meetings should mainly be around building trust and establishing process. Other functions are secondary.