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COVERING THE STATES OF NEW JERSEY, PENNSYLVANIA, DELAWARE, MARYLAND AND VIRGINIA

By Angela Calzone and Christopher D'Marco, C&RS Virtual Teams or Geog. Dispersed Teams that work

Virtual Teams or Geographically Dispersed Teams

(GDT) are becoming more commonplace across all industries

and are a popular alternative to traditional work environments for both employers and employees. While implementing GDTs may help solve challenges associated with limited real estate space, recruiting and retaining qualified talent, the stresses of commuting and the need to provide flexibility to the increasingly diverse needs of employees, GDTs do pose their own challenges that cannot be ignored. Such challenges include designing, communicating and implementing workflow procedures; keeping the team continually focused on its objectives and timelines; and building and



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maintaining team morale and productivity, all while team members may rarely if ever come face-to-face with each other. The company that is best able to mitigate these challenges so that communication, workflow and productivity are enhanced rather than hindered, will be the company standing on the competitive edge.

While it can be argued that these are the same issues that traditional workplaces must overcome, these challenges take on an added dimension of complexity when workers and teams are scattered across town, throughout the country or even around the world.

From a management perspective, it is essential that goals, deadlines and procedures are developed and communicated with the ut-

most clarity and are results-oriented so team members are aware of what reaching each milestone and completing the project entails. It is critical that roles with specific responsibilities for team members are defined along with guidelines that govern acceptable virtual team behavior and interaction are created and clearly communicated. This affords the team best practices and a stable group infrastructure.

To assure the team's focus and progression of projects, regularly scheduled teleconferences, web-meetings, or video conferences along with a recurring, structured method of progress reporting should be used to fill the gap created by the inability to huddle in one room.

Without the value of face-to-face interaction where verbal or written communication can be more holistically perceived when underscored by body language, recurring

personal interaction, and cultural competency, misunderstandings and mistakes could be detrimental to a virtual team. An important step to minimize misunderstandings and ensure effective, positive communication is training and assimilation for each virtual team member. When team members are trained to be aware of where and how exchanges can be misconstrued and are provided tips and techniques to avoid pitfalls, they are more equipped for optimum performance. Even virtual training or distance learning, when done collectively and interactively can build camaraderie and team spirit while imparting important information or fostering skills enhancement.

As the world gets smaller and the availability of qualified, local talent becomes an increasing challenge, a virtual team can be a winning team for your business. ■