



# The Long-Distance Leader

## Rules for Remarkable Remote Leadership

### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

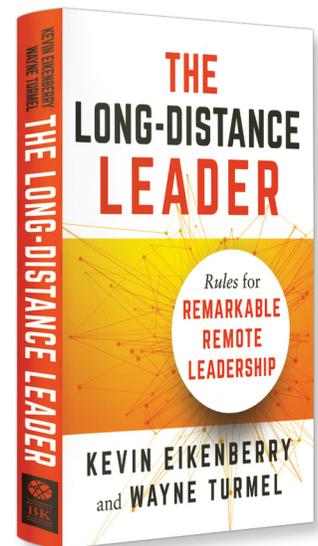
As more organizations adopt a remote workforce, the challenges of leading at a distance become more urgent than ever. In *The Long-Distance Leader*, the co-founders of the Remote Leadership Institute, Kevin Eikenberry and Wayne Turmel, show leaders how to guide their teams by recalling the foundational principles of leadership, whether their teams are scattered globally or just working from home a few days a week.

The authors' "Three O" Model refocuses leaders to think about outcomes, others and ourselves — elements of leadership that remain unchanged whether employees are down the hall or halfway around the world. By pairing it with the Remote Leadership Model, which emphasizes using technology as a tool and not a distraction, leaders can navigate the terrain of managing teams wherever they are.

With models and strategies that ensure projects stay on track, keep productivity and morale high, and build lasting relationships, *The Long-Distance Leader* is the go-to guide for leading effectively, no matter where people work.

### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why leading remotely requires you to lead differently.
- How the Three O Model and the Remote Leadership Model work together.
- To choose the best tool for long-distance communication.
- To practice servant leadership while also taking care of yourself.
- The three key questions for developing Long-Distance Leaders.



by Kevin Eikenberry  
and Wayne Turmel

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE LONG-DISTANCE LEADER

by Kevin Eikenberry and Wayne Turmel

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*The Long-Distance Leader: Rules for Remarkable Remote Leadership* by Kevin Eikenberry and Wayne Turmel, © 2018 by The Kevin Eikenberry Group, has been summarized by permission of the publisher, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. 224 pages, ISBN 978-1-5230-9461-5.

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## Getting Started

### **Rule 1: Think about leadership first, location second.**

Leading a team at a distance is first and foremost about leadership, and the principles of leadership haven't changed — they are principles.

What has changed is that more people are working in different places and perhaps at different times. Given those changes, how we apply the timeless principles of leadership in this new world matters a great deal — for the team members working at a distance, for you as their leader and for the organization that you all serve.

The Remote Leadership Survey, conducted in 2017, examined more than 225 managers who have at least part of their team working remotely. The results show that challenges for remote leaders very closely mirror those for managers in any situation. The survey highlights challenges that arise because of the distance between people and the use of technology to bridge those gaps.

Four common questions that remote leaders often ask themselves are,

- How do we know people are really working?
- Are people getting enough social interaction?
- Are we getting good feedback when we need to consider options?
- Can we be as effective a leader as when we're co-located?

Leaders are making things happen in this new environment because they are working longer and harder. They want to succeed in the virtual world, but they're doing it through effort and guesswork. There is a better way.

### **Rule 2: Accept the fact that leading remotely requires you to lead differently.**

Today, according to the Project Management Institute, 90 percent of project teams have at least one member (usually more) who aren't co-located with the rest of the team. Nearly 80 percent of white-collar supervisors have at least one direct report who works in a different location — at least part time.

There are two major repercussions for leaders as a result: First, the communication methods that enabled us to succeed (if we've been around for a while) have changed. You may be terrific in a face-to-face meeting . . . but how many of those will you have today?

Second, the notion of a leader's sense of isolation is no longer simply emotional. You're not only lonely because you have the sole responsibility for decisions, or the weight of authority or feel responsible if people lose their jobs — you're often actually physically alone.

But while there have been significant changes to the way we lead, the act of leadership itself hasn't really changed all that much. This is a first-order change, meaning we need to do the same things but in a different way. We need to do something faster, smarter, using different tools, but the task at hand is fundamentally the same.

### **Rule 3: Know that working remotely changes the interpersonal dynamics, even if you don't want it to.**

Whether we're talking actual physical presence or "virtual presence," where you are available and visible to your people, "being seen" is critical to leadership and suffers in a long-distance relationship. Virtual communication changes the interpersonal dynamic, even if you don't want it to.

When you speak to someone face-to-face, you get instantaneous feedback. The broad smile of acceptance



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or the furrowing of a brow tells us we need to adjust our message, repeat it, check for understanding or get more information before we proceed. We constantly and naturally adjust our messages on the fly based on those real-time responses. In a world where those immediate cues are missing, you must ensure your message is easily understood and that you find other ways to receive critical cues.

The basic needs of humans don't change, but the context of working locations may make some needs more important or obvious than they were in the past. If you have team members teleworking from their home, they may have interaction needs that were previously met in the workplace that now are missing. As a Long-Distance Leader, you must find ways to meet those needs, because as those needs are met, people are better able to focus on and complete their work successfully. ●

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### Models That Matter

**Rule 4: Use technology as a tool, not as a barrier or an excuse.**

The Remote Leadership Model depicts three inter-working gears that work together to propel remote work. The largest gear is “Leadership and Management,” which is the work you were hired to do. The second, smaller but critical gear is the “Tools & Technology” you must use in order to make the work happen at distance. Finally, the smallest gear is “Skill & Impact” — the ability to use those tools well.

The Leadership and Management gear reminds us that our job as leaders — the leadership and management behaviors we are expected to exhibit — are the same as they've ever been.

The Tools and Technology gear is perhaps the most important difference when leading remotely. Leaders are expected to exhibit all the traditional leadership behaviors and do it using tools and technology with which they might not be comfortable. That's a bigger deal than you might think. What tools do you have at your disposal to help get the job done? Are you using the right tool for the right job? Do you rely too much on the tools you're comfortable with?

The Skill and Impact gear is the simplest concept, the easiest one to maintain, yet often the one that can cause the biggest problems. Choosing the appropriate tool for the job is critical. But if you can't use the tool you've chosen effectively, all the hard work and good intentions in the world won't get the job done.

**Rule 5: Leading requires a focus on outcomes, others and ourselves.**

The Three O Model of Leadership outlines three areas of focus all leaders must recognize and use to reach their maximum success. This model is a more complete picture of the biggest gear in the Remote Leadership Model.

**Outcomes** — you lead people with the purpose of reaching a desired outcome. For a Long-Distance Leader, this focus on outcomes is even more important and can definitely be harder, for several reasons: isolation, lack of environmental cues and potentially less repetition of messages.

**Others** — you lead with and through other people to reach those outcomes. Long-Distance Leaders focus on others because you can't do it alone anyway; you win when they win; you build trust and relationships when you focus on others; you are more influential when you focus on others; and team members are more engaged when you focus on them.

**Ourselves** — you can't leave yourself out of this model. While leadership is about outcomes and other people, none of that happens without you, whether you like it or not. Who you are and how you lead is important wherever your people work, but when you are leading at a distance, some of this is less transparent, and your beliefs and assumptions are even more crucial. ●

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### Achieving Outcomes at a Distance

**Rule 6: Leading successfully requires achieving goals of many types.**

As a Long-Distance Leader, you need to be aware of, think about and help your teams reach all of the different outcomes in the organization.

**Organizational outcomes** must be crystal clear so you can help your team members (individually and collectively) move toward successfully achieving them. How clear are the targets? How often do you think about them? How often does your team discuss or review these targets to track progress?

**Team outcomes.** When your team is in the same location, you catch side conversations and parking-lot banter and have many ways to reinforce and clarify the goals. When you have team members working on their own, these clarifications don't happen easily. People must know how what they do fits into the work and success of the team.

**Personal/individual outcomes.** Remember that working remotely can be like living alone on an island. There is less interaction, and none of it happens serendipitously.

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Without solid, clear targets, individuals can drift, losing sight of both the big picture and their role, too. That's why tools like electronic dashboards, intranets and online project management systems are so important — they provide visibility even when people are miles apart.

On a daily working basis, perhaps more important than goals are expectations. Expectations aren't just about the "big G" goals or the "what needs to happen." They are about how the work gets done: the rules for working together, the way you'll support and help each other, what tools you'll use and what good communication looks like.

When the expectations are clear and understood, the chances people will be successful are higher. Furthermore, there's a better chance the outcomes described above will be reached.

### **Rule 7: Focus on achieving goals, not just setting them.**

Most everyone agrees that goals should be SMART (specific, measurable, actionable, realistic and time-driven). People find two of these criteria the hardest to master and the most difficult to make work from a distance: making goals measurable and determining what realistic looks like.

To make the work of others more measurable, ask how else you can quantify the effort and contributions of others. These questions might help: What are the quantity components of the work? How does time factor into the success of the work? How is the quality of the work determined? When working with team members who are remote, setting measures in smaller chunks can be even more important. When people work alone, in their own bubble, and the targets are too big, it is easy to let too much time pass before realizing the need to course correct.

A realistic goal is one that stretches your belief, yet you can create a workable real-world plan that might allow you to reach that goal. To make the goals of your remote team members more realistic, provide the needed information; expect engagement; get their thoughts first; modify with your thoughts, if needed; and gain agreement.

### **Rule 8: Coach your team effectively regardless of where they work.**

Coaching is an area that Long-Distance Leaders routinely feel they could improve. Time seems scarce, conversations can be uncomfortable or seem more difficult at a distance, and leaders often don't feel confident that they're doing it well.

There are two big reasons coaching remotely feels more complicated and stressful: 1) Every interaction needs to be conscious and intentional; 2) Communicating through

technology creates mental and social obstacles that don't exist face-to-face in person.

What follows is designed to address these two issues that are particularly troubling when you're at a distance.

Make sure it is truly a real conversation. Too many coaches do too much of the talking too much of the time. If you want to be a better coach, you must create a real two-way conversation with the other person about their behavior and results. The best way to do this is to ask them first, and create a conversation with them speaking first.

Have a process, and make coaching consistent and frequent. Use your webcam. We rely on visual and nonverbal cues to help us communicate. Our brains crave visual connection to the people we speak with. Webcams help mitigate the fact that you're not in the same room.

Finally, follow up. When people aren't seen, you can't rely on spontaneity; you must be focused and intentional about all your follow-up. ●

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## Engaging Others

Engaging others is one place where working remotely really becomes complicated and radically different than the ways we worked before. *Leading remotely requires influence more than command.* There are levels of accountability, trust and proactive communication that, while desirable in a traditional workplace, are absolutely critical when you're not in close physical proximity. How we engage others in a digitally connected but physically isolated world will largely determine whether you hit your goals and how stressful it will be along the way.

### **Rule 9: Communicate in the ways that work best for others rather than based on your personal preferences.**

One of the most quoted adages of all time is known as the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you'd like them to do unto you."

When everyone works in the same location, it's much easier to pick up the signals that tell us how to work with other people. You learn who's a morning person and who isn't. You can tell who the extroverted, chatty people are and who are the people sitting at their desk with their headphones on, just plowing through their work.

When working and leading at a distance, some of these cues are missing, so you might tend to work from your assumptions, personal preferences and your more limited history with the other person.

So let's modify the Golden Rule into the Golden Suggestion: Lead others in the way that works best for

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them. Assessments like DISC, Myers-Briggs, Insights or Strengths-Finder can help you and your team identify the areas where you mesh together, as well as where there may be sources of challenge.

Consider people's preferences, and ask people how they want to work with you. Make sure that when you're seeking this information, you phrase it as a neutral question about their preference. For example: "How can I help you be successful? I want to support you and help you stay on track." "How often would you like for us to have a one-on-one?"

**Rule 10: Leading successfully requires an understanding of what people are thinking, not just what they are doing.**

Politics, although usually applied to ruling a government entity, is simply the dynamics of trying to reach decisions and move an organization toward a goal.

Being separated from those with whom we work or lead can present political challenges. In particular, leaders need to see and be seen. "See" means gathering the information needed to understand what's going on within the organization. "Be seen" refers to how others get their information about and from you as the leader.

First, you need to be aware of how you gather information. If all your information is coming from the same three sources or you're trying to understand how people work together strictly from email threads, you are giving yourself limited data on which to base decisions. Consider gathering information more widely and in a variety of ways; then process that data into a clear, accurate picture of what's going on around you. Ask more people, scan more sources, and be more alert on conference calls and virtual meetings to get a clearer picture of reality.

As a leader, be more aware of the impressions you make. If people know you mostly as a signature on an email and not a real person, you are constraining their ability to get a positive, accurate impression of you and what you're trying to accomplish — and why. As a leader, are you being seen often enough? How are you visible to your team? And what are they seeing (and how do you know)?

**Rule 11: Building trust at a distance doesn't happen by accident.**

When working remotely, it's foolish to say that trust is more important than when you are all working in the same location. What's different when working remotely is that trust is harder to build and more easily broken.

The Leadership Institute has identified three components necessary for high levels of trust to exist: common purpose (do you and the people you lead have the same

purpose?), competence (do you believe that the people you lead are competent?) and motives (are people willing to go the extra mile?). The more alignment of these three components, the more trust will exist.

A Long-Distance Leader does some very practical things to help build trust as a team and between team members. Use meetings strategically. Build in time for people to really see how smart the team is. You could try showcasing one person per meeting, letting them talk about their work, or highlighting their strengths for them. Share praise in public, and delegate in public. When assigning tasks, the perception of fairness is as important as equality itself.

Use technology to build relationships. Synchronous tools like webcams allow people to put faces to names. Research at DePaul University shows that when we know the other person's face, there's a decrease in negative behaviors like lying, exclusion and being overly aggressive. Encourage the use of webcams, especially one-on-one. You can also use asynchronous tools like SharePoint to showcase task status and expertise.

**Rule 12: Identify the leadership results you need; then select the communication tool to achieve them.**

Long-distance leadership is mostly the same as traditional leadership, except for the pesky technology. That's an awfully small hinge swinging a terribly big door.

There's a simple tool to help people focus their thinking about which tool to use when (and how). In 2001, the Swiss/German researcher Bettina Büchel created a simple matrix that explains this concept: For communication to be effective and appropriate, you want to strike the right balance between richness and scope.

We all know humans communicate in multiple ways. Our tone of voice, the expression on our faces, our body language and the word choice we use all help us interpret a seemingly simple message. With Büchel's model, the best example of rich communication is a one-on-one meeting over coffee. You and the other person are in physical proximity, you can see and hear each other, and you're getting all the nonverbal, visual and social cues you need to interpret the other person's message.

Yet it's impractical to meet face-to-face every time we need to communicate with somebody. So every time we pick up the phone or fire off an email rather than get in the car, or hold a videoconference instead of hopping on a plane, we're sacrificing richness in favor of scope.

Email is the perfect example of a tool with great scope. Thousands of people receive the same message at the same time (theoretically, at least). You can't see the reactions of your reader, hear their wails of anguish or

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shouts of joy, or answer their questions in real time. You don't know if you've been understood correctly or if people have bought in.

As a leader, be mindful of your messages and communication goals; then choose the right tool for the task. Web meetings are a good example. Let's say you have Skype for Business as your daily collaboration tool. Web meetings are in the middle ground — fairly rich with good scope. In fact, depending on how they are used, they can be quite high in richness (e.g., one-on-one video calls, coaching and training) or have terrific scope (the dreaded but often useful “all-hands meeting”). But generally you are sacrificing one factor for the other based on how you use the tool.

If you need to brainstorm effectively, you might want to have small groups using webcams and full participation with the online whiteboard. You may even want to record the meeting for later use or to include those who couldn't attend. That leads to surprisingly rich communication. On the other hand, if you're not using webcams and have a hundred people online, you might get your message out (high scope!) but will have little real chance to engage people, get input, answer questions in real time or gauge your participants' reactions.

This doesn't make that application wrong. The point is to be mindful of what you're trying to get across, to whom and how “richly” it needs to be done.

**Rule 13: Maximize a tool's capabilities or you'll minimize your effectiveness.**

When you realize you must build trust, communicate clearly and have productive meetings, you need to use the technology at your disposal. That requires choosing the right tool for the right job (by balancing richness and scope) and then using the chosen tool as effectively as possible.

*Asynchronous communication* allows you to get the information when you need it. In a distributed workplace, a central repository of on-demand information is needed. Asynchronous tools include the following:

**Video and recorded messages.** Video allows you to add a visual component to your communication. Rather than a broadcast voicemail, it is almost as easy to push “record” and use video.

**Common file locations.** Tools like SharePoint, Google Docs, Basecamp and other products allow a permanent, easily accessible and searchable central warehouse for information.

**Email** is best used you need greater scope, you need a permanent record and the message is complete.

*Synchronous communication* happens live — at the same time for everyone involved. Synchronous tools include the following:

**Webcam and video chat.** These are the ultimate remote, one-on-one, see-and-be-seen tool. Many people think that a webcam is used best to “broadcast” messages, and it's certainly useful for that, but it is probably more useful in one-on-one situations.

**Text messaging.** Texting is useful because it utilizes the device your people are most likely to have on them at any time of day or night: their mobile phones. Texting can work for business. It's how a good portion of your team functions in everyday life. Texting is best used when the message is time-sensitive.

**Telephone and conference calls.** Although the phone is the tool you “grew up with” in the business world, it isn't always the most effective way to communicate. Sometimes people can't hear you well, are taking the call where they can't speak openly or are multitasking.

Teleconferences are notoriously bad for getting equal input from people — or any input at all. It seems someone's always over-contributing, and it's not always the people you want to hear from. Conversely, it's easy for people to hide and not participate at all. This challenge can be overcome but only if you actively seek their engagement. ●

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## Understanding Ourselves

If you're a believer in servant leadership, you put yourself last, or at least behind other stakeholders. Taken to the extreme, focusing on others can lead to sublimating yourself and to not taking care of your mental, physical and social well-being.

You can't really focus on the desired outcomes or engage with your team without looking at the one constant — yourself. A leader who is physically exhausted, mentally drained and socially isolated is not going to be effective. We need to be honest about how we're doing and take care of ourselves.

**Rule 14: Seek feedback to best serve outcomes, others and ourselves.**

When you walk the plant floor or stand in the middle of the cubicle farm where people are working, you can sense the mood of the team. When you sit in your home office 500 miles from the nearest employee, you're drawing conclusions based on how you feel about the situation, what you've seen in a few email threads or

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what you heard in one quick conversation with a team member. Soliciting feedback can help you communicate and lead far more effectively.

When soliciting feedback on yourself, especially as a leader, keep some things in mind:

**Start with existing evidence.** Before going to individuals, go back through relevant files, email threads and meeting notes. How are people feeling? What are they thinking about how you're doing and the decisions you're making?

**Identify people you trust.** Don't confuse this with people you like or who always say yes to your ideas. Trusted advisors can come from many sources.

**Ask open-ended questions.** For example, ask, "Based on what you've heard, what about this would work? What would be a problem? How do you think people will respond, and why?" Make them truly open and not presumptive.

**Have these conversations as richly as possible.** If you really want feedback and input, take the time and use the tools in the ways discussed above. Schedule the conversation, block sufficient time and use the tools at your disposal.

**Have the conversations over time.** If what you're considering is really important, people may do their best thinking before and after the conversation. If you want good insight, people should be able to prepare for the conversation.

**Rule 15: Examine your beliefs and self-talk — they define how you lead.**

Good leaders require a relatively healthy self-image. After all, if you don't think you are correct a good percentage of the time, or somewhat capable or the right woman for the job, you likely wouldn't find yourself in this position. Unless you are a complete sociopath, however, the voices in your head aren't always supportive or positive.

Here are some warning signs that your internal dialogue is going in an unhealthy direction as well as how to steer it onto a more positive path:

**"You're an idiot. That's the worst idea ever."**

Really? Ever? At times like this, it's okay to revert to middle school and ask yourself, "Says who?" If you take that question seriously, it takes you back to the neutral facts. What evidence is there to support or deny your idea or premise? First of all, it's highly unlikely you're an idiot. And it's even more certain it's not the worst idea ever.

**"I can't do this."** When you get frustrated to the point of saying you can't do something, change the word. "I haven't yet figured out how to . . ." or "up until now

I haven't been able to do it" are different ideas entirely. Changing the wording recognizes there are difficulties but still accepts the possibility of success, which changes your internal motivation.

**"I'm a fraud and I will be exposed."** This feeling, known as "impostor syndrome," is estimated to affect over 70 percent of leaders. Here are some simple techniques to help address this monster:

- Check your assumptions. Recognize your "I can't's" for what they are. When in doubt, ask, "Says who?"
- Accept positive feedback as valid. When people tell you how smart or capable you are, believe them and don't dismiss or downplay it.
- Get help. Remember that even the best and brightest go to others for help, feedback and answers.

**Rule 16: Accept that you can't do it all — you shouldn't try anyway.**

One of the greatest challenges you face is finding the balance between being responsible to your organization and its people and taking care of yourself so that you can be both highly effective in your leadership role and fully functional as a human being, spouse, partner, neighbor or productive member of society.

Put your ego aside for a moment and ask this simple question: "If I got hit by a bus tomorrow, how would my team function?" There is a lot of power in that question, because it forces you to look at the things that encroach on your boundaries:

- Do your people know what they should be doing?
- Are you the only source for answers?
- Do you have the right people in the right roles?
- Do you guard your time?
- Are you answering email and phone calls on vacation?

Look at your organization's processes and workflow. Where are you being drawn in unnecessarily? Are there times when you are not critical to the process? If there aren't, could there be? Who else in your organization could take on some of those responsibilities? When you delegate successfully, you set your team up to succeed and give yourself the freedom to set healthy personal boundaries, too.

**Rule 17: Balance your priorities to be a remarkable Long-Distance Leader.**

Outcomes and others do come before ourselves. That doesn't mean we surrender our humanity, our health or

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our sanity. There is a difference between self-preservation and selfishness.

Let's start with values. Your values determine how you decide what is truly important to you.

So, what is important to you? When you ask questions about what is important to you and answer honestly, you will begin to see that the barriers to managing your time are mostly of your own construction. Everyone has the same amount of time — the question is how you will use it.

As Kevin Eikenberry says in *Remarkable Leadership*, time management is really choice management. If you aren't clear on your values, you can't make clear choices on how you are using your time. Knowing your values allows you to prioritize your activities. For example, if you need spiritual balance, working on the finance reports on Sunday might be a bad call. If you need physical exercise to be happy and productive, get to the gym — that time to yourself won't undo all your good work for the week.

If you haven't yet, make a list of things that are important to you, and ask yourself, "Am I satisfied with the time I'm giving them?" If the answer is no, try to identify small blocks of time you can dedicate to them. ●

## Developing Long-Distance Leaders

**Rule 18: Ensure your leadership development prepares Long-Distance Leaders.**

Whether you are an individual manager trying to grow the leadership capabilities of your team or you're in charge of learning and development for a huge corporation, here are some strategies and approaches to create a plan for growing great leaders in the dispersed workplace. When considering leadership development, there are three pairs of questions to be considered:

**1. What kind of organization do you want to be? Does your current culture match this vision?** Every company has a culture, which is defined as "the way we do things here." It doesn't take much insight to realize that when people work apart from each other, the way things are really done can vary greatly.

Without guidance, people working remotely and left to their own devices tend to get very task-focused and independent. If that is what you are looking for from your people, you might be fine with that — if you have a team of individual customer-service reps or salespeople focused on their quotas, for example. If you want people to collaborate and build strong relationships, it can be done virtually, but it needs to be done intentionally — whether at an individual, team or organizational level.

**2. What behaviors do you expect from your Long-Distance Leaders? What skill gaps must you address?** Use your existing competencies as your starting point, then use all three gears in the Remote Leadership Model to frame the discussion about additions or changes driven by leading remotely. For example, does your existing competency model accurately reflect the expectations you have of your remote leaders? Which tools do you want them to use, and when should they be used? This is the richness vs. scope discussion. Do your leaders use the tools in an impactful way?

**3. What is your plan for developing and supporting your Long-Distance Leaders? How will the organization support the remote team members?** The focus of "developing and supporting" should be learning and not simply training. When you change your perspective to learning, you will do three things: connect learning to the work, make learning available in different ways and make it a process.

**Rule 19: When all else fails, remember Rule 1: Think about leadership first, location second.**

Remember, the act of leadership itself hasn't really changed all that much. We need to do the same things but in a different way. While there are adjustments we need to make to lead in a world with more distance between team members, there is far more that won't change.

With that in mind, now let's get to work leading at a distance more effectively. ●

### MORE SV CONTENT ON LEADERSHIP

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