

# LEADING AT A DISTANCE

| Continuance Guide

# LEADING AT A DISTANCE

## THREE CORE TENANTS WHEN LEADING AT A DISTANCE

Leading from a distance requires thoughtful communication and touchpoints that inspire belief in the work, the team, and its vision. The stakes are high when you're rarely face-to-face.

Building an aligned team dynamic at a distance is easier said than done. Here are the three core tenants to consider when leading remotely.

### **1. Your team has to be in-step with your vision.**

While the vision may have already been established with the team, when working remotely, it is easy to lose track of the big picture. Understanding this makes it even more important to re-iterate and align your messaging to the vision during virtual meetings and conversations. If the team loses track of the vision, they'll never be able to stay the course without a local leader. This is why it's imperative that as a leader, you ensure that the team stays aligned to the vision by maintaining connection through frequent touch points.

### **2. Watch out for passive-aggressiveness.**

When working in this way, people often operate on their assumptions. It's normal for teams to get frustrated with each other, and distance can exasperate this. However, if you allow passive-aggressiveness to set in, then the march towards resentment has begun. As soon as it comes up, in you or others, name it, talk through it, and commit to working together to keep it out of the relationship. Don't allow it to influence ongoing interactions.

### **3. Feeling the pull to micromanage.**

If you get the itch to track hours, you've started the vicious cycle that will keep you up at night and infuse your interactions with tension. When this happens, have the conversation immediately, be honest about your fears, and avoid being accusatory. If the conversation is received well, take that opportunity to set well-defined expectations, make clear commitments, and move forward. If the interaction isn't positive, or if it's an ongoing issue, take a step back and consider what is needed to move forward and prepare for the next conversation. When you prepare for a difficult conversation, you prioritize the relationship and make a resolution more likely.



Leading from a distance takes a lot of work, and part of that is self-management. It's important to hold up a mirror and be honest with yourself. This will allow you to make the tough calls and also to change the things about your style that are holding you back. If you can do that, and encourage that same introspection and accountability in others, you'll be successful.

## **COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY: THE KEY TO SUCCESS WHEN LEADING AT A DISTANCE**

When adopting a new way of working, such as working and leading remotely, it is important to consider the areas that may cause frustration and use effective communication to manage them efficiently. Understanding what possible causes of frustration may be and what we prefer to do when those instances arise are helpful markers in setting a plan to carry the load effectively.

When leading at a distance, miscommunication, connectivity issues, and lack of human interactions are three sources of potential frustration. All of those can be managed and avoided if we have the right level of preparation and we are equipped to build clarity.

For example, if the team is continuously facing connectivity issues that are preventing them from doing their job properly, it should be clear to them who the go-to person is to support them. Having that clarity helps to avoid the frustration that very often builds up in this scenario.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARATION IN EVERY COMMUNICATION WHEN LEADING AT A DISTANCE.**

The need for preparation is even higher when leading from a distance. When you're clear on what you'd like to accomplish in each conversation, you can use that preparation to express yourself clearly and appropriately during the conversation. Your clarity of thought and expression makes it easier for your team to understand and take the appropriate action as needed after each meeting.

Being intentional about how you connect with your team through your listening, questioning, and advising skills will help your team stay focused and adapt quickly to the change of working remotely.



## How to Prepare

When leading at a distance, there is a lack of physical cues in day-to-day communication; the audience relies solely on the clarity of the message. Before you schedule a call or meeting, ask yourself these five questions:

1. What do I know about who I'm speaking with?
2. What are we talking about?
3. What will be asked?
4. What do I want to ask?
5. What is my goal for this meeting?

Asking yourself these five questions will help you prepare for the meeting or call and lead with clarity. It will also help you structure the conversation so that the other person understands clearly the three key elements of any communication:

1. **The subject** - what exactly you're talking about.
2. **The point** - your message and why you're talking about that subject. This helps your audience view the conversation correctly instead of having to imagine why it's happening.
3. **The call-to-action** - clearly stating what's happening next, when it's happening and who's doing it.

## HOW TO MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTION THROUGH COMMUNICATION WHEN LEADING FROM A DISTANCE

When leading from a distance, interactions are through calls, emails, or chat channels. In these mediums, it's essential to use conversational language. Staying conversational reduces barriers between you and your audience and encourages your audience to remain conversational too.

A conversational style is the sweet spot between formal and casual communications. To give you a sense of what a conversational email looks like, see the features outlined below.

Features of a conversational email:

- Contractions
- Every day, yet professional language
- Shorter sentences

*Example of a conversational email:*

CADENCE LEADERSHIP + COMMUNICATION



Hi Samantha,

This report is pretty technical, and I might benefit from an extra pair of eyes. I'd like to go through the report with you. Can we have a call tomorrow at 2 p.m. to discuss this?

Thanks!

Bob

## **SETTING A REGULAR CADENCE AND RHYTHM FOR MEETINGS AND COMMUNICATION WHEN LEADING AT A DISTANCE**

With this new way of working, it is crucial to clearly define the cadence and rhythm of work so that everyone knows what to expect. Very often, in this setting, people operate on their assumptions of how things should be done, and if not set clearly, it leads to frustration. It's critical to set defined touchpoints with your team to create and maintain connection, both from a business and a human perspective. As a leader, you should take the lead to create that clarity for your team to ensure things run smoothly, and they can focus on the business.

### **Keep these in mind when creating the cadence of engagement:**

1. Rhythm for the different types of meetings: Team of 1:1, project updates, etc.
2. Length of meetings: Without the physical component, people's attention span reduces.
3. The best way for your team to connect with you in challenging times or urgencies
4. Be Accessible: When working remotely, people do not get the same sense of whether they are on the right track or not. Build internal dialogue with regular check-ins and clearly stated methods to deliver feedback, which helps to reduce that uncertainty.

## **LEADING WITH CLARITY IN EVERY COMMUNICATION WHEN LEADING AT A DISTANCE**

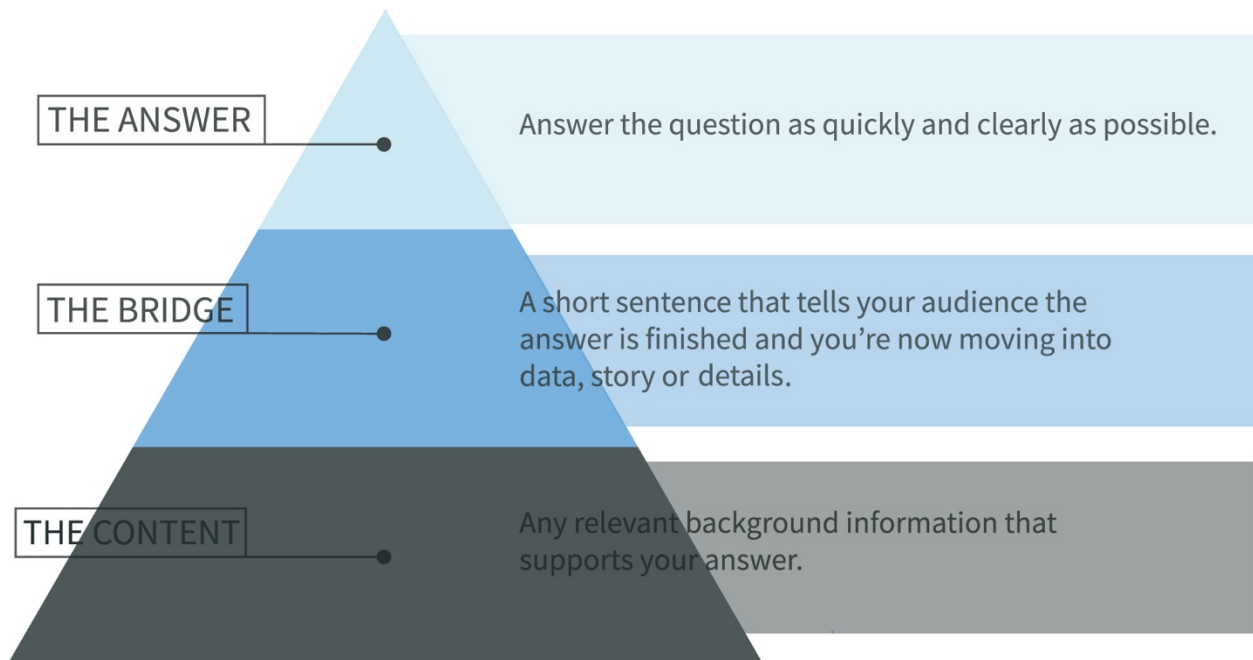
In every communication, you can lead with clarity by using the **Answer Pyramid** method to answer questions and the **Question Funnel** method to create alignment and understanding. These two skills are especially powerful when working remotely in the absence of physical cues.

## **CREATING CLARITY WITH THE PYRAMID METHOD**

The probability of confusion and misinterpretation increases when leading at a distance if unchecked. Using the pyramid method of answering questions, where you answer the



question with your first sentence, helps mitigate the risks. Then, you can move into providing background information and/or data—if necessary.



We encourage you to try giving the answer in one sentence. There is no question—no matter how philosophical, technical or nuanced—that cannot be addressed with a short answer.

Think of your answer as the so-what or the essence your data gets boiled down to. That's why there's no such thing as a long answer.

**Short answer rating system:**

- An incredible short answer is one sentence.
- A pretty good short answer is two sentences.
- An okay short answer is three sentences.
- A needs-improvement answer is more than three sentences. This indicates you're explaining your way down the funnel.

**Guidelines for using short answers:**

- Answer the question as quickly and clearly as possible.
- Feel free to use a one-word answer, unless the question is emotionally weighted, and a one-word answer would alienate your audience. For example, if the answer is “No,” you can soften that by expanding the sentence to, “I’m sorry to say, the answer is no.”
- It’s okay to soften or strengthen your answer. For example, instead of just saying “No,” we strengthen by saying, “No, that will not be possible” or “Yes, for sure.”



- Operate on the assumption that there's a difference between the answer and the data, story or content that supports the answer.

### **Expanding A Short Answer With A Bridge And Content**

When a short answer needs support, you can do that with a bridge and the content.

- **The bridge** is a short sentence that tells your audience the answer is finished, and you're now moving into data, story, or content. This tells your audience they can stop listening if they don't care about what's coming next.
- **The content** is the relevant background information that supports your answer.

When leading from a distance, using the bridge is very impactful because of the lack of physical cues. It sends a clear message on what the answer is and what the content is. It reduces the risks of confusion that often happens when working remotely.

Not every answer needs a bridge and content, but if you're going to provide content, you must use a bridge. This closes the answer portion of your response and opens the content segment.

#### **Guidelines for creating your bridge:**

- Say what's coming next: explanation, story, content, etc.
- Use up to 10 words.

#### **Bridge examples:**

- To explain this further...
- To get into the details...
- To tell you the story behind that...
- To expand on my answer...
- Now, that's the answer. Let me get into the explanation...
- Now, that's the answer. Let me give you the content here...

Now that you've used the bridge, you can give relevant content.

#### **Guidelines for giving your content:**

- Stick with sentences that are 22 words or less.
- Use as many sentences as you need within the time frames listed next.
- If you speak for 30 seconds, most people will listen.
- You can speak for one minute if you anticipate your audience truly cares enough about the content to listen for a full minute. (It's actually a long time for speaking.)



- Some stories, data and content require more than that. In those cases, you can speak for up to two minutes—again, only if it’s necessary and you anticipate your audience will listen for that long.

It’s rare for audiences to listen to anyone speaking for two minutes straight unless they really care about the content. That’s why you must anticipate how interested they are in the content and give them just the right amount.

Answer	Yes, I’m concerned about security breaches because we haven’t completed a cybersecurity risk assessment in two years.	Our fees are based on projected employee time and effort.
Bridge	Let me give you some context for that concern...	To elaborate
Content	PwC recently found that half of organizations like ours conduct cybercrime risk assessments even though cybercrime is the third-most reported fraud. Without risk assessment and protection protocols, our reputation and clients are at risk because malicious agents target Fortune 500 companies like us.	Our property management staff and accounting teams provide forward-looking expertise that produces innovative outcomes for clients. This level of service takes time, and our fees reflect that.

That’s how you create an excellent short answer. The how-to section includes some tips for getting better at answering questions, using the pyramid method.

### **CREATING CLARITY BY ASKING QUESTIONS USING THE FUNNEL METHOD**

One of the major constraints of leading remotely is, because we cannot read people’s facial expressions, very often, assumptions are made. When teams operate on assumptions, it will eventually lead to wasted time, effort and frustration. To avoid this, we create clarity by asking open-ended questions and the funnel method.

We recommend using open-ended questions instead of questions that can be answered with a yes or no. Open-ended questions require us to use our memory and creative processes. This keeps us calm.

Open-ended questions start with what, why, when, who or how. Don’t say, “Can you tell me more about that?” It may sound open but since it would be easy to answer with a yes or no, it’s a closed-ended question.





The funnel method helps you get to the core of what is being discussed and what the person really means. Any line of questioning—using the funnel format—has up to five, increasingly specific questions.

**Five funnel questions:**

- What’s been happening that’s caused you to feel this way?
- What would you like to see differently?
- When have you had that before?
- How did you get there?
- What was the result?

Let’s look at an example of using the funnel format to explore someone else’s vague comment during a conversation.

Who	Action	Words	
Jeff	Jeff gives Adam vague feedback.	I feel unheard in our conversation.	
Adam	Adam uses a surface level question that allows the other person to paint the broad landscape.	What’s been happening that’s causing you to feel this way?	1
Jeff	Jeff talks about the situation.		
Adam	Adam listens and picks one thing from Jeff’s explanation to explore next.	So, one of the things you’ve mentioned is that when we meet, it seems like one-way exchanges of information. You sit down and I tell you what to do. What would you like to be different?	2
Jeff	Jeff talks about the situation.		
Adam	Adam listens and picks something else from Jeff’s explanation to explore next. It’s more specific than the last inquiry.	Based on what you’re saying, you’d like it to be more like <point that Jeff made>. So why do you think we’ve ended up having this kind of exchange?	3
Jeff	Jeff talks about the situation.		
Adam	Adam listens and picks something else from Jeff’s explanation to explore next. It’s more specific than the last inquiry.	Of your previous leaders, who have you had this kind of relationship with and how did you get there?	4
Jeff	Jeff talks about the situation.		
Adam	Adam listens and uses the final question to ask about specific results.	What was the result of your working relationship with <the person Jeff mentioned>?	5

When you use increasingly specific open-ended questions, you go beyond the surface and become able to speak to what’s really going on in a meaningful way.



## CALL TO ACTION

The call-to-action is clearly stating what's happening next, when it's happening and who's doing it.

### 1. Write down your vision for this new way of working:

- Tools to be used
- Identify people in support roles
- Set up communication norms
- Best way to reach out in challenging times
- Rhythm and cadence of communication for the team
- Anticipate areas of frustration for the team

### 2. Communicate your vision clearly

- Set a call – use video to read non-verbal cues from the team
- Send email summary of the new way of working
- Clearly state your next steps

### 3. Next steps

- Setting the call rhythm
- Prepare for the next interactions:
  - a. Get familiar with conversational language
  - b. Structuring your messaging: subject, point and call to action
  - c. Applying the answer pyramid
  - d. Using the question funnel method

