



A good teammate

What is the difference between organisations that have successful remote teams

and those who do not? The answer might surprise you. Productivity is the obvious answer, but it is not the only factor. It is not each individual being as productive as they can while on their own—it is the members of the team working as true teammates.

Even before COVID-19 and the shutdowns, remote work was on the rise. Indian firms such as Tata Consultancy Services anticipated that as much as 75 per cent of their workforce would have the option to work from home by 2025. Now most companies have at least some of their workforce working away from the office, voluntarily or not. The issue for many of these entities going forward is creating the same level of engagement, collaboration and team spirit they had while working in the office together.

In researching our new book, *The Long-*

Distance Teammate—Stay Engaged and Connected Working Anywhere, Kevin Eikenberry and I uncovered some unexpected factors in the long-term success of remote workers.

The first was how they identified themselves. Certainly, being able to maintain productivity unsupervised was the obvious part of the equation. But we found that even the most focused, capable individual worker sometimes felt stuck or unmotivated, and often began to exhibit signs of stress and burnout after several months. Those who felt they were individuals answering to their manager and otherwise on their own were, in the long run, less productive, engaged, and satisfied than those who thought of themselves as ‘teammates’.

In the book, the difference is explained this way: a team member is an individual who reports to the same manager as the other members of the team, but whose focus is on their individual tasks and duties. Task completion is the key focus, particularly those things that impact their personal metrics and performance. The word teammate implies a deeper social, emotional connection to the

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work, the direct manager, and the other members of the team.

Teammates care about more than their own performance. The success of the team matters. They take joy in building and maintaining solid relationships with their fellow teammates, and thus are more engaged in the work and the overall success of the team. Simply put, they care more and put in much more discretionary effort than those simply meeting the requirements of their job.

We interviewed hundreds of remote workers and their leaders

and uncovered three factors that determine what separates teammates from people who simply work together. Those factors have been built into what is called in the book, *The 3P Model for Remote Teamwork*. The three success factors are: Productivity, Proactivity and Potential.



Productivity sounds simple and obvious: You need to get the work done even when you are alone or isolated from your team. But that thinking can

result in individuals becoming focused on their own work, deliverables, and key performance indicators and them not actively contributing to the success of the team. People may undermine group activities like brainstorming or contributing to meetings. When we talk about productivity as a teammate, it means not merely getting your work done (the bare minimum to keep your job) but getting the right work done. This is a mixture of personal duties as well as work that benefits the whole team. Productive workers help their teammates succeed, work in a way that benefits everyone, and successfully balance their individual and team tasks so that the collective team succeeds while the individual achieves their own goals and expectations.

Proactivity is the factor most managers and teammates described as one that truly separates great teammates from people they work with. Many people associate proactivity with doing the tasks that need to be done without being asked. While that is true (and important) proactivity on a remote team is so much more.

When a teammate is obviously struggling or has a question, do you reach out to them on your own? When you have a question, are you comfortable reaching out to people on your team for help or do you struggle in silence because you do not want to interrupt or bother people?

Maybe most importantly, a proactive teammate is engaged enough to ask clarifying questions of their manager, to speak up in meetings when others won't, and actively contribute to brainstorming and collaboration without waiting to be called upon. By being proactive, teammates are caring, engaged, and adding great value to the team and each other.

Potential means thinking about the long-term implications of our communication, our relationship building efforts, and our work. This has implications not only for the immediate work of the team, but for the long-term engagement, satisfaction, and quality of the

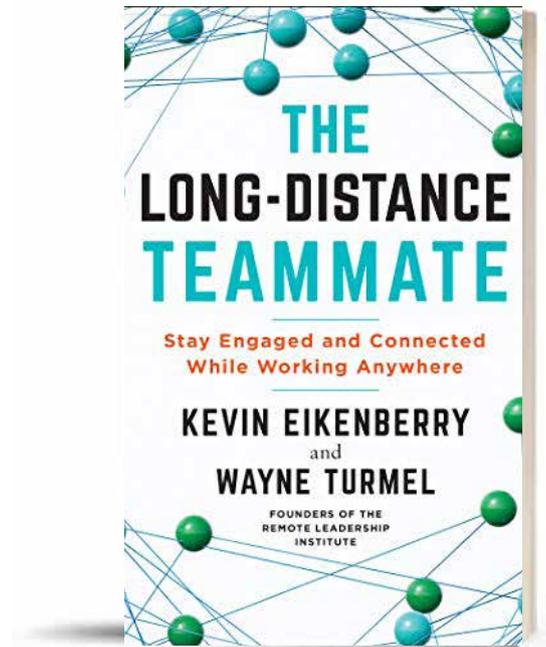
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individual's work going forward.

One of the challenges of working apart from others for a long time is that communication tends to be transactional. We only speak to someone when we need something from them. The social conversations across cubicle walls, or chats in the tearoom that make interactions pleasant and fun often do not occur.

We do not accidentally run into people; we need to push a button or write a message and send it. We speak with our teammates only when we have to, and only about work-related topics; we do not build and maintain the kind of relationships that make work easier, more efficient, and pleasant. Team members who are proactive about reaching out to our peers, take the time to engage in chit chat and celebrate birthdays are perceived as better teammates in the long run.

On a personal level, successful teammates take a long view of their own work. They do not just focus on the tasks in front of them, but think about their longer-term career development and personal goals. They keep an eye out for learning and development opportunities. When people see a future for



themselves, rather than simply do the same thing day in and day out with no end in sight, they are more apt to be excited by their work and invest their energy into it.

Remote workers who embrace all '3Ps' will be more engaged, do better work, and be perceived as better teammates. This has great implications for the organisation, the team, and themselves. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wayne Turmel is an author, speaker and co-founder of the Remote Leadership Institute. He is the co-author, *The Long-Distance Teammate: Stay Engaged and Connected Working Anywhere* and *The Long-Distance Leader- Rules for Remarkable Remote Leadership*.



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