

Best Practice Interview Part 2: Never met in person, but still a great team!

“We cannot meet physically, but we can be together happily.”



The Leadership & Organizational Development Team proves to us that working in different locations in different time zones and having never met in person can work. They are a productive and close-knit team with a great team spirit. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Corporate Communications team had the chance to talk to them and learn more about their tips, tricks and best practices for working together effectively as a remote team.

In the following interview they share some of their experiences and tips as well as some challenges they face and how they counter those. Click [here](#) to read the first part of the interview.

1. How do you welcome new members in your team and handle the whole onboarding process while working from different countries?*

All: We share the responsibility to bring new members up to speed. Every one of us is responsible to provide onboarding sessions to new members about the topics that we own, which gives us the opportunity to connect with every team member in quite an intense way. Personal connection and openness to cultural diversity are key for new members to get along quickly in a diverse team.

Katleen: What we also do as a team and, which I think is very important, is we talk about ourselves, our families, our hobbies, what we did on the weekend etc. It's also, not only talking about the content, but how we work together with our communications channels, etc.

Jeannie: I was last to join the team. The onboarding process was fun and exciting. It validated to me that I had made the right decision. I am on a great team and it was very inclusive from the beginning, very encouraging. They sought my opinion on things so that Americas' perspective was incorporated from the very beginning. Katleen as a tenured member of the team was really outstanding in holding my hands at times in helping me understand certain expectations. One of the things that she did that I thought was so effective is, anytime she would be sending out a communication to her H.R. business partners or her business leaders in her region, she would copy me and Anna on that. It really allowed me to understand the connection that Katleen was having with her business partners and her business leaders. It was very purposeful and deliberate.

2. Have you experienced special moments together?

All: Yes! Julie mailed a gift box to each team member which arrived before we had a virtual Christmas Party. We all opened the box at the same time. Inside there were some Christmas decorations, artwork materials and guess-the-word games. We spent a fun and memorable hour together playing games, making Christmas decorations and decorating our desks.

Anna: I shared the “group photo” on Teams right after the party, with my quote “We cannot meet physically, but we can be together happily.” Other special moments for me were the time we shared our frustrations.

Sharing my frustrations openly and being vulnerable in front of these great listeners and best friends at work, I can climb out of the deep hole and rewire my brain to be positive quickly. These moments allow us to connect on a deeper level.

Jeannie: Julie challenged us, developing our technical skills a little bit with Skype. One of the ideas that I came up with was to have a bingo card that I was able to show on Skype. It was everything from “I have pets” to “I play a musical instrument”. It was just a list of things for each of us so we could see some commonalities that each of us has. But it also showed some of the differences that we have and allowed us to kind of understand each other even more.

In the engagement survey that we've taken the last couple of years, one of the questions that always tends to be a little bit of a struggle for people is the question “I have a best friend at work”. The response is typically then pretty low, but when you think about what defines a best friend, it's someone who you can confide in, who encourages you, who accepts you, but at the same time, kind of pushes you because they can see more in you maybe than you can see in yourself. It's people who help you to laugh at yourself, who you are, maybe glad, even if not excited to be able to see them. When you break it down to what really defines a best friend, I think you can see and look around your work and realize you really do have best friends because there are people who fit that definition. And I think remote teams can have that as much as in-house teams. Again, you just have to be purposeful and deliberate about it.

3. How does everyone stay engaged?

Julie: A lot of what we have already spoken about above, highlights what we do to stay engaged -the regular Skype calls, communication through MS Teams, virtual Christmas parties and conversations about things outside of work. In addition, we held several virtual meetings around our engagement survey and created robust action plans which we all own and which we review regularly.

We have also used some psychometric tools to help us learn more about our individual and team working styles. Everyone was very open in the discussions and I feel there is truly a spirit of trust, honesty and friendship. We learned a lot about how we can help and support each other, as well as how to play to our strengths and continue to work on our areas for development.

This is the first time where I have managed a team where no team members have been based at the same location as me, but I feel that we are as close, if not closer, than teams I have worked within the same building. As with anything, you get out of it what you put into it and I think every member of the team puts a lot of energy and effort into making it work for them as an individual and for us as a team. They are all brilliant!

4. How do you effectively manage and develop the team when they are remote?

Julie: We have weekly 1:1s and a weekly team meeting, as communication is key. We all give regular feedback to each other on what we do and what we are working on. The team is great as one member will have an idea and then the rest of the team will continue to build on it and add to it, until the final piece of work is usually an amalgamation of everyone's input.

We set goals at the beginning of the year, as does everyone, and we regularly talk about performance, goals and individual development in our quarterly PDP meetings (PDP = Performance Development Planning) which we hold in April, July and October, before the end of year review in January. For the quarterly review meetings Jeannie, Anna and Katleen prepare the performance preparation review form and send it to me for my review prior to the discussion. After the quarterly review I will update the document and send it back to them for their records. It's much easier having the discussions quarterly as opposed to trying to think back over a whole year in January. We focus on achievements, development plans and progress.

Corporate Communications would like to thank the Leadership & Organizational Development Team for the interview.

**Editor's note: The interviews were conducted before the COVID-19 crisis*

