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**Rebuilding
the World's
Confidence**

10 Tips for Leaders with Team Members Starting New Roles from Home.

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10 Tips for Leaders with Team Members Starting New Roles from Home.

Why?

1. Accelerate Speed to Effectiveness
2. Enable Focus, Identity and Belonging
3. Ensure Well-being and Reduced Anxiety/ Stress

Imagine starting your career, first job or a new internal role from your bedroom. If you're at school, university or a recent graduate it's likely that it is in a shared house, noisy and cramped.

New starters or individuals starting new roles are already anxious. They want to impress everyone, fit in and belong, create value and be valued. Leaders must build their confidence.

If it was our first day at school we'd have already attended an open day and met lots of people. On our first day we'd surround ourselves with new friends in the same situation. We'd enter the environment and be immediately 'advised' by notices on walls, student alumni achievements, school mottos of what the values, expectations of behaviour and rules are. In the first lesson if we were struggling we would simply lean over to our new friend and ask them for the answer or the method. Every 90 minutes we'd play together and build teamwork and connection. During the breaks we'd be walking and running through the corridors and unconsciously absorbing the culture of the school as well as signing up for social clubs and fulfilling a boarder purpose beyond exam results

Back to the new work environment! Starting a new role in the new working from home environment can leave people feeling isolated and vulnerable. Asking silly questions is much harder, learning is slower, building relationships and connecting with the culture is awkward and clunky and enjoying our honeymoon period can feel forced.

We have interviewed 3 individuals who have all graduated within the last 2 years and have all started a new role virtually. Each one provides a unique and insightful perspective and highlights the difference in approach of different companies, emphasising what works and what doesn't.

1. **Interview 1** - A recent graduate from a top university, who has struggled to find a graduate job due to the impact that Covid-19 has had on the job market. They have secured a freelance position at a British Design Consultancy and has started virtually.
2. **Interview 2** - Since doing their placement year at a Multinational Technology and Consulting Company, they have returned and joined their large graduate scheme for their first year virtually.
3. **Interview 3** - Having already worked at a British Multinational Pharmaceutical Company for over a year on the graduate scheme in the office environment, this interviews explores what it's like to change onto a new graduate rotation in a virtual environment at a large company.



Profile Interview 1.

New Joiner, British Design Consultancy

"I was simply existing on a group chat and being given tasks and doing them. It was pretty impersonal and lonely."

How did you find the process of getting a job during COVID-19?

After graduating in July, I had hoped to be back working where I had spent my placement year. This had always been the 'unwritten' plan. Because of Covid-19, they had to make a lot of redundancies and when I enquired about my role that had been previously been discussed, it was no longer a viable option for them having had to say goodbye to some of their long-term employees.

I studied Product Design, so the jobs I was applying for needed a portfolio. Upon graduating, I spent around 2 months on my portfolio whilst doing part-time pub work. I have previously worked at a pub for years but even they were unable to take me on so I had to apply to a new pub.

It's a bit of a hit to have all of these security blankets in place and then to realise they all have been taken from you.

It wasn't until September when I was really able to apply for jobs. I ended up doing over 30 applications over 2 months, about 1/3 of these I progressed to some form of 'next stage' (video interviews or tests). Out of the 30 I applied for, I got 3 final interviews and 2 job offers.

Although the end result was good, it was such a long process and when things are already so uncertain and you've already taken quite a lot of rejection (especially secure rejection, where you really thought you had it already in place), it's really tough.

Out of the 2 jobs offers, I accepted one which involved starting virtually.

Biggest benefits of starting a brand new role virtually:

I don't have to move locations, which is a positive as the office is in a location where I wouldn't have liked to have moved to.

It also enables me to work the hours I need to and be flexible. People are also a lot more accepting of your schedule and your personal life.

The company I am working for is very small and I am currently the only person working from home as everyone else lives near the office. Despite this, there's no longer a stigma or judgement around individuals opting to work from home, it's now a more respected option. I also feel I can easily reach out to people.

Biggest negatives so far:

When I was first enrolled in my current position, there was no introductions to the company, I was immediately given tasks and started working straight away. There was no 'welcome to the team' or any individual messages and I was simply existing on a group chat and being given tasks and doing them. It was pretty impersonal and lonely.

I find messaging others about important design decisions strange and sometimes difficult virtually, when they could be very easily made if you were able to look at a physical part with your team. The premise of the job requires a lot of physical interaction that doing it completely virtually is very difficult. This means I feel far less productive working from home and I don't feel I am doing the company much good.

They have a group chat, where they will be continuously sending links or comments (in-jokes and

memes to things that just don't make sense, so they must be talking about it in the office space. It makes me feel very left out and out of the loop.

What leaders within organisations could be doing differently to support virtual new joiners:

A meet the team or some form of initial greeting is important. More informal social chats that aren't just about the company and the work that you're doing, it would allow people to show more of their personalities and set a nice tone within the group.



Profile Interview 2.

First Year Graduate, Multinational Technology and Consulting Company

"It's so difficult to form relationships with people. When I don't know somebody already, it's been really hard to gauge them virtually."

How did you find the process of getting a job during COVID-19?

I was quite fortunate in that I had secured a job from the internship for their graduate scheme. Thankfully I secured this in October 2019 before Covid-19 happened.

Despite securing my job, I was a bit scared of them taking it away, as I was hearing of others having their graduate schemes taken away from them or delayed to the following year, and with a lot of companies executing hiring freezes it was definitely a worry.

Biggest benefits of starting a brand new role virtually:

Luckily I have been able to save a lot of money. The nature of the graduate scheme includes a lot of socialising, which we haven't been able to do. Despite wishing we could I have still saved from that.

My company have ensured that everyone has an adequate work from home set-up, with 2 screens which is important for the work that I do. If I was travelling to client companies pre-Covid I would potentially be faced with a small, less than ideal working space.

I have also saved money from not commuting, and I now use that time to do anything that I want. I also get to hang with my friend all day who also works from home, which is great.

Biggest negatives so far:

It's so difficult to form relationships with people. When I don't know somebody already, it's been really hard to gauge them virtually. It's especially hard in meetings when people have their cameras off and I don't know who they are, what their roles are, or whether they are clients or not.

It's also really hard to get a sense of the mood and whether its positive, negative or if people are annoyed or happy etc.

It's important in my role that my clients trust me, and I feel that it's hard to build trust with people virtually.

I feel slightly more stiff when connecting with someone virtually on a call, it's harder to be charismatic or maybe make a small joke, especially when there's people on mute and you can't tell if its being received well or not.

To be completely honest, I'm not exactly itching to be back in the office, but I do miss being able to build relationships with people in 5 minutes rather than 5 weeks (that is honestly how long it takes sometimes!).

What leaders within organisations could be doing differently to support virtual new joiners:

My company did quite a good job of transferring the physical experience of the graduate scheme to a virtual one. Every year they normally send everyone to a big house in the UK, where there's training in the day and socialising in the evening - it's a bit like freshers.

The virtual/remote version of this is no way near as fun, but there are people in place who's job it is to make sure you're having a good time.

They also organise small 'coffee breaks' with random people, where you have a call arranged for you for 15 mins of your day and you literally just chat. They will also randomise these 'meetings' by collecting data on your views via polls and pair you with both people with similar viewpoints to you and complete opposite too to really mix it up.

Companies should definitely put more money into supplying employees with decent work from home equipment, good chairs, desks etc.

I also think it's important that there is a bit more time to not to your day-job. In an office environment, there is a lot of time where you're just have social chats with your colleagues, going to get coffees, having actual breaks, but in a virtual world it's all online and it's its completely full on. Even today on a call, I noticed after we had got off topic, we were quick to get back to the task on hand instead of taking the time to enjoy the catch up.

There's a pressure to always be working when you're working remote. However, my house mate has a 'power hour' between 11-12, where everyone does something productive but non work/project related. Companies should look to incorporate something similar, to ensure employees have a scheduled period to relax a little.



Profile Interview 3.

Second Year Graduate, British Multinational Pharmaceutical Company

"Although the company I work for does a lot to support people's mental health, it is much easier to struggle in silence and feel isolated in the virtual world."

How was the transition from the office to WFH?

Well initially it seemed exciting...! We weren't often given the opportunity to work from home (max. 1 day a week) so I was looking forward to being at home more as this was a novel thing to do. Being honest, it has been an extremely challenging period of my life and has really tested my resilience daily. It has however made me appreciate the small things that I took for granted; A couple of interesting reflections I have found is that 1) some of my relationships with my colleagues have got even better, I know things about people that I probably wouldn't have found out, meetings start with a 'how are you doing?' before jumping into the agenda straight away, and I think this is because we all have something to relate to, even though everyone's experience through this pandemic will be unique and personal to them. My second reflection is that it is truly incredible how quickly humans do adapt to new situations. If you would have told me last year that I would not be going into the office and would be working from home for 10 months, I would have likely laughed and said 'no way!'

Biggest benefits of starting a brand new role virtually:

Overall, I feel like starting a new role virtually (or even simply the benefits of working virtually) has meant I have more freedom over how I manage my time. As I have no commute, I'm trying my best to keep this time free to fill it with something that is not associated to work (for example, exercise or reading) and if I do need to work during this time, I'll try and make time at another point during the day for it.

Admittedly, I wasn't very good at this at the beginning of lockdown, it was easy to start work earlier and finish later, but I continue to try and learn what works best for me and an important reflection to myself has been to be stricter with my time (and not feel guilty for it!) and the importance of building in time for self-care.

Biggest negatives so far:

I have found starting a new role virtually has come with many challenges. Firstly, I have never met anyone in my team (and am still yet to) and it has felt harder to build more authentic relationships with people, especially as my team already know each other well. It requires more effort, which I don't mind doing, however you aren't able to ask someone a quick question across the table, or take time to go to lunch with someone and whilst you can put a virtual meeting in, it just doesn't feel the same.

Secondly, I have found it has made learning more difficult. On the graduate scheme I'm on, we rotate in different areas where we may not have any previous experience. The current role I am in is a specialist area and whilst I know I can reach out to people to ask questions or spend time upskilling myself, it does feel like I am not getting the same enriched experience as I would in person (this is through comparing to the previous role I had which was in the office). I often find in person as well, you are privy to various conversations happening around you where you can interject and ask whether someone could tell you more, or explain what they are talking about and I have found I've really missed this as I learnt a lot through this when I was working in the office.

Lastly, although the Company I work for does a lot to support people's mental health, it is much easier to struggle in silence and feel isolated in the virtual world. Whilst part of this is down to the individual to speak up if they are struggling, working from home and working with a team you've never met can make it easier to simply say nothing. We learn a lot from observing people's body language (consciously and subconsciously) and by working only virtually, this is missed and thus it can be a lot harder for us to show and/or see/read if someone may be feeling a certain emotion e.g. stressed. I think there is more that needs to be done here to support employees and people who are working from home.

What leaders within organisations could be doing differently to support virtual new joiners:

I think it is important for leaders to recognise that everyone will have a unique response to the changes that the pandemic has caused, and that although we are all going through this together, people may be having very different experiences/emotions.

I would encourage leaders to be very open during this time, consider different ways they are able to show approachability, and recognise that people may need more support than they would have done if they were in the office and consider how they may be able to provide this support. I truly believe that leaders / and those around you at work can make such a difference to positively impact someone's mental health so I would encourage everyone (not just leaders) to reflect about how they can be supportive to people during this challenging time.

So, what can Leaders do?

1. Team Introductions, Collaboration, and Integration

Rapid inclusion into projects, more team based activities rather than independent tasks that requires integration into the work and the outcomes

2. Purposeful , Meaningful and Task Based Goals

Set short realistic goals that are task based. These goals need to be linked to the organisations purpose and values at every opportunity to connect the new start to the company ethos

3. Branded Environment

Provide branded goods, (water bottles, mugs, clothing) and platforms (Teams, Zoom)) to make them feel a sense of pride and belonging

4. Buddy System

Assign a friend that works closely with them from within the team. Preferably someone experienced in the firm and someone relatively new. The experienced buddy provides the accurate answers and the other new starter provides the psychological safety to ask 'silly' questions

5. Open Communication

Re-create the virtual environment as if you are all sitting together. Keep a zoom call open all day between the buddies. This replicates being with them all day, accompanied and safe

6. Recognition

Provide frequent feedback to instil as sense of value and contribution

7. Training

Competency development provides confidence. Rapid development will drive skill and performance and eliminate any sense of the 'emperors new clothes' worry that new starters often feel

8. Growth Mindset Development

Resilience, mental toughness and the appreciation that work ethic, curiosity and ownership will drive outcomes. Should they ever feel 'fixed' or a victim then a growth mindset will create a change to their circumstances and empower them

9. Visibility and involvement

Find ways to keep their role, activities and tasks visible to the leaders and the wider team. Involve them in team projects and events. Its not just about the leader being visible to the new starter but the new starter having a reason to be visible to the leader and team

10. Line Manager Development

Line managers need to be trained on how to manage remotely, how to deal with change with emotional intelligence. Leaders need to shift from 60% task/result - 40% people to 60%people and 40% task/results. New ways of working requires new leadership skills. Arcadia offer the following programmes to support this:

- Inclusive leader
- Virtual leader
- EQ leader
- Purposeful leader
- Growth mindset leader

Leaders will need to recognise that much of the identity, branding, pride and belonging was previously provided to new starters by the organisation, the building and the informal colleague conversations.

It is the leaders duty, responsibility and challenge to build the teams confidence.

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