

## Excerpt from Guided Insights' 101 Essential Tips for Leading High-Performing Virtual Teams: Listening Tips Great Virtual Leaders Use

- 1 Read the signs.** Are certain people on your team cancelling status report meetings? Taking longer to reply to emails? Becoming noticeably withdrawn on con calls? All of these can be signs that people need a catalyst to get back on track. Your instincts are to offer help and advice. But tread lightly. If these people doubt their skills or suitability for the task, your offer of help could reinforce those fears. What could be needed is simply time with you acting as a vital sounding board, helping to motivate and focus.
- 2 Reach out.** If face-to-face is not possible, schedule time to speak. Both of you will need time to prepare for the conversation. Before you pick up the phone, find a quiet place to speak, away from your computer, phone or other distractions. (Nothing can kill an earnest conversation faster than multitasking!) Have your notes in writing in front of you with any details that may be important, as well as a calendar and a project plan.
- 3 Listen deeply.** Once you have stated your observations, without judgment, simply be quiet. Allow the other person time to gather her thoughts and find the right words, even if it means a minute or two of silence before she speaks. Take notes on a piece of paper and paraphrase every so often to ensure understanding in the absence of visual cues. Carefully ask probing questions for clarification, and only if needed. Refrain from giving advice during this time.
- 4 Summarize what you've heard.** Once you're satisfied that you have a good understanding of what's going on, summarize what you've heard as objectively as possible, much as a journalist would report the facts. Pause and seek validation. Ask whether there's anything else that's important for you to discuss before moving on to the next part of the discussion.
- 5 Diagnose the real need.** Perhaps the trickiest part of the whole conversation is knowing how to determine what kind of support a person really needs from you. In some cases, you can come right out and ask. (Be very cautious of your wording and tone here. Asking, "Just what do you want me to do?" is very different from asking: "What would be the most helpful actions I can take on your behalf at this point?") Validate the kind of support you believe he is asking for.
- 6 Circle back.** Before you end this call, set a time/day with this person to check in to see whether the combination of support and guidance you have offered has made a difference. Also agree on how you will both be kept apprised of actions taken or progress made in the interim. (Once again, use the phone in a quiet, undistracted location for your follow-up meeting to demonstrate how seriously you are taking your commitments to provide her with the needed support.) If you must resort to email, take the time to ask specific questions, referring to notes you've made, versus a terse: "How's it going?"