

Seven Secrets of Effective Remote Supervision Uncovered

JOHN WALSH: Hello. My name is John Walsh, and I'm the project director of the Center for Innovative Training in VR at the George Washington University. Welcome to the Seven Secrets of Effective Remote Supervision Uncovered. Our presenters today will be Carol Pankow and Missy Diehl from the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management.

We would first like to acknowledge that the contents of this presentation were developed with the support from the VR Technical Assistance for Quality Management and the Innovative Rehabilitation Training program, both funded by the US Department of Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the positions or policy of the US Department of Education, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the US Department of Education. We also wanted to provide a short disclaimer that the information and related resources you're going to see in today's training are intended to assist management in state VR agencies in developing effective practices to supervise their staff who are working remotely.

It's really important to remember that you have to consider your own state statutes, regulations, and collective bargaining agreements when you implement any new practices to ensure they are in alignment with these key legal documents be sure to consult with your legal team and administrative teams at your agency for any guidance on this issue. So before we begin today's presentation, I wanted to provide you some information about the Center for Innovative Training in Vocational Rehabilitation.

The center started in October of 2019, and our goal is to develop innovative methods to train VR personnel in their work within state VR agencies, with the goal of ultimately improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. We invite you to our website at trainvr.org, or to our online community at trainvr.ning.com so you can see the results of our training needs survey that we performed across the country with the 78 state VR agencies, to learn more about our communities of practice, and a number of webinars and training resources that we offer on our website at trainvr.org.

And now without any further ado, I would now like to turn it over to our presenters, Missy Diehl and Carol Pankow, to tell us about the secrets of effective remote supervision. Missy and Carol.

MELISSA DIEHL: Thank you, John. One of the things we really wanted to preface this conversation today was just to acknowledge the incredible challenge and recognize the work that you're doing out in the field right now as mid-level managers and supervisors. And, you know, we realize that many of you may have been doing for a long time managing vacant caseloads, sometimes multiple vacant caseloads, all while you're still wearing your manager hat, so we recognize the dual role that many of you are doing right now.

And we know that what we're going to talk about today isn't going to cover everything. But we do plan on having a series of trainings and webinars and tools that we could develop in the coming months and

even the next couple of years over our grant cycle, specifically for mid-level managers and supervisors. So look for that good work to come.

CAROL PANKOW: And, Missy, it certainly has been an interesting last year. And the one thing that we thought was impossible, which was remote work, looks like some version of that is here to stay in a new normal going forward. We know you've been at this a while. In fact, you've been at it for a whole year now.

Some of you had put temporary things into place and need more of a permanent approach or to rethink how or what you're doing. And so throughout the year, we've been collecting a lot of information from articles. We've watched YouTube videos, talking with state agencies on what is and is not working, and we hope this collection will help you.

Just remember, if we can all endure a global pandemic, social unrest, economic downturns, fires, hurricanes, and murder hornets, then managing a remote team sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? Some items we're going to discuss today are going to be repeated more than once. And it isn't because we've lost our mind. It's because we want to make that point, and we're going to come at it a little different way in a couple different ways so please do know that this is intentional.

MELISSA DIEHL: All right. So Secret number 1 is really no secret because it starts with you. And really what we mean by that is modeling the way, just kind of walking the walk. And we know that's not always easy. But whether you're in person or down the hall or on the phone or on a Zoom, figuring out how all this fits together and figuring out what works best for you and your team is where to start.

So we know that your people are looking to you, and you want to model that behavior that you expect in others. So we've got a few ways that you can model the way. We call them our "Be's." So the first one is being inquisitive, and we do this by checking in.

Even if you've already asked some of these questions before, circling back and checking in never hurts, asking folks how they want to be managed remotely or how you can support them, maybe what's working, what isn't working. Maybe it was OK in the beginning, but now it's just not working. Ask what conditions work best for the folks.

Here's a big challenge. Every member of your team has a different home environment. And I'm sure by now you've become intimately familiar with some of those unique situations your staff are in.

Some have spouses, children, pets. Some have home offices. Some are in their living room, in a kitchen. Some are even in a closet, right? So some are experiencing different types of challenges in the way that they're having to adjust to work from home.

And the point is that, as a manager, we need to find ways to kind of empathize and understand those unique circumstances of each of our employees and really get where they're coming from, so that we can either mitigate any potential conflicts or issues or just be there to listen to our staff, which kind of gets us to our next "Be," which is being flexible and empathetic. As long as work is getting done, is there a way we can be more flexible in terms of the specific way that it's getting done? So sometimes

we have to operate within our own HR policies and mindful of those Fair Labor Standards Acts and parameters that are put in place.

But to the extent that we can be flexible, really try to find ways to do that. And in many states because of the pandemic, it's allowed just a smidge more flexibility than some of our previous goes at doing things in a flexible manner have gone prior to the pandemic. We have a great quote from one of our VR directors in Pennsylvania, Shannon Austin.

She has a sign in her office behind her that says, "Blessed are the flexible, so they should not get bent out of shape," which I love that quote. But one of the things that Pennsylvania's governor has done is allowing folks flexibility in expanding the work hours from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM. So parents who might be helping children with online school or different challenges as a result of the pandemic have a little more flexibility in a typical eight-hour workday.

Another "Be" is just being approachable and finding different ways to do that. We all have different personalities. Some of us are a little more introverted than others. But just finding ways that you can make yourself seem more approachable, so staff feel like they can come to you, whether that's blocking off an hour or even a half an hour a week where your folks know that you're always available.

You have that blocked off so people can come and talk or letting staff know the best way to reach you. So that if there is something that they really need to get a hold of you for, they're not sending it in an email that might get buried between 50 or 60 other emails. But maybe it's instant message or a text or a phone call. However it's best to reach you, let your folks know that.

Another "Be" is being observant and just watching for those signs of distress in your employees, which can get a little tricky in an online environment. But sometimes we can tell by the way our staff are interacting with us or not interacting with us, so that we're basically just trying to create that way of an environment where your team can feel like they can come to you if something is impacting their job. When responding to staff calls or emails, one of the things that our North Carolina Blind VR agency does is they're having their managers and supervisors start off every conversation with their staff and asking them, how are you doing today. How's it going? You know, just that intentionality built into every conversation that offers that opportunity for staff to feel connected.

And trust your instincts. If you sense something might be wrong, making time to follow up and ask about what you sense might be happening and give that opportunity for your staff. And, lastly, being diligent and silo free, so keeping in contact with maybe other departments that might be impacting your staff, whether that's your human resources department or IT staff, just different ways that you can help connect with other departments to maybe overcome some obstacles that your staff are having.

Being supportive and being supported, so again encouraging your staff to get together with their peers or with you. And likewise so you can be getting together with maybe your peers, just to have that support network to surround yourself with other supervisors and managers who might be going

through the same thing. And maybe they've resolved something that you're having challenges with. Or maybe it's just someone that can identify with the stress and the issues that you're dealing with.

CAROL PANKOW: So, John, can you cue up the video? That's going to help us set the stage for our Secret number 2.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[ALARM BEEPING]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[END PLAYBACK]

All right. So you could see from that video, that Iris is in definitely a different emotional state from one side when she's going to work versus working remotely, which is going to lead us into our Secret number 2. So Secret 2 is mental and emotional health matters for you and your staff. Again, we're going to talk about modeling the way. And it's important for you and also what you're saying through your actions to your staff.

Are you setting an expectation or a precedent for staff that they should not have balance in their life? You want to share these tips with your staff. And the following tips are actually research-based, and Fortune 500 companies and leaders across the globe are paying attention to them because your physical and mental health has a direct relationship to your ability to think and execute.

This speaks to self-care. And we want to point out the GW Center for Innovative Training on trainvr.org has several training resources on self-care for you and your staff. You want to dedicate workspace that is as free from distractions as possible. Try to not have that workspace also be your bedroom. It's really tougher to separate work from downtime when you're right there, and it may even make it difficult for you to sleep.

Also try to use spaces that are not associated with leisure time, like a couch. Even dedicating a particular work surface can help. Now maybe you're on the couch now, or you've been sitting there for over a year in that same hard kitchen chair.

You want to be careful about your posture, using a rolled up towel to help with lumbar support or even putting a pillow under your seat on a regular chair. Some people have converted a closet, and then you can close the doors at the end of the day. You want to look around your environment to see what you can do to carve out a space you can walk away from at the end of the day, maybe even using something like a spring room divider to give that illusion of creating a separate space.

Get ideas from others in the agency on what they've done to set up a workspace that works and share those out with staff. Communicate your expectations with anybody that will be home with you. Just because you're working from home doesn't mean you're home in the traditional sense.

I know my husband loves to come check on me and waves through the window in the door to my office, even if I'm on a Zoom call. He'll be, like, do you want a snack. So sometimes you've got to lay that groundwork and set those parameters for folks.

Secondly, you want to establish a routine and stick to it and be realistic. And this is an area where folks have really found, after being at this a year, they need to do something differently. Like, you need to actually get up and take a shower, change your clothes.

Do things like eating breakfast or maybe you prep your food the day before, just like you would have done as you were going to work. Pack those snacks. It'll recharge you to do better work when you have good nutrition.

You also want to include some break times in the day for a stretch. Our friends in Arizona had sent us some really great desk exercises that you can do. And we have them included in a resource file in the back of this PowerPoint. Use breaks to get away from your desk or your workspace.

And make sure to have some blank space on your calendar that can handle any of those crazy situations that come up. And there have been a lot of articles lately that have been stating that folks are really missing those transition rituals from the start of your day to the end of your day. People are missing the commute. Like, who thought anyone would ever say that?

You might want to replace your commute time with taking a walk, listening to a podcast or audio books for 30 minutes. Maybe meditate or create some other exercise ritual. Or you can quite literally-- and folks have been reporting this-- that they go sit in their car, and they listen to music or books.

Or they phone a friend, just to replicate that commute time. And at the end of the day, you can also replicate a transition ritual by straightening up your workspace, making a list of three things you want to accomplish the next day, and then finally closing that laptop and shutting down your computer for the day. It really helps you to avoid that temptation and get back on for just one more thing, one more thing.

Third, you want to set expectations for what you want to accomplish each day, using that checklist and getting satisfaction from checking those items off. Your motivation level can also change throughout the day. You want to figure out your own ebb and flow and capitalize on your most productive periods to tackle those harder tasks and do easier tasks when you have that lull.

Music can be a motivator and helps you tackle the tough stuff. And match your music to the task at hand. You can also use laundry even as a work timer. You're going to start and finish something before you change a load from the washer to the dryer.

Tip number 4, turn off alerts on your private cell phone so you aren't as distracted by every Facebook like that happens. And, in fact, you can log out of all your social media accounts during the day. It really prevents you from getting distracted by all the tweets, et cetera, and the little dings on your phone.

And, fifth, use noise-canceling headphones. If you have a lot of people around also working or learning remotely from home, they can really be a life-saver. It's over to you, Missy.

MELISSA DIEHL: Thanks, Carol. And I'm going to talk about something that some folks find controversial, which is responding and looking at email at set times throughout your day, rather than it being up all day long and distracting you while you're working on something. A lot of times, you set out with a list of things that you need to accomplish. And you find that you're being driven by your workday according to the emails that are coming in. So, again, it's just something that you can do, a good time management activity, to just look at your email at certain times or in between those activities, rather than allowing them to kind of derail you.

It is looking at setting up office hours and sticking to them. So this is a lot harder, I think, now that folks are working remote, especially if you're not used to working remote. Many of us in the technical assistance world have been doing remote work for quite some time. But for many folks, it takes a while to get used to and setting up those same types of boundaries.

So if you can, try to make sure that you're setting some boundaries so that your staff aren't getting emails from you at 2:00 in the morning. Or they're coming in and, as soon as they turn on their computer at 8:00 AM, there might be seven, eight, 20 emails from you. So if there are ways that you can either delay sending them, if you're just tired or you can't sleep one night, because that can be really overwhelming for your staff, too, because then they feel like they have to meet that same level of expectation.

Checking in with colleagues because it can really be isolating working remotely, and you lose that sense of community. So it can be talking with other supervisors or managers to see how they're doing or what's working for them. But for your staff, it would be having them connect with the team and maybe being intentional about that, maybe building that in so that folks have an opportunity to do that.

And if you're struggling, reach out and ask for help. And the same goes for your staff. Again, reminding folks about employee assistance programs and other wellness programs that your organizations might have going on right now. Almost every state we've talked to told us that you can never say that enough.

We might have mentioned it at a staff meeting or your last unit meeting, but our people are in different places. And they might not have been needing to hear that, and so now they do. And so the more often you can remind folks about what's available to them so that they can get the outside help that they need when they do need it. And setting up a support network which, of course, includes your tech support.

CAROL PANKOW: Now Missy has her own tech support in husband, Randy, who has really actually been a blessing for our whole team with tips that he's been able to share. So I just wanted to give that plug. Definitely that tech support is important.

Secret number 3, you want to think three, which is the management trilogy. Whether you're supervising in the office or remotely, there still are three primary focuses for all supervisors and managers. The first is accountability. You know, you have to set those expectations. And are staff clear about expectations?

You still need to manage performance and compliance with policies and procedures. And third is communication, and it's that two-way communication that supports the work of staff to remove barriers or gain those needed resources. And we're going to go more in-depth into these in the next slides.

MELISSA DIEHL: We can go to the next slide, which is Secret number 4, resetting expectations. And we do mean resetting expectations, even though you might have felt like you've already done that when your staff first moved to a virtual environment. But don't assume that people can carry over expectations from working in an office to working remotely.

And we want to hold people accountable. In order to hold them accountable, we need to understand that they need to understand what our expectations are. So resetting those expectations also means kind of revisiting the current and existing expectations that were in place before we went remotely and how we can help staff understand how those expectations are going to work in a virtual environment.

So a lot of that comes into play with how we orient staff. There's been a lot of hiring going on during the pandemic. We want to help those staff in particular really get socialized into our offices, even if they're virtual, and with colleagues. And maybe that's setting up 30 minute Zoom meetings to meet everyone on the team or different ways that they can learn from some of the other staff in the office and get to know them.

Helping staff understand their roles, so we might just look at things like expected response time for communication or attendance at virtual meetings. You know, how do we expect or anticipate that our staff are going to be present? So sometimes we'll hear a lot about, do you have a camera on or don't have a camera on.

And is that a bone of contention and the why behind it? And a lot of times just having a conversation about it is super important. So we're not making any assumptions and we're not building expectations that maybe aren't there.

So we also want to build expectations around after-hours work emails and texts, as I kind of shared before. But it just kind of helps create that healthy work-life balance, so having that conversation with staff, too, and being intentional about it. And also, you know, why we're here, right? So we always want to keep our goal in mind and why we're all here to help individuals with disabilities achieve their employment goals. So even though we are as remote, we don't want to forget why we're all here. All right.

So some of this is going to be setting goals and creating professional goals and development plans. So now more than ever, staff can feel disconnected, and it's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. So revisiting those performance goals and annual goals will help everyone kind of see that bigger piece and how they're contributing, even if it is remotely.

So tying them back to whether it's common performance measures or the different measures that are built into your own performance plan. Having staff look at their caseloads and develop targets that can help them stay focused. For other staff that might not have caseloads, this could be how they're

looking at their contributions to your department or division. And whether that's business consultants or fiscal folks, just kind of helping them again feel that connection. And part of that goes with professional development plans so wanting them to feel like you care about their professional growth and development, whether that's sharing information about webinars or related articles or books.

You know, it's a perfect opportunity with so many opportunities being virtual now, where it's much more cost efficient that we can share information with staff that maybe we couldn't have before with travel restrictions and such. So having staff map out their plans for the week or the month and helping them. Maybe setting up regularly scheduled calls with them to kind of go through and see how they're progressing and where the challenges are and how you can support them or help them troubleshoot.

And for those staff that aren't counselors, apply the same principle. What are the items that need to be accomplished? Maybe it's contracts or bill payments or anything like that. And what are the other ways that you can help strategize with them to get that done?

Delegation, so delegating or assigning projects and being clear in our expectations when we delegate. It's harder to do. You know, we all think we might be good delegates.

But we have to kind of revisit this and see how have we explained how the work-- what our parameters are and what we expect. Is there a due date or other check-ins built in so that we can monitor the progress of those? Or are we going to end up doing it for someone?

Using different types of virtual collaboration tools. There are just so many out there, including Microsoft products or Google. And everybody has their own system, depending on your state agency. But there's ways to set up your system so there's collaboration tools that you can use at your disposal.

And one of our states, Texas, they really use Microsoft Teams to the fullest. It's really been helpful for them to move to a virtual environment and really maintain staff engagement. So they shared with us that they started using it just for meetings and information exchanges via Chat. But they started using some of the Teams' channels to create communication and information exchange structures and really allowed for a lot more teamwork to happen in a virtual environment. They also share commonly used files and reference materials and different things that would have otherwise gotten lost getting circulated by email.

The other is just ensuring that job descriptions are up-to-date and reflective of the work required. So you might be restricted in your state or your agency by formalizing some of this because of your policies and processes about how that gets done. But to the extent that you have that ability to make those job descriptions and performance plans up-to-date and more reflective of what your staff are doing now is always helpful.

CAROL PANKOW: Secret number 5, Performance: plan for the plan. I love Oprah. You get a great plan, and you get a great plan. Everybody gets a great plan.

Lack of a plan is a bad plan. You still need to evaluate performance, and you may need to figure out new ways to do this in a remote world. If somebody was a poor performer in the office, don't be

surprised if that continues in this virtual work environment. And you don't want to take the path out of sight, out of mind.

You also don't want to have staff report in every time they are taking a bio break or having a snack. I mean, you wouldn't do that if they were in the office. So you want to resist that urge to do it now. And, in fact, that constant worry you might have that people are not working, studies have shown that remote workers on average do 13% more work than their counterparts who are in an office.

I want to start off with really good organization and planning. Many agencies are relying heavily on the use of shared calendars. They make sure those are updated at least weekly, details about appointments while maintaining confidentiality and creating that space and expectations on that calendar so staff have time carved out where no meetings are scheduled.

I love that Texas blocks out Friday afternoons where no internal meetings are scheduled. And Arizona likes to reserve Fridays for one-on-one meetings. Also scheduling meetings so people have a chance to use the restroom or get a coffee, I love that.

Some states are saying, you know what. We scheduled you for an hour. But the agenda really is 50 minutes, so everybody has at least 10 minutes to dash in between the endless Zoom or Teams meetings.

Agencies are also using Microsoft Stream to create and post quick how-to videos in their Teams' channels. It helps to build staff capacity for using all of these new tools. You want to make sure whatever you do with your organization and planning if you're relying on technology, that you're using state and agency approved technology systems and apps. You don't want to go rogue. It would be nothing worse than you're taking down the whole system by some rogue piece.

Now, this is all foundational. We need these foundational pieces to get our evaluation together. This includes having those regular check-ins. Do what you say you're going to do and be consistent. You want to make those check-ins a priority with staff and avoid canceling.

Have your staff set up a plan for the week. Check back the next week to see what was accomplished. And if you have a well-liked employee that is underperforming, don't let it slide.

It really circles back to Secret 2 on emotional and mental health. You want to talk to them. Find out what's going on and give candid feedback to help them improve.

And watch out for oversharing. We were given this tip by a couple of states. Sometimes supervisors were getting a feeling of freeness when on a video versus being in person or maybe if your camera's off. You don't want to overshare things with staff that you would not do in person.

You want to evaluate individualized professional development plans that Missy talked about a little bit earlier. So we've got this great opportunity with things being virtual. It's been easier and cheaper to offer opportunities for staff to grow and learn. And you want to nurture that and foster that and create that culture of learning. It's such a great gift.

Our video tech QM will have a collection of learning resources for supervisors and managers when our website goes live. And it's really important for you to invest some time in yourself, too, to learn new ideas, approaches, and thoughts. But you want to circle back and evaluate that individualized development plan that the staff had set up.

Also as you're preparing that annual performance review, you want to make sure there are no surprises. Your diligence in connecting and keeping track of what is happening with each of your staff, that's going to help you as you do your virtual performance review. You want to make sure you're giving feedback the whole way along so there are no surprises for staff in a review. Somebody might think they were doing fine, while you were quietly upset with the quality of their work. So review their progress on those annual goals that they set, too.

And then tools go two ways. You want to make sure, as you're evaluating staff, that staff really have the tools to get the work done because you'll end up in a whole lot of trouble in that review if you're talking about something, and they said, well, I didn't have a computer for three months. Some of you had put some temporary solutions in place as the pandemic started.

But as this is getting to be a longer term situation and, in some cases, it's really going to be your new normal, you may want to rethink how this is working for staff. And I know some things might be out of your control due to internal processes or money. But your role really is to advocate and bust down those barriers. Staff need things like that working computer, headset, printer.

Work out things like how documents should be mailed. Do you send them stamps, envelopes, and papers, everything electronic. Do staff have supplies like sticky notes or notepads, paper, pencils? I know I still-- I'm in an electronic world, but I like my sticky notes.

And tech support, we talked about it above. We're talking about it again. You may have to help facilitate this. As your team comes up with good tech tips, they can also serve as a resource to each other.

And you could even regularly talk about that and add it to your agenda. Bottom line, you want to make sure you set up your people for success. If you are not, then you're going to hear all of this as you evaluate performance.

And also with tools, you want to track how work is getting done, focusing on those outcomes, not just activities. You're going to circle back to those goals you set above, checking on how last week looked and what happened or last year looked and how it is now. Think about how you're going to evaluate productivity and specifically how to move away from more time-based approaches to something more meaningful regarding outcomes.

Purely time-based approaches mistake presence for productivity. I had a boss who liked to call it butts in the seat. It didn't mean work was getting done, but he-- boy, he wanted people at their desk. And, of course, you know, it's always been a challenge.

But I think it's really been magnified during remote work. Agencies report that some managers are asking staff for daily time logs that are in 15-minute increments, daily check-in and check-out emails, maybe requiring an unrealistic response time to non-urgent emails. You want to show trust to those you hire until there's a reason not to trust them.

So you want to consider things like looking at the quality of the work versus the quantity of the work. Maybe they're working with an especially challenging group of customers and families. Are they navigating those situations well and coming to a successful resolution of issues?

Not all caseloads are equal. Sometimes working with a specialty population can pose additional challenges. Quality of the case work, is it marginal or just getting by?

Or is there real thought put into those case notes and plans? And what do your quality assurance reviews report? You can take a look at that as you're preparing for evaluation.

Look at customer satisfaction surveys. Are you getting a lot of customer complaints that they can't get a hold of certain staff or aren't getting responses? Or maybe customers are reporting really good experiences. Are your customers getting employment?

Have staff facilitated maybe training being accomplished remotely for customers? Or is staff navigating working with vendors in a more creative way? Some staff have created their own virtual training options when a vended option hasn't been available.

The North Carolina Blind Counselors created a virtual Pre-ETS newsletter and at-home training when there was nothing else available for students with disabilities. Think about things like are staff taking initiative in bringing up problems along with suggestions on how they'd like to solve them. And ask your staff to evaluate themselves and make sure you're providing that positive feedback and celebrate the wins.

It's really easy to lose sight of that as you're working in this remote world. You don't see people, and you can all congregate real quick for a nice huddle meeting or a quick shout-out. So you want to be intentional about that.

And you can also look at those more traditional methods for evaluating work and using that case management system, like the history of your case work. IT can help you develop reports, or you can utilize those canned reports already in your case management system. You can look at things like frequency of contact with clients.

What do the case notes look like and the details of engagement with the clients? Look at the IP, last reviewed, and the services, and maybe the last service authorized. Bottom line is connecting with your staff is going to help you keep up-to-date and in the know on what is happening, so you can do a proper evaluation.

MELISSA DIEHL: Well, Secret 6 is all about communication. So before we start, we thought we would show you a short video clip that kind of depicts one version of communication.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[CHIME]

- Trip Crosby.

- Has joined the meeting.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[TAPS DESK]

[CHIME]

- Beth.

- Has joined the meeting.

- Hello.

- Tyler?

- No, this is Beth from ICS.

- Oh, hey, Beth. How are you doing?

- Oh, oh, good, yeah, just making it, you know.

[CHIME]

- Tyler.

- Has joined the meeting.

[DOOR CLOSES]

- All right. Well, uh, this is Trip. Who's here?

- Tyler's here.

- Beth's here.

- OK. The purpose of today's meeting is to discuss--

[CHIME]

- Yeah, I'll be able to do it in like 30 minutes. John.

- Has joined the meeting.

- Hi, John.

- Hi.

- I was just trying to go over the purpose of today's meeting, which is to discuss the deliverables.

[CHIME]

- Tyler.

- Has joined the meeting.

- Sorry, guys, I got cut off. Is Paul here? I sent him an invite.

[KNOCKING]

- Put in your access code.

[BEEPING]

- No, no, no, that's your PIN number.

- It should be a nine-digit number.

- Try pressing the pound key.

[DOOR OPENS]

[DOOR CLOSES]

- Paul.

- Has joined the meeting.

- Any questions before we move on?

- Yes, this is Beth. What's our best plan of attack for the second quarter?

- The question actually--

- What we should do is--

- Oh, go ahead.
- Go ahead. Oh, I think what we should do--
- Well, it actually depends on how you look at it because the--
- Really come-- ah, eh.
- Go ahead.
- You go ahead.
- Given sales spread--
- We'll--
- Let me just say that--
- OK.
- That's a great graph, John. Tyler.
- (VOICE BREAKING UP) Well, my main concern with the predictions for last year was that-- they are just insufficient. I mean, they're not even taking into account--
- Did we, uh-- did we lose Tyler again?
- Hello?
- John, are you guys taking distributions?
- [NO AUDIO]
- John?
- Oh, my bad. I was on mute. Um, let me start over.
- So I've prepared a presentation. I'm sharing it with all of you. You should be able to see it on your screen right now.
- Got it.
- I don't see a link anywhere.
- It says I need to download a plug-in.
- We are all using Macs, I'm assuming.
- Yeah.
- Yeah.

- Yeah.

- How can you tell? Um.

- Financials are looking great. Paul, do you have any comments on staffing?

- I was thinking--

[DOG BARKING LOUDLY]

We get a few more contractor types in. Hold on, I'm sorry. Rex! Get down.

- I don't know. I feel like when I'm [INAUDIBLE].

[LOUD WHIRRING SOUND]

[DOG BARKING]

- Tighten that up then--

- (VOICE ECHOING) To me, staffing is a huge impact.

- What is that?

- Is that me?

- Is that me?

- That's not me, I don't think.

- I just want to go over a couple of details as we move into our next section here.

[CHIME]

- We've got three new departments coming on the--

- I think I'm breaking up a little bit, guys.

- By the end of Q3.

- Driving through a dead spot.

- I need everyone to give me detailed evaluations.

- Sorry, guys.

- So that we know-- that's it, guys. Beth, you'll send out a recap email that could have basically taking the place of this whole meeting, correct?

- Yep, always do.
- Yeah, thanks for doing that, Beth.
- Dave, you've been here the whole time?
- Yeah.
- Huh. Well, thanks, everyone, once again. Oh, one more th--

[END PLAYBACK]

MELISSA DIEHL: So as that short video kind of depicted what a conference call would look like in real life, I'm sure that many of you have experienced that in a number of situations. But I think we can all relate to it. And one of the reasons we wanted to share it, in addition to it being funny and adding some levity, is to keep these types of communication barriers in mind so hopefully we can mitigate them. Because it really does impede communication and can really derail engagement among the people who are participating in a conference call if they get frustrated enough, so just something to keep in mind.

And communication really is the linchpin of all of these secrets. Because if we don't have good communication, all the rest really breaks down and can fail. So it's needing to have a good communication plan and strategy in place.

And language that we use is so important in developing a cohesive team. The words we choose really do matter. And we want to make sure that we are intentional about the words we choose, and we're also kind of reading the room, right? So I think we can all tell when folks kind of check out or get disengaged.

And we want to make sure that we're building in time, that we're not presuming that someone was just disinterested. But maybe we said something that they took the wrong way, or they didn't-- we might have said it in a way that they misinterpreted. So it's really important to keep that communication open and check in with folks.

Now some of the ways we can be intentional about communication is discussing what's happening with the agency. One of the biggest things we hear across the country with frontline staff is they feel like information is being kept from them, and they don't know the why. They don't know what's really happening. They're just feeling like they're getting directions or having to do things, and they don't know what's really happening.

So different ways that you can make staff feel that you're keeping them informed is super important. Some of the examples we found in talking with states, Arizona, they do fun themed emails. So they have Motivation Monday or Winning Wednesday and Fun Fact Friday.

And different key staff members on their leadership team take turns to send out these emails and communicate with staff. And their staff are really enjoying it because they're communicating with different leaders in the organization in a different way than they have been before. So they're getting to know a different side of their leaders and feeling like they're getting to know them a little bit more.

Both of the Minnesota agencies have done some really cool YouTube videos with messages that can go out to all staff, just mixing it up a little bit and giving them another method and modality. And ways that we can keep people in the loop is so critical now more than ever. So whether that's formal or informal methods, just to kind of make them feel like we would if they were in the office but even more.

So, you know, err on the side of overcommunication. Idaho General, they do a really fun newsletter that has nothing to do with work. But it might include things like self-care tips, recipes, things that might engage their staff in another way.

Another way to look at communication is through weekly check-ins with team members, so trying to create some sense of a routine. And they don't have to be a lengthy conversation but just an intentional built-in time to check in. So whether you do that with your individual staff or as a team and encouraging them when they can to use their cameras so that you can look at those signs of body language and so forth.

Some people really like when there is music playing or folks use different backgrounds or screen savers. Other folks have done different types of virtual themed office gatherings. Maybe they've had virtual costume contests or different fun icebreakers. And one of the things that we did in this PowerPoint is, in the back, you'll see a whole bunch of links to some fun resources that we have. And one is some fun virtual icebreakers that you could do with your staff.

And, again, as Carol had said before, communication really is a two way street. It's really about listening more than we are talking. So I know Carol and I have been doing a whole lot of talking on this webinar. But really if we want to have dialogue, then you're going to need to listen 80% of the time and talk only 20% of the time. So the next time you have a conversation or you have a meeting, think about whether or not you're just reporting out or you're actually engaging your staff in dialogue, and you've built in that time for listening to your staff.

Be OK with the silence. Sometimes you need to pause and allow people to get a little uncomfortable with the silence, which would allow them to respond where they otherwise might not. They might just be waiting for someone else to talk-- for you to talk. And we really do set the tone as managers of what we hope our staff to accomplish. So this might be communicating about those milestones, which can help us down the road with evaluating performance.

And, again, we do have a mix of staff. Some are introverts. Some are extroverts. And we want to find ways to make sure everyone has a voice.

So sometimes we're going to have to talk with those folks to find out the best way they're comfortable to get their voice heard. So sometimes our introverts like a little more time to process ideas, and they

might want to follow up with their thoughts, where you have others that like to monopolize conversations and jump in and talk over people. So we want to make sure that we can respect everyone.

Fostering collaboration is important as well, so ways that we could encourage staff to meet without us as a manager. Are they having time set aside where they can meet as peers and talk about the work and trying to figure out ways they can be a team and help each other? Maybe it's different things that we've heard from the field that we can share with you. Like, some of them have scheduled coffee dates and appointments with coworkers, or they've had virtual lunches so they can get together.

Other agencies have online group fitness time set aside, where they have different folks who are leading different fitness activities. Water cooler, so you can set up virtual chats in Microsoft Teams similar to being around a real water cooler or coffee pot back in the office. Florida General shared they have water cooler moments, which is just an opportunity that they set aside for staff to talk about things they're interested in or have in common or newsworthy or just ways for them to feel connected.

So agencies also set up a coffee break time, where folks can float in and out to chat on Teams. So they're not necessarily mandated, but you have different rooms. And people can come in and out, depending on the conversation.

Another example that we've heard from an agency in Michigan is they're kind of floating around this idea of crowdsourcing, which is a good way to address challenges. And they were looking at just finding ways to help counselors feel connected and pose an issue or something that they're struggling with with one of their consumers maybe, a situation. And they can post that question out to their peers and crowdsource it to try to get more innovative responses. And, again, we have another link about crowdsourcing at the end of this presentation, too, for everybody.

Identifying and solving problems. So it can be easy-- super easy-- to have a misunderstanding in a virtual environment. And Zoom and video chats are really no different, especially when there's glitches with technology that can happen. So sometimes we want to make sure that no matter what, we are coming into the conversation assuming that there's positive intent.

Because if something doesn't make sense, we want to make sure that we're starting from a place of folks are always showing up with a positive intent. They're not trying to be disruptive for the sake of being disruptive. So keeping that in mind sometimes or just reminding ourselves before a meeting starts or before our day starts about that positive intent.

And probably what's challenging but so true is timely feedback and showing appreciation for the work that gets completed. We might not be able to be as timely as we want to be. But we want to do that as much as possible. And if we can't, we want to make sure that we're using that communication to allow folks to know exactly where we are and why maybe it's taking a little longer than anticipated. So they're not just assuming we're ignoring them or we haven't prioritized it.

So we don't want to forget to celebrate the wins and show gratitude for all the hard work our staff are doing. There's not enough times that we can say it, and I would be as specific as we can to show our

appreciation so that we're not generalizing things. If we can give an example, instead of just saying thanks for all you do, but rather saying, hey, you did a really great job setting up that webinar last week. Or I know that that case was really challenging, and I saw the tremendous job that you did and the amount of work that was involved.

People really like hearing that you've paid attention to those details. And several agencies have shared they like to send-- their supervisors like to send handwritten notes and cards to their staff periodically. And staff really are responding to that, just knowing that somebody went that extra little mile to send them a note to recognize the job that they're doing. And coaching and support, each of these tips require time and attention and consistency. And so we want to make sure that we're being intentional about all of those things.

CAROL PANKOW: So Secret number 7, last but not least, being the boss does not equal having all the answers. And we love this quote from Katherine Plumber. "Being boss doesn't mean you have all the answers, just the brains to recognize the right one when you hear it."

"I don't know" are very powerful words. And pretending to know when you don't really know can cause a whole host of problems. And it's really OK. We're giving you permission right now to let go of your need to have all the answers.

Letting go can be so empowering. Research has shown that expressing vulnerability and asking for help is a strong signal to others that you are trusting, and you are more likely to be trusted in return. And it puts everyone and you on the path to solving problems and sparking innovative thinking.

You want to ask your people to share insights, opinions, and experiences. Your team is going to feel so valued. You're going to build camaraderie, teamwork, and collaboration. And, again, it'll show respect and trust to your staff.

And sometimes-- and especially in this situation-- there can be no good solutions for certain things. And there may not be that perfect right answer out there. You're really making the best of a very tricky situation. So getting that input from others is going to help you to address, and people are going to realize that and not be, like, oh, what are they doing because they saw it. They saw all angles of that and the difficulties that you're in.

And, finally, we want you to realize you are not in this alone. Don't forget to reach out to your colleagues. We talked about it earlier, about setting up those support networks.

You can also reach out to us if you're stuck or you're trying to find a new idea. Definitely reach out. We've been doing a lot of research on this. We're happy to chat with you. Don't carry the weight of the world on your shoulders alone.

Now we have spent some time going over basics to help you in the remote world. We know these are not rocket science, and you may be saying, eh, we knew these. But we're hoping that you could take away a new nugget or two that will help you and your teams to not only survive but thrive.

And then here's our contact information. So, as I said, you can get a hold of any of us, we've left you our emails there. And we're going to leave you with a variety of resources. Actually over the next, I think, three slides, we have all of the resources that helped us to build this presentation.

You'll see all the references to the articles that we've read, the resources that you can use that we reference throughout the presentation, and we just hope that you'll find use in those down the road. And definitely you can also visit both vrtac-qm.org and also trainvr.org to help you with other materials that we have referenced in the presentation. And so may the force be with you and know we are with you, too.

JOHN WALSH: Thank you, Missy and Carol, for a wonderful presentation. And be sure to check back on our websites for future offerings that are going to be impactful for you as a supervisor. And we also want to share with folks that all of the great resources that you've seen in this webinar, we're going to put into a condensed reference guide so that you'll be able to get some of the key talking points and also get access to those links of some of the great reso