



6 Traps to Avoid When

Creating an Engaged Virtual Team

By **Chris McChesney** & **Mark Josie**

Author, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, and Global Practice Leader, FranklinCovey

Senior Vice President, Business Outcomes, FranklinCovey

FranklinCovey



In today's virtual work environment, we've learned a few things.



Productivity isn't necessarily hurt — and may be improved — in remote environments. A PwC survey found a 47 percent productivity increase in 2020, despite the large rise in working from home. And 94 percent of employers surveyed by Mercer reported productivity was unaffected or improved during the pandemic.

So while working from home presents some challenges, remote workers have proven they can engage at high levels. In remote and hybrid environments, leaders need to be even more intentional about creating the right conditions for high engagement.

The most powerful principles of human motivation are timeless, and they apply in all settings: in-person, remote, or hybrid. As the best leaders know, highly-engaged employees are playing a game that matters, and they're winning.

Dispelling a Few Myths



**A winning team
doesn't need artificial
morale boosting.**

Myth 1: Engagement is the same as camaraderie.

When organizations and leaders start to think about engagement, a litany of classic reasons employees quit surfaces. But the reality is that getting along with your boss or having a best friend at work isn't what drives engagement. Culture consists of camaraderie and engagement.

So abandon thoughts of *"if only we brought in lunch every Friday,"* or *"if only we had flashier incentives,"* or *"if our only leadership team were more fun."*

Myth 2: Money and prestige are the biggest motivators.

As Frederick Herzberg explained in the 1960s, improving what he called hygiene factors — like status, compensation, or benefits — doesn't mean you'll love your job.

When hygiene factors are missing, their absence leads to dissatisfaction. But their presence doesn't guarantee engagement. We all know miserable people in high-paying, prestigious jobs.

Myth 3: Engagement is the same as employee satisfaction.

People love their job because of what Herzberg called the motivation factors: challenging work, responsibility, and purpose. Motivation factors are intrinsic. No prodding required.

Chances are that moment had nothing to do with pay, benefits, or even your boss. It had everything to do with the feeling you were winning at something that mattered.

Reflect on a time during your career when you were most engaged, a time when you were most enthralled.

“

The opposite of job dissatisfaction isn't job satisfaction, but rather an absence of job dissatisfaction.”

—Clayton Christensen,
author of *How Will You Measure Your Life?*

The Secret: A High-Stakes, Winnable Game

The most effective leaders engage their employees in a high-stakes, winnable game. Every member of their team or organization feels that what they're doing every day matters — and that their work is moving the team closer to a Wildly Important Goal® (WIG®).



**A winnable game
takes the ambiguity
out of goal setting.**

As organizations continue to adapt to changes in the way they operate, external factors have added significant change and stress to everyone's day-to-day-operations, a.k.a. "the whirlwind." We've seen a lot of leaders simplify their strategy to "whirlwind +1." Instead of choosing two or three WIGs for their teams to focus on — in addition to the whirlwind of day-to-day operations — they're focusing on just one at a time.

To create and maintain a highly-engaged team or a highly-engaged organization, leaders must avoid these 6 traps:

1. The Concept Trap
2. The Complexity Trap
3. The Futility Trap
4. The Urgency Trap
5. The Planning Trap
6. The Ambiguity Trap

Note that while all 6 traps apply to leaders at any level, Traps 1 to 3 are especially relevant to senior leaders, while Traps 4 to 6 are especially relevant to line managers.

1. Avoid the Concept Trap



What's your most important next target? Give it your front-sight focus.

Start with the target, not a concept.

A concept is ambiguous. A target is specific. A concept is an idea. No matter how great your idea is, without a clearly defined target, you won't hit the bullseye — especially in a rapidly changing environment.

Mark Divine, a former commander in the Navy SEALs, tells us that SEALs are taught to “simplify the battlefield” in the chaos of war. They identify the next important target and then put all of their energy into executing that micro-mission, while maintaining what he calls “front-sight” focus.

How can you simplify the battlefield for your team or organization?

Ask yourself:

- What small area do we want to have a huge impact in?
- What metric do we want to move?

Let's say you want to improve sales. A clear target is not growing all of sales — that's a concept — but a component of sales. It's picking a single, tangible metric like increasing the close rate or the average deal size. Remember +1. It is the engagement factor. If you don't keep that goal simple, then the whirlwind devours it.

2. Avoid the Complexity Trap



Execution does not like complexity.

Embrace simplicity; achieve results.

Few in today's remote work environment have the luxury of a separate office or a leisurely lunch. Many are parenting, teaching, and working at the same time. Minimize stress levels and increase engagement by communicating with simplicity and transparency.

Put simply, execution does not like complexity. Less is more. In 1962, when President John F. Kennedy tasked NASA with going to the moon, he provided just two guidelines: a time frame ("before this decade is out") and a destination.

The quickest way to kill execution is to lose focus or over-goal your team or organization. If you want your people to do something spectacularly useful and productive with their time, give them an ambitious target and keep it simple. Don't add a prescriptive list of dos and don'ts, or your Wildly Important Goal will never get any traction.

3. Avoid the Futility Trap



Highly-engaged teams are playing to win. They aren't playing to not lose.

Without purpose, passion doesn't exist.

A remote or hybrid work environment can feel like working in isolation. But it doesn't have to feel isolating, and it won't if team members have clarity about their purpose. Small wins are where improvement comes from. Remember whirlwind +1.

If people have a +1, then they know their job matters, and knowing that gives them more of a sense of security than if you say, *"Oh, we're just going to do the day job for right now."* That leads to insecurity and speculation: *"Is the company not doing well? Am I not going to have a job six months from now?"*

Also avoid setting goals that are too high. Unsurprisingly, team members respond with, *"That's not gonna happen,"* and promptly return to the whirlwind. And whirlwind +0 feels like futility. Strictly playing defense is exhausting. The +1 reverses that feeling. Team members really do want to be engaged in doing what matters.

“

You're not doing people a favor when it's just all 'day job' all the time.”

—Chris McChesney,
author of *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*



4. Avoid the Urgency Trap



In the absence of focus and discipline, urgency dominates human behavior.

There is always work to do.

In the absence of focus and discipline, urgency — not importance — dominates human behavior. High-performing leaders and team members avoid the trap of only spending energy on the urgent.

Great leaders understand that even if people are in agreement about what matters, until they've activated that sense of importance, the whirlwind very easily consumes all of their time and energy — and that of their team members.

Having a well-articulated target helps team members focus and allows them to act instead of being acted upon. They're equipped to be proactive rather than reactive. Everyone agrees on what's critically important, and it gets done.

5. Avoid the Planning Trap



If you want compliance, you deal in planning. If you want engagement, you deal in targets.

Spend all of your time planning, and you'll be left behind.

Change is constant, and organizations that adapt to rapidly changing environments are the best positioned to weather the disruption. When organizations can pivot and adapt, business outcomes that could have been tepid often exceed expectations, month over month and year over year.

So often leaders and managers want to map out a detailed plan, which is the appropriate response in a lot of situations. But for a goal that requires a high level of team engagement — especially in an uncertain environment — it's much better to point people in the direction of the target and let them figure out how to get there.

Strategic leaders allow the teams closest to the work to define targets that support the larger goal, create lead measures, and set up a game with a compelling scoreboard. Creating a plan yourself and expecting other people to just execute it doesn't lead to engagement. When you allow teams to shape their own work, you are actually more in control of the thing that is really important: the +1.

6. Avoid the Ambiguity Trap



**Without clarity,
employee
engagement
nose-dives.**

The human brain can only handle so much ambiguity.

Today's workers are packing around a lot of uncertainty baggage. Avoid ambiguity, and your team members won't have to decide what to make room for.

Without clarity, employee engagement nose-dives. People simply check out because they cannot connect the dots. They may hear what a leader is saying, but without knowing what's actually expected of them, they become apathetic.

Uncertainty leads people to a point where they simply don't want to deal with the ambiguity anymore. No more questions — please and thank you.

However, they won't quit. And they won't argue. They will simply go back to their day job — the whirlwind — abandoning the +1. Remember what whirlwind +0 feels like: futility.

“

In the absence of clearly defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia.”

—Mark Josie,
SVP, Business Outcomes, FranklinCovey

Engage Your Team in Winning

From eliminating ambiguity to avoiding futility, strategic leaders engage their teams in more than accomplishing their day jobs. They build on the momentum of small wins and provide the clarity needed to win.

One by one they amass countless wins and develop a culture that's focused on winning. They possess the fluidity and focus that sustain engagement. They are not trapped by complexity or the whirlwind. They are confident they can achieve their Wildly Important Goals. And they do.

Frederick Herzberg's motivational principles are still relevant — and they're more important than ever in today's environment. Just a little change can be enough to move a person, a team, or an entire organization toward a more productive state. Just a little shift in the brain can change the resonance of a whole system.

FranklinCovey experts help leaders at all levels engage their remote, colocated, and hybrid work teams in winning. Our world-class learning solutions — delivered Live-Online, On Demand, or Live In-Person — are designed to improve execution throughout your organization.

More than 100,000 teams in business, government, and education have partnered with FranklinCovey to implement *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*. Act now and receive a complimentary executive overview. A FranklinCovey execution expert will meet with your executive team to share how you can implement the 4 *Disciplines* to drive results.

To learn more, email us at info@franklincovey.com, visit franklincovey.com, or

Call us at

1-888-868-1776





FranklinCovey