# Rethinking Working Remotely

In times of crisis, people start re-evaluating things. They question their present habits and start to take another look at those options that seemed to be of only minor interest to them. New preferences offer themselves, paving the way for greater opportunities. After coming to terms with the initial moment of shock, people discover that the current disruption may produce some interesting future opportunities. This is how we function as human beings, guaranteeing our survival and allowing us to be successful in all circumstances.

Who would have thought, some six months ago, that Lufthansa would ground over 90% of its fleet? Who could have imagined that a huge number of managers and employees would now be working from home, resulting in a massive rush for headphones, monitors and other household articles? Managers are more used to airport lounges, business-class seats and good hotels than the need to try to work in their home offices with uncomfortable chairs and their dear family at arm's length. Suddenly, we feel a little remote and helpless at first.

As managers, we are now facing the same challenges and feelings as some of our employees who have been working remotely for years. Our thoughts might linger for a moment on memories of our comfortable chair in our reasonably quiet office, missing the subtle signs of importance that usually come with inhabiting managerial workplaces. Some feelings of light despair may affect us when our normal direct influence on our staff suddenly seems to lose much of its impact, lessened by the distance and separation that are typical of our new environment. We may whisper to ourselves: this is not my world at all.

However, after a few weeks, we become more used to our virtual environment; becoming accustomed to the use of headphones, cameras, while dealing with platform features or bandwidth issues. We begin to appreciate our increasing ability to build new, different virtual communities. Our old mentality of a relentless, personal drive for 'better' and 'more' seems to slowly diminish, as we cannot expect things to be ready by 'yesterday' anymore.

## We begin to adopt a more relaxed leadership style

Maybe we are a bit proud of ourselves, impressed by our increasing ability to express understanding and empathy towards our employees. We come to the realisation that we finally share the same lot. In return, our employees react more calmly towards us, creating an amicable relationship. We become sensitive to the need to move closer together emotionally within the virtual environment and, as the weeks pass, we begin to adopt a more relaxed leadership style.
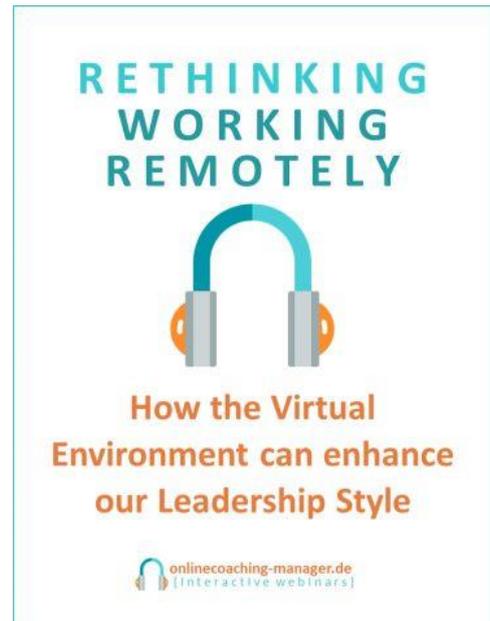
Almost unknowingly, we are trained by circumstances to be more patient with people. In order to bridge the gap caused by physical separation, we focus more on our social skills in online meetings. We have entered a new normal and will never be the same again.

Eventually, we come to a place where we feel much more emotionally attached to our team and, when we finally return to our office, we find we want to continue this journey. In future meetings, physically present colleagues will engage in a similar fashion; office staff will empathise with those working remotely and join online while in their office.

We may start to wonder why we felt such concerns and reservations towards virtual meetings and training sessions after all. We start to realise that digital modes of communication are not just about the technical side of things; rather, they help people to meet personal and practical needs. The virtual environment becomes a friend, making us better communicators and greater leaders of people.

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