Good Leadership

Especially critical in tough times

Survey Results from:
Good Leadership in a "Zoom" World

This presentation summarizes the results from the online survey conducted in mid-January 2021 on "Good Leadership in a 'Zoom' World". The survey (and a corresponding link) was promoted on social media sites including Linkedin, Instagram and Facebook.

The focus of the survey was on what good leadership looked like for those working in a remote environment during the pandemic. The survey was by no means a scientific study. It was more about gathering stories and experiences regarding how good leadership can positively support people in a remote work environment. The important message was that good leadership is indeed especially critical in tough times like what we have experienced through the recent pandemic.

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Our Mission

Change the work experience from ordinary to thriving so that people can accomplish amazing outcomes for themselves and their companies.

The survey was conducted by Thrive People Strategies.

We are a women-owned consulting and coaching firm with a mission to *change the work experience from ordinary to thriving so that people can accomplish amazing outcomes for themselves and their companies.*

With this mission in mind, we work with managers, teams and individuals who are striving to accomplish their professional and personal best.

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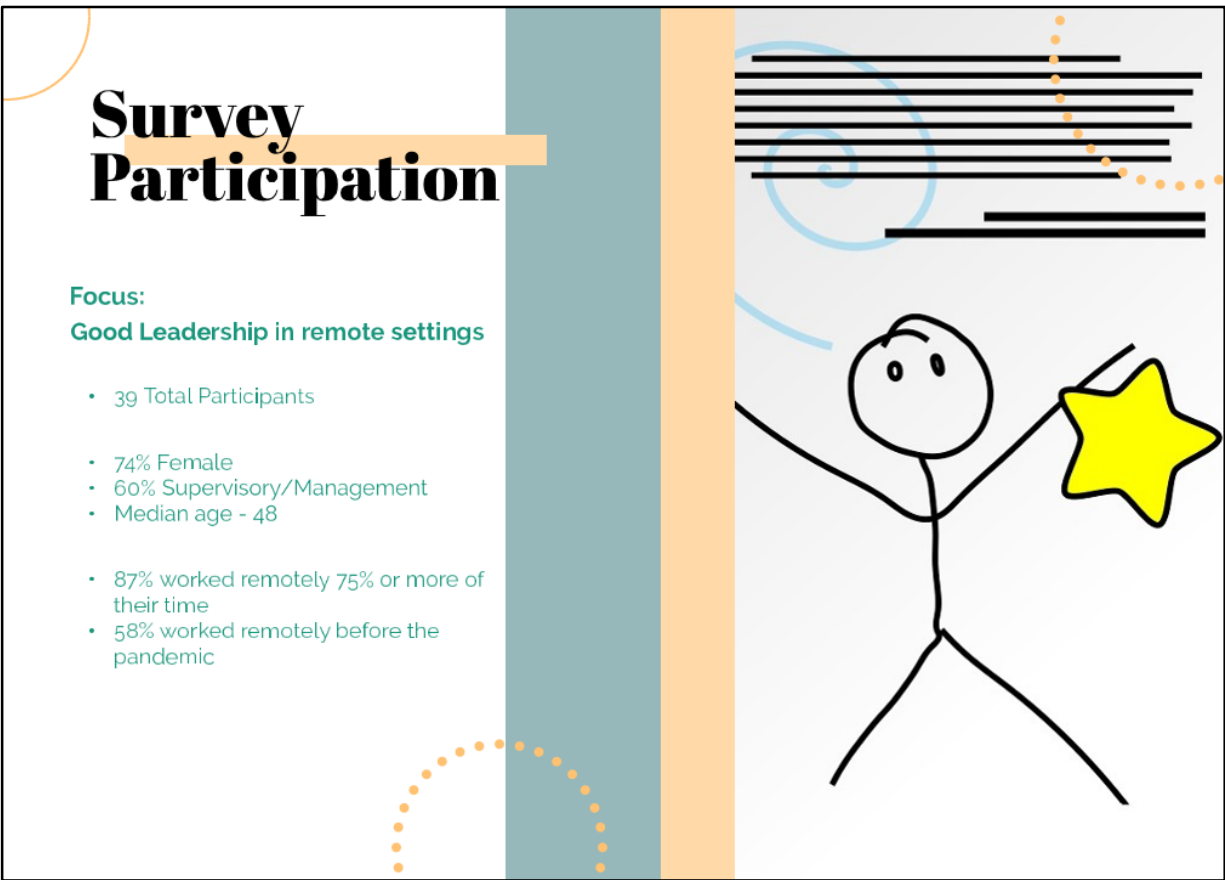
The results represent responses from 39 participants from both audio and written responses. The survey questions were primarily open ended and asked participants to describe their experiences and to share stories. As a result, the summary of this survey presents key themes discussed by respondents.

A large part of the respondents were female (74%)

60% of participants were in supervisory or management roles.

Median age of respondents was 48.

87% of respondents said they worked remotely 75% or more of their time. And for more than half of participants (58%), working remotely was not new to them as they said they had worked remotely before the pandemic hit.
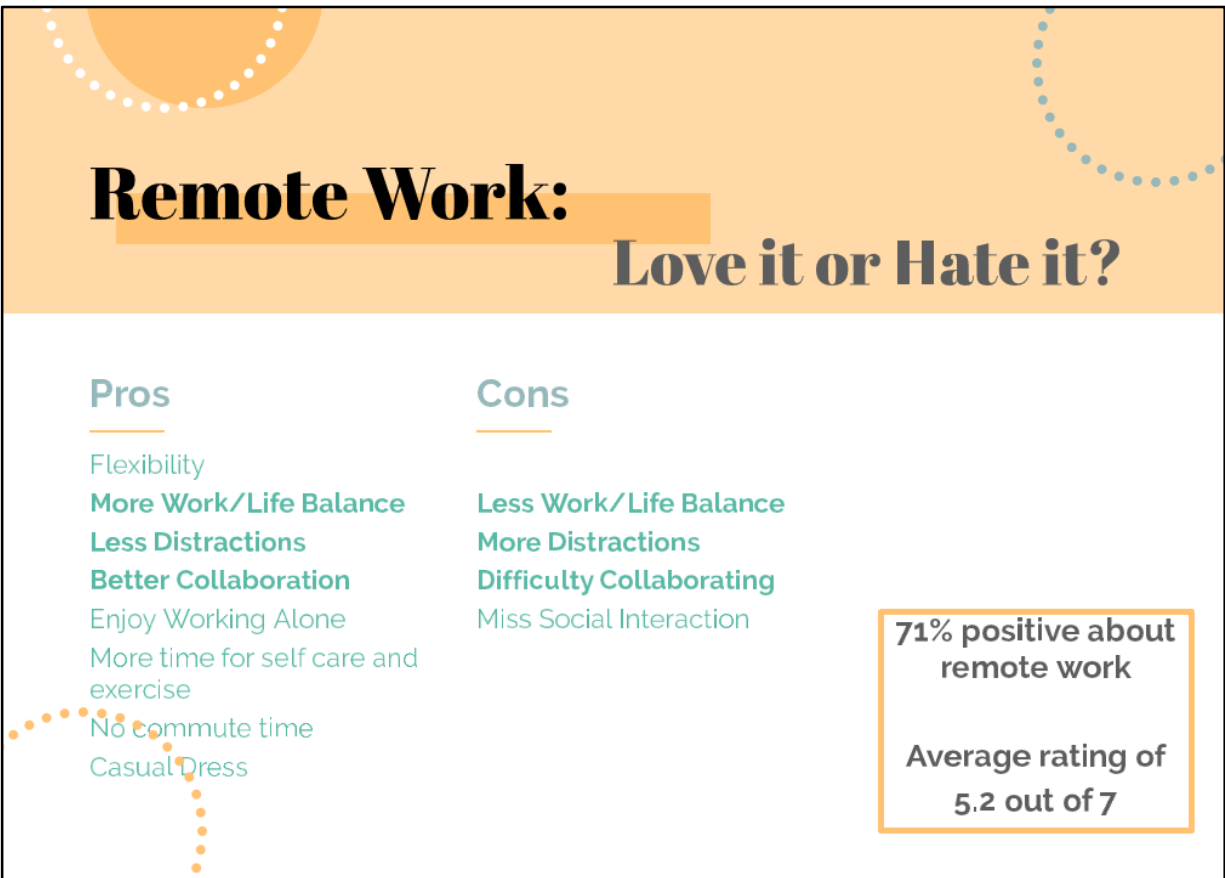
Now, let's get into the key findings of the survey!

We saw 2 key themes. The first was that:

The experience of remote work depends on personal circumstances AND how it is experienced differs from person to person.

Although the overall remote working experience was rated as positive among participants surveyed, the reasons cited by participants were experienced in different ways. For example, work/life balance was cited in several cases but for some it was positive and for others it was negative.

Let's explore this further…

Remote Work:
Love it or Hate it?

Pros

Flexibility
More Work/Life Balance
Less Distractions
Better Collaboration
Enjoy Working Alone
More time for self care and exercise
No commute time
Casual Dress

Cons

Less Work/Life Balance
More Distractions
Difficulty Collaborating
Miss Social Interaction

71% positive about remote work

Average rating of 5.2 out of 7

When we asked participants to rate on a scale of 1 to 7 how they felt about working remotely, with 1 being "hate it" and 7 being "love it", 71% of participants rated it positively. That is, participants either rated it as a 5, 6 or 7. By the way, the average rating for all participants was 5.2.

What's interesting is what we saw in the follow-up question to the "love it or hate it' question.   We asked participants to tell us "what 1 thing most influenced their rating on the previous question. The results showed that some people listed the same reasons for loving or hating the experience. In particular, **Work/Life Balance, Distractions, and Collaboration** showed up on both the positive and negative sides of the experience. The following slide shows 3 quotes that describe the dichotomous experiences of work/life balance and distractions.

Some participants also differed in the way they saw collaboration in a remote situation. Some felt that the remote environment made it difficult because they needed to be face to face with colleagues to work effectively together. On the other hand, others said that the remote environment forced the team to create systems or processes that led to more inclusive collaboration and sharing of information.

Flexibility was clearly a positive for many participants and was mentioned most often in the responses. Everyone saw flexibility as a plus of working remotely.

One final observation that highlights how remote work is a personal experience relates to a person's underlying preferences. Some people said they were introverts and enjoyed working remotely, while others craved social interaction.

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What Participants Said

"Having to balance online learning for children and home activities such as cooking and cleaning during the day. This results in very long hours of work. There are no clear lines between home and work tasks."

"I enjoy the flexibility I have with my day and have a better work/life balance."

"I am far more productive at home without distractions of people dropping in to chat, plus no commute."

Remote Work:
Love it or Hate it?

These are direct quotes from participants that highlight the personal experience of remote work. One's circumstances clearly impact remote work and whether it is a positive experience for them.

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Good Leadership...

Theme 2

Leadership is about nurturing relationships both on a one-on-one level and on a team level.

The second theme we saw from the survey results gets to the essence of good leadership. Examples of good leadership as described by participants essentially suggested that...

Leadership is about nurturing relationships both on a one-on-one level and on a team level.

The most prevalent comment was about the importance of "one-on-one" connections between leader/employee. People wanted/needed that personal touch. People also wanted to ensure as a team they were connected.

There is a lot packed into this theme. So, to unpack it, let's look at 3 sub-themes that came out of the responses which fall under "nurturing relationships"
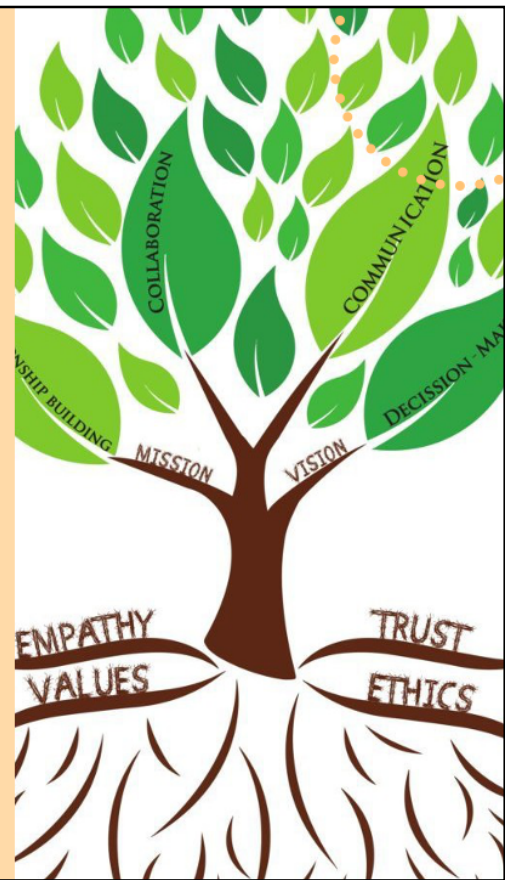
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The first sub-theme is that:

Good leaders show empathy, compassion, and caring for others

The emphasis on empathy and compassion may have been magnified as a result of the pandemic. However, regardless of the pandemic's impact, we know that these characteristics and behaviors are essential for developing effective relationships.

This slide includes a couple of quotes from participants showing how they experienced caring, empathic leaders.

The second sub-theme was that:

Good leaders connect with people one-on-one

As noted earlier, one-on-one meetings and touchpoints were mentioned as important by several survey participants. In a remote environment, people want to know that their leaders haven't' forgotten about them! And team meetings are not enough to provide that sense of personal connection and understanding of their unique circumstances.

Relationships

Sub Theme 3

Good leaders facilitate relationship building among team members by formalizing processes and modeling behavior

"For larger virtual gatherings and meetings it was important to deliberately take/make additional time to acknowledge others' presence to avoid them feeling left out and/or ensuring that all voices were being heard."

"It was a safe environment to be vulnerable and learn together. It demonstrated empathy that this was a new tool required in the new normal and not everyone picks up new tools quickly and/or easily. It was an opportunity to grow as a team."

The third sub-theme was that:

Good leaders facilitate relationship building among team members by formalizing processes and modeling behavior

Overall participant comments reflected the importance of acknowledging team members' virtual presence and ensuring a safe environment where team members could ask questions and be heard.

As with the quotes on this slide, there were several instances where participants shared stories of team meetings that encouraged inclusion and created more effective collaboration.

Clearly, the pandemic impacted the way remote work needed to be done in the last year. Maybe companies with distributed workforces did this already. However, as a result of the pandemic many of us who were not working remotely before paused to figure out how to create more formal processes for inclusion and engagement with our people.

So, what we experienced in the last year were more structured meetings and more regular meetings (or huddles as some people called them) where leaders were intentional about the processes and their behaviors. Leaders communicated more, listened better, and ensured inclusion of voices. They also closed the loop on the process by creating ways to better share information via systems like common drives and applications for improving collaboration.

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Measurable Impact

"Production is at an all-time high and it is because our team feels valued (and knows that we care about one another)."

"It affects me in a positive way because it rolls down from the top leadership, and it helps me to also think about the type of leader that I want to be for my team. So it affects me in that way - to take the good from the experience and apply it to my own working relationship with my team."

"We retained our business, NPS score of 4.5-5. We pivoted successfully in the new virtual environment without significant disruption. Employees remained engaged. Met 85% of sales goal."

"We were able to adapt to Webex quicker and easier thus reducing anxiety and adapting to a new normal much quicker."

Maintained high NPS Scores

Pivoted their business

Improved Productivity

Met sales goals

Adapted to changes more quickly

So, at this point you might be thinking that this is all nice touchy-feely stuff, but what's the concrete value of all this?

We asked participants to tell us about the positive impact their experiences had had on them, their teams, their organizations or the community. Some of the measurable factors participants cited included meeting sales goals, maintaining their high Net Promoter Scores (NPS), improving productivity, pivoting their business, and adapting to changes more quickly.

The slide shows some quotes from participants related to the measurable outcomes achieved.

As we read or listened to the stories, another important impact that clearly surfaced for us was the overall tone or attitude of participants. There was a sense that people experienced safer and more supportive work environments - perhaps the pandemic brought out that feeling as we were hypersensitive to what people were facing during COVID -- but these factors are important, nonetheless. COVID, we believe brought the behaviors of good leadership into greater FOCUS. Leaders had to magnify actions to achieve inclusion or to connect with individuals; they had to be more intentional about engaging people in a remote environment. They had to put themselves in other people's shoes to understand the challenges that their employees were facing.

Survey participants also mentioned many positive outcomes that were related to processes, which are not easily measurable For example, they talked about how the tone set by the leader led them or the team to open up more, work more effectively together or how the leader's actions were seen as good examples of what they would do in the future as leaders of their own teams. All of these "intangibles" may be measured by other means such as employee retention rates or employee engagement levels, which trickle down to financial and operational results.

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Enhancing remote work:
Leader characteristics
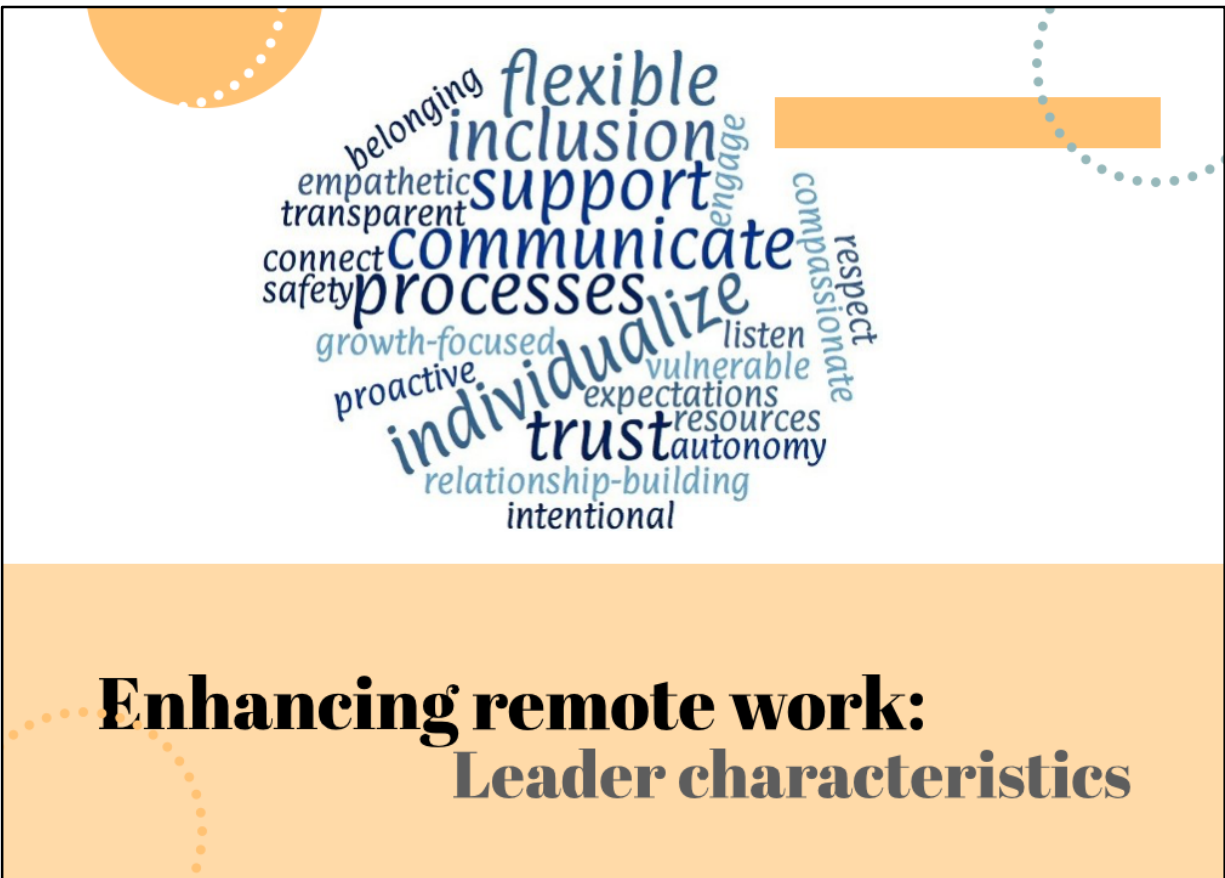
This word cloud chart shows the skills, traits, abilities or characteristics that were most often cited by participants when asked what they wanted to see in a leader to improve their experience of remote work.

The key words here show that leaders need to:

- be focused on the individual and their personal needs
- communicate and encourage people to speak up and participate
- support, be flexible
- develop processes that create trust and collaboration

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Practical Takeaways

Strengthen Relationships

- Connect human to human
- Converse with curiosity
- Imagine life from someone else's perspective
- Connect people with each other
- Understand individual's needs and motivations
- Share more of you

Create structure and consistency

- Schedule one-on-ones
- Hold regularly scheduled meetings or huddles
- Create standard agendas for meetings
- Create processes to ensure inclusion, sharing, transparency in teams
- Develop guidelines for remote work

Support human ingenuity

- Share context for/why's of job
- Provide meaningful information and feedback
- Offer opportunities for choice and self-initiation
- Show confidence in person's ability to do well
- Encourage person to ask questions

In conclusion, these are practical takeaways from the survey results that can help us be good leaders in a remote environment:

1. Strengthen relationships with people – get to know the people you work with on a more personal level. Understand their needs and motivations so that you can better support them to accomplish the objectives. By getting to know them and sharing more of yourself, you can understand their circumstances and develop a mutual appreciation for your differences and similarities.

2. Create structure and consistency – remote work is new to many people, so they need to understand what is expected and how to behave in a remote environment. Creating processes that set out the norms and expectations of behavior reassures people, creates order and result in more productive outcomes. With more companies going to remote work on a broader scale, we also encourage you to consider developing formal guidelines about remote work, e.g. business hours that employees must be available, when phones can be turned off, use of video on Zoom calls, moving out of state and impact on compensation, etc.

3. Support human ingenuity – every human being has basic psychological needs to feel confident in their abilities and valued for their contributions. People come to work with a genuine desire to do meaningful work – even at the most basic level of a task. As a leader, you can support those needs by helping people understand how what they do matters, providing them with meaningful feedback from which they can learn (vs. evaluative feedback that makes them feel like a failure), and by encouraging people to be curious, ask questions so they can learn and grow.

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Thank you to those who shared their experiences with us in the survey and to you all for reviewing this survey summary. If you'd like to further discuss the results or have questions about the survey, please email us at thriveH2H@gmail.com.

You can also visit us at www.thriveH2H.com more more information about Thrive People Strategies LLC.