

Virtual Coaching

Adapt your approach for distributed team environments

Virtual coaching requires making the implicit explicit. Use these reference tables to set up your virtual coaching engagement, design effective sessions, and maintain a strong coaching presence across the screen.

1. Virtual Contracting Checklist

AREA	WHAT TO AGREE
Communication Channel norms	Which channels for what purpose: Slack for quick questions, email for formal updates, video for discussions. Agree expected response times per channel.
Camera & Mic Expectations	When cameras should be on (coaching sessions, retros) vs. optional (daily stand-ups). Mute protocol. Virtual hand-raising or chat signals.
Async Working hours & overlap	Core overlap hours for synchronous work. Async norms for distributed time zones. "Right to disconnect" boundaries.
Sessions Cadence & duration	Shorter, more frequent sessions (60–90 min max). Built-in breaks every 45 min. Clear start/end rituals.
Safety Confidentiality & presence	Agree what's shared outside the session. No recording without consent. "Shoes off" signal for camera-off breaks.

2. Session Design Principles

PRINCIPLE	PRACTICE
Shorter segments	Break 2-hour sessions into 3x40-min blocks with 5-min breaks.
Engagement every 5–7 min	Poll, chat prompt, breakout, annotation — shift modality regularly.
Breakout rooms	Use for pairs/triads reflection before full-group sharing.
Visual anchors	Shared whiteboard (Miro/Mural) visible throughout; reduce slide dependency.
Warm-up rituals	Check-in rounds, "weather report," or one-word energy check.

3. Coach's Virtual Presence

PRACTICE	HOW
Active listening cues	Nod visibly, use verbal acknowledgments ("I hear that"), summarise before moving on.
Energy management	Vary tone and pace. Pause longer than feels natural. Name the energy level.
Gallery view awareness	Scan faces for disengagement. Call on quiet participants with care.
Tech fluency	Master the tools before the session. Have a backup plan for tech failures.
Boundary modelling	Start and end on time. Take your own camera breaks. Name your own fatigue.

4. Team Dynamics & Accountability

Building Cohesion Virtual coffee chats, shared playlists, "personal object" show-and-tell. Invest in informal connection that co-location would provide naturally.	Inclusive Communication Round-robin turns in discussions. Chat as a parallel voice channel. Rotate facilitator role. Ensure time-zone equity in scheduling.	Managing Conflict Address tension early — it festers faster online. Use 1:1 video before group escalation. Name the dynamic, not the person.	Accountability Visible task boards (Jira, Trello). Daily async check-ins. Public commitments in retros. "Done" = demo'd, not just claimed.	Leadership Encourage leadership at all levels. Rotate meeting facilitation. Recognise informal leaders. Make decision-making processes transparent.
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Reflection Prompts for Virtual Coaching

- > How do I maintain genuine presence through a screen?
- > Where is digital fatigue showing up in this team?
- > How am I modelling healthy boundaries with technology?
- > What virtual-specific working agreements are missing from my contract?
- > Which voices am I hearing less because of the virtual format?
- > What face-to-face practices need rethinking, not just transplanting?

