



SLINGSHOT  
GROUP

# VIRTUAL CHURCH TEAMS:

Keeping Your Staff  
in Sync During the  
COVID-19 Pandemic

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# Our work is about to change.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many local and state governments across the U.S. have called for the closure of schools and the cancellation of large gatherings. In response to the growing concerns of many churches across the country pivoted to online, virtual worship experiences as an alternative to physical gatherings

As the latest data from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends, "social distancing" will help curtail the spread of this deadly coronavirus. Businesses, large and small, are now forced to contemplate an ethical responsibility to their community while trying to keep the economy moving. In the days, weeks, and possibly months ahead, many companies will have limited hours, while others will close their offices altogether and ask all of their employees to work remotely. Church teams are now facing this same dilemma and must pivot quickly.

At Slingshot Group, we are often asked how we have been able to maintain alignment with an entirely remote workforce. As our world faces a crisis, this topic could not be more crucial for everyone in church leadership. Momentum and opportunity await the organization whose leaders implement a proactive plan to keep everyone connected and on the same page while working remotely. To keep your staff in sync during these uncertain times, we've put together this document to help you build a remarkable virtual team.

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# Virtual Church Teams Summary

*So, what is a virtual team?*

According to the Harvard Business Review, Virtual teams are comprised of **"people who interact primarily through electronic means, and are engaged in interdependent tasks."**

*The next step for your team is to decide how you will continue to operate as a church staff. Your congregants and community need reassurance and hope during this season of uncertainty. Our mission has not changed, and your work has never been more important. It will look different because it has moved into the digital space.*

*Opportunity belongs to the church teams who think digital-first. Pivoting your operations to a virtual team environment will unlock unprecedented levels of impact for your church.*

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# LEADING VIRTUAL CHURCH TEAMS

*The strength of leadership is always tested in the crucible of crisis. If this pandemic has taught us anything, it's that complacency can be deadly. What you do now to help your staff navigate through these uncharted waters will define your organization for years to come.*

**Leading a Virtual Church Team will demand a new level of thinking and expertise from church leaders.**

**Here are five best practices to help you as you move to a remote workforce.**

- 1. Reiterate Your Vision and Values Often.**
- 2. Flatten Your Organization's Structure.**
- 3. Assemble Ad Hoc Teams To Solve Problems.**
- 4. Use Technology to Bring You Closer to People.**
- 5. Unleash Your Team With Your Brand Assets.**

# 1. Reiterate Your Vision and Values Often.

Your "Why?" as an organization has never been more critical.

Leading a Virtual Church Team means learning to use technology in a way that brings us closer to the people we are called to serve. For the past 13 years, our leaders at Slingshot Group have committed to a simple, but compelling vision:

## WE BUILD REMARKABLE TEAMS

From our early, fledgling days of a few faithful associates scattered across the country, to our growing, robust team of 50+ associates today who collectively serve hundreds of churches each year, our leaders have relentlessly reiterated our organization's vision and values through every step in the journey.

At Slingshot, we talk a lot about the importance of providing consistency of care in every interaction. Our mantra has become, *"When you get one of us, you get all of us."*

As the Leader of a Virtual Church Team, you will serve as the **Chief Reminding Officer** of your organization's vision and values. By reinforcing your values through daily and weekly rhythms of communication, your team will carry your culture and DNA into every digital conversation in the days ahead.

## 2. Flatten Your Structure.

*Decentralize decision-making by distributing responsibility across the organization.*

***"It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and then tell them what to do. We hire smart people so they can tell us what to do." - Steve Jobs***

Conventional thinking says the performance of remote workers will suffer from a lack of supervision and that productivity will decrease as a result. Leading an effective Virtual Church Team starts with believing in the people you hired. Employees who work under a cloud of suspicion rarely feel empowered to bring their best. In a rapidly-changing environment, permission-asking only creates unnecessary anxiety. A more decentralized network of leaders will give individual members a deep sense of personal ownership in the collective mission.

**"Because there is no one in charge, everyone is responsible for keeping themselves—and everyone else—on track" - Excerpt from *The Starfish and The Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*.**

Virtual Church Teams embrace the notion that across the entire organization, ideas are a meritocracy, and that the best and brightest ideas often come from the bottom of the organization rather than from the top.

### 3. Assemble Ad Hoc Teams To Solve Problems.

*Digital ad hoc teams can help churches become more agile and responsive to the needs of their community.*

The term "ad hoc" is a Latin phrase that literally means "to this" and is commonly understood as meaning "for this purpose." Church leaders across the country have been forced to come up with a hundred answers to questions you've never even considered asking before this crisis.

#### **Problems we have. Solutions we need!**

Social-distancing and self-quarantining will only increase the amount of time people spend online. This has presented a great opportunity for churches to invite collaboration, even at a volunteer-level, as a means to solving their most pressing issues.

The benefits of organizing and empowering temporary teams to run directly at problems will allow you to:

- Crowdsource for solutions by inviting people from a wide variety of perspectives, experiences, and skills.
- Organize and release people according to their gifting rather than their title or role.

***"Leadership is done best when it is something you do with people instead of something you do to them." - Ken Blanchard***

## 4. Use Technology to Bring You Closer to People.

*Be responsible with your communication efforts. Shouting at everyone on every digital channel will only turn confusion into chaos.*

So, you have decided that your team will work remotely. How will you keep your Virtual Church Team in the loop? Bombarding your team through every communication channel at your disposal will only add to the sea of digital white-noise. For this reason, Virtual Church Teams must choose which mediums they will use to stay connected to their people. Establishing communications guidelines will help drive engagement with your staff while holding everyone accountable for being in the know.

Virtual Church Teams need policies that define boundaries and set clear expectations for staff participation. Here are just a few examples:

- Emails from Senior Leadership are always urgent/important.
- Video conference calls are used to facilitate all (most) meetings.
- All remote staff members have 24-hours to respond to an email.
- Staff members must followup with a handful of members via phone calls, text messages, email, and social media each week.

***We're about to find out which meetings could have just been emails this whole time!***

## 5. Unleash Your Team with Your Brand Assets.

*There has never been a more opportune time for this many people to experience your church!*

As Church leaders God has called us to empower an army of kingdom ambassadors. That means we can never be content building an anonymous audience.

Virtual Church Teams should allow everyone to participate in the mission and also a compelling reason to advocate for this mission. In the marketplace, this is what happens when the customer becomes the salesforce for a company.

**In the absence of physical gatherings, church staff will need to scale their efforts quickly to bring the "Church" to their people.**

For years, franchises have successfully scaled their brand's identity and services by giving their employees and customers the tools to share their experience. That's why a Subway® in Joplin, Missouri, looks and tastes (mostly) the same as a Subway® in Seattle, Washington.

By empowering everyone in their organization with digital brand assets and relevant content, Virtual Church Teams can unleash digital missionaries who will spread the hope of the gospel to a world in crisis.

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# Tips For Supervisors Who Lead Virtual Church Teams

1

**Use Video Calls to Facilitate Connection and Build Community.**

Your team will need to see you and hear from you at least once a week. From throwing virtual birthday and Christmas parties, to extended times of staff devotions and prayer, our leaders at Slingshot Group use Zoom® to stay connected.

2

**Establish Rhythms That Everyone Can Repeat.**

You cannot afford to be sporadic in your efforts to meet with your team during this season. For now, consider setting an expectation for a daily or every-other-day check-in.

3

**Start and End Meetings On Time.**

Studies have shown that remote workers help increase a team's productivity. Don't diminish your team's return by running over the time you allotted for the meeting.

4

**Ensure Everyone Is Given a Turn To Share.**

Everyone on your team is counted, recognized, and invited to share during every team call.

5

**Establish a Transparent Reporting Process.**

High performing teams hold each other accountable for the outcomes. At Slingshot Group, our leaders use Google Docs® to facilitate our reporting, which is always visible to the entire team.

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# Tips For Staff Members Serving on Virtual Church Teams

1

**Set a Start-Time and End-Time for Your Workday.**

For the remote worker, boundaries are the difference between loving your work and longing to escape. Consider bookending your day with calls or appointments.

2

**Get Dressed As If You Are Going to the Office.**

I know you won't right away, but after four years of remote work, this will help you more than you think. Jon Acuff said it best about working remotely, "I love pajama pants too, but they're a breeding ground for depression. Flannel starts to feel like failure by 3pm."

3

**Practice Good Meeting Etiquette.**

Mute your microphone when you're not speaking. Also, if you are looking down at the camera, that means we are probably looking straight up your nose!

4

**Initiate Reporting Up, Across, and Down.**

Your supervisor, peers, and direct reports won't see you regularly anymore. As a remote worker, it is on YOU to make yourself visible to others. This means that you must be proactive in letting everyone what you're working on.

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# Meet the Author

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Keith Robinson is the Senior Associate for Communications at Slingshot Group, bringing fresh insights and innovative solutions to some of the most pressing issues facing churches and organizations in the digital age. Having served in a variety of leadership capacities at churches and faith-based nonprofits, Keith draws from a deep well of experiences that help organizations increase their influence and extend their reach. He is a published author, communicator, consultant, and coach—connecting churches to innovative solutions through staffing and coaching. Keith and his wife, Samantha, reside in Southern California where they are raising their two sons, Joel and Jude.