



# leading high-performance remote teams research report

Primary research and actionable insights  
to lead the leaders, leading from home.

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# welcome to the next normal

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The world of work has forever been altered and the office as we once knew it is unlikely to return.

COVID-19 has served as a catalyst for change and thrust upon organizations an accelerated cycle of disruption. A defining moment when everything about how we've historically collaborated and lead teams, organized and deployed resources, has been forced to be redesigned in an instant.

When working together in the physical space is challenged or deemed no longer cost effective, having the ability to influence, communicate, and create a shared vision across a distributed and remote workforce becomes an indispensable skill.

Seemingly overnight, the future of work has become the present and a new normal is beginning to take shape.

For some leadership teams with seasoned remote work policies and an existing distributed workforce, the opportunity will be to elevate engagement and performance as they confront new forces of uncertainty.

For others working outside their traditional four walls for the first time at scale, a new reality is being confronted. One requiring leaders to quickly skill up to drive performance and outcomes with teams operating in both remote and new office settings.

The challenge is we weren't exactly great at leading engagement and collaboration activities prior to COVID-19 accelerating us into these new hybrid environments where research shows that the productivity goes down by more than 50% when teams go remote.

This drop in productivity is largely the result of flaws in team dynamics that existed long before many departed for home offices. Years of painfully low scores across engagement and leadership effectiveness are now only being amplified.

According to a study conducted by Ultimate Software and the Center for Generational Kinetics, 80% of employees say they can do their jobs without their managers and actually think that their managers aren't necessary.

A Gallup study of over 7,000 Americans concluded that one out of two people had actually left a job at some point during their career to get away from their managers in order to improve their overall quality of life.

And let us not forget the consistently abysmal global engagement research showing that only 15% of employees around the world are engaged in their roles.



**80%**

**feel they can do their jobs  
without their manager**

**70%**

**of employees are  
underengaged or disengaged in  
their roles**

**50%**

**productivity drop when  
teams go remote**



# connecting hearts and minds

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If managers were ill-equipped to connect with the hearts and minds of their people to influence behavior and shape outcomes while sharing space in the office, managing these efforts from afar today while navigating one of the most challenging economic crises of all time, feels like an insurmountable challenge. Yet the stakes have never been higher for this group of leaders to rise to the occasion.

As organizations across the world transition to a partial or fully work-from-home environment and because 70% of an individual's engagement is driven by their manager, understanding how to effectively influence and inspire those on the front lines of leadership must be a priority for organizations and executive teams.

The question we've been asking is: how do we engage this group so that they might engage those directly influencing the customer experience?

What does this group of front-line managers and directors value most from their leadership?



# what we value determines what we do

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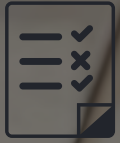
Why is what this group values such an important question?

Because what we value determines what we do and right now, our shared human values matter more than ever. Why? It's a fundamental principle of human behavior. During times of extreme uncertainty, when overwhelmed and full of fear, humans double-down on what they care about most; what they value.

In fact, neuroscience has shown that once safety and survival have been confirmed, the prefrontal cortex, often referred to as the "CEO of the brain", analyzes the world and filters inputs through one primary discerning question: "Does this align with my values?" If the answer is yes, then the brain organizes itself in such a way as to take action.

Thus, if we know what people value, we can influence their behavior.





**1,850 respondents**



**managers and  
directors**



**working  
for companies with 5,000  
employees or more**

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In an effort to understand what front line managers and directors that find themselves working and leading remotely value most, we conducted a research project targeting this group across the United States and Canada.

We surveyed 1,850 managers and directors working from home who are employed by companies with more than 5,000 employees.

We used the responses from those 1,850 mid-managers to pull insights from our benchmark dataset of half-a-million surveys from around the world. This dataset maps 436 metrics on what everyone cares about; what we all value, want, need and expect.

**Three themes emerged in the study we call: *Leading the leaders, leading from home.***



**relationships  
vs.  
belonging**

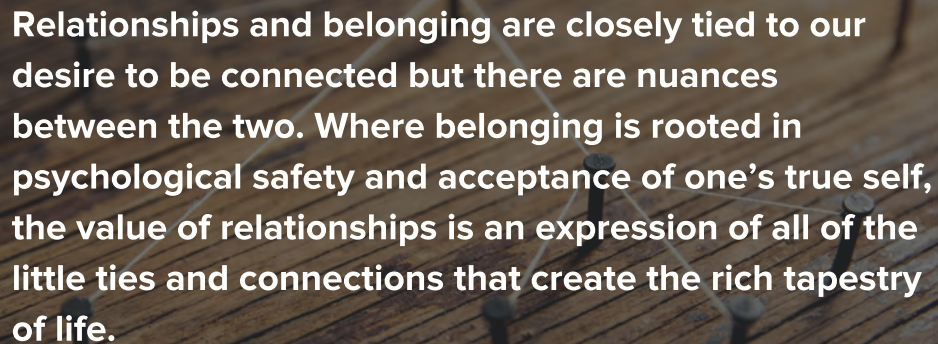
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THEME #1

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Around the world belonging is one of our mostly highly regarded human values. In fact, in America, belonging sits at the very top of our value set. Here in the West, the deep desire to be known, seen and heard, and accepted for who we really are drives much of our behavior. Understanding this fundamental human need, inspiring talent leaders like Pat Wadors, the Chief Talent Officer at ServiceNow, have helped belonging gain real traction inside corporate cultures.

What's interesting with this particular group of front line managers and directors though is that belonging is not its top value. In fact, it's not even close. Belonging came in number ten and in its place, at the top of the list: relationships.



**Relationships and belonging are closely tied to our desire to be connected but there are nuances between the two. Where belonging is rooted in psychological safety and acceptance of one's true self, the value of relationships is an expression of all of the little ties and connections that create the rich tapestry of life.**

It's the brief exchange at the coffee shop with the barista. It's the Monday morning quarterbacking at the water cooler with colleagues passing by. It's the team's inside jokes and storytelling prior to the start of meetings. All of these delicate interwoven threads make up the value of relationships.

Having built their careers and networks on key connection points, these leaders now find themselves feeling isolated and cut off from their primary value. As such, it's critical to design and deploy tools, strategies, and activities to help this group reconnect to those around them.

Many organizations are leaning heavily on video platforms to help their people maintain connectivity, but structure and intention matters as video alone won't suffice. Whether it's purposefully setting aside 5 minutes at the start of a morning meeting with a meaningful open-ended question or establishing a routine of team members taking turns teaching their peers something new, fostering dialogue is key,



From town hall meetings and “feedback Fridays” to virtual communities and slack channels where people can connect and share their experiences operating in these new remote settings, as leaders this is a time to be seen and heard.

Even if it feels uncomfortable or unnatural to share openly about the struggles you face, helping people feel like they’re not alone and that you’re in this together in an open and honest way minimizes the distance and breathes life into the value of relationships.

# action guide

01

## solidify your relationship with yourself

Check in with your "self-talk". The better your relationship with yourself, the better your relationship with others. A few powerful reflection questions for leaders to ask are: How's my self-talk? How much of me am I allowing to be seen? What would it feel like to reveal more of what I'm going through? Who needs me on my A-game today?

## daily deposits

02

As social distancing becomes the new normal and employees face feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression, intentionally scheduled micro moments of connection can help the mental well-being of those around you. Never underestimate the power of simple acts of acknowledgement.

03

## leverage digital and analog

While seeing each other face to face can be powerful, Zoom fatigue is real. Instead of another video conference, sometimes the best option is to pick up the phone or drop a thank you note in the mail.



**Improving  
+  
Ownership  
=  
Security**

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THEME #2

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From a list of 56 possible core personal values, frontline leaders place the most importance on financial security, personal growth, and personal responsibility.

The margins between these values are so small it's best to think of them altogether as trifecta of values. In other words, being better every day, holding oneself accountable, and feeling financially secure are all equally important, deeply valued, and under threat.

Working and leading remotely, particularly during times of deep uncertainty, puts an incredible burden on individuals to perform and deliver in difficult and sometimes distracting environments. Often withstanding an ever evolving and potentially growing list of unknowns such as potential job loss, economic and market collapse, coupled with challenging family dynamics, these individuals face a tremendous strain.

The silver lining to this challenging environment is that it creates an opportunity for leaders to lean into this trifecta of values and engage this group.

To support frontline managers and directors' performance, appeal to and reward their desire to take ownership. Whether that's energizing their distance learning and development commitments or encouraging them, even while working from home, to treat the business and its money — as if it were their own.

Taking ownership for this group, particularly when no one is there to watch over their shoulder, is proclamation to those around them that says: "You can trust me to do the right thing."

They thrive on that trust and the expectations that follow.

Activate this trifecta of values by tying financial security to clearly defined expectations. Support these leaders by defining what success looks like without dictating everything they must do to reach it. Help them identify the what, without imposing the how and you'll capture both the heart and mindshare with this group.

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“Reducing fear and uncertainty by clearly defining expectations in these virtual settings is important but we’re also acknowledging we’re not just working remotely; this is managing chaos during a global pandemic.

What if ownership right now was also about taking care of one’s own mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. What if we said, just do what you need to do to get through this whole.

Because let’s be real, you’re not just executing against your performance metrics, you’re worrying about the health and safety of your family and the people you love. You’re stressing about your children’s education and your spouse’s mental well-being. You’re wondering if the supermarket will be stocked by the time you get there for groceries.

People are internalizing an incredible amount of uncertainty and we know everyone copes with it differently. So yes, we’re a business and we need to keep pressing forward, but that can't trump our value of being human centered. The message for my team is, you’re an adult, do the best you can with what you have right now. If you need support, raise your hand and we'll have your back.”

# leadership spotlight

DIRECTOR  
MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP  
DEVELOPMENT  
BIOTECH COMPANY  
TOP TEN FORTUNE'S  
BEST PLACES TO WORK



# acknowledgement and invisibility

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THEME #3

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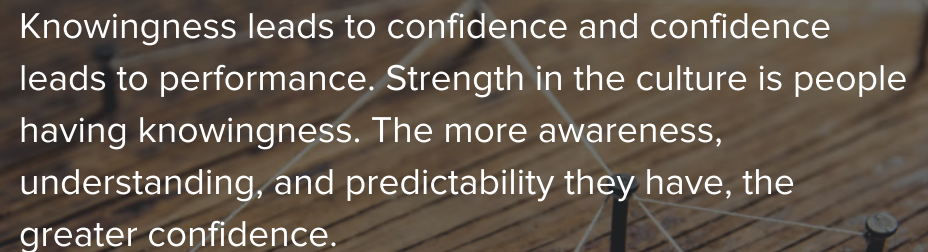
Team leaders are united around one critical sentiment: 86% said they don't feel acknowledged. In other words, working and leading in these isolated virtual environments has left them feeling starved of recognition and adulation. When no one is around to see the long hours and extra effort put forth, confidence erodes, and effort can wane.

Remember these are often star athletes who have succeeded in the office environment by being the best at what they do and, importantly, by being seen doing it. They know how to speak up in the boardroom. They know how to get the high-fives and fist bumps from the right people. But now the playing field is gone, there's no one watching from the stands, and there isn't an obvious way for their game-changing score to be noticed by the people who matter.

To add to the strain of playing in the proverbial empty stadium, many individuals are also carrying the burden of deep uncertainty about the future of the organization and their own careers.

With economic aftershocks reverberating across industries, many are left to ponder what the future will hold. How are we doing as a company? How am I being measured right now? Am I meeting expectations? With so much uncertainty, a two-fold approach is needed.

First and foremost, transparent communication around the state of the organization and the expectations people are accountable for in order to help reduce the anxiety is critical.



Knowingness leads to confidence and confidence leads to performance. Strength in the culture is people having knowingness. The more awareness, understanding, and predictability they have, the greater confidence.

Implementation of simple but powerful strategies to say I see you, you matter, and your efforts are appreciated drive performance. Authentic acknowledgment goes far beyond the feel-good element of recognition. Deep appreciation builds intimacy and creates powerful interactions while simultaneously defusing elements of strain and stress brought on by our new remote settings.

Whether it's members of the senior executive/C-suite team committing to write one handwritten note of appreciation a day to a manager or director at home or publicly celebrating small victories via video conferencing, shining a light on the hard work being done in the dark by this group will reverberate far and wide throughout the organization.

# action guide

01

## clear consistent communication

With so much uncertainty it's impossible to over communicate the current state of the organization. To the extent you're capable of, share as transparently and as much as possible; numbers, financials, runway, etc. Don't leave space for speculation and doubt about the future to creep into the minds of your people.

## be explicit with expectations

When people are worried about not being seen it's usually a great indication that they're unclear about how they're being evaluated. A fundamental ingredient of high-performance teams is accountability and clarity of expectations. Ensure your people know where they stand.

02

03

## beyond acknowledgment

You're most powerful acknowledgement tool as a leader is your presence. In a world of cheap celebrations and easy virtual high-fives, nothing beats the feeling created when busy leaders make time to truly see and be with their people.

# the valuegraphics dataset

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The Valuegraphics Database is informed by almost a half-million surveys from around the world in 152 languages. Metrics include 54 core human values like belonging, friendships, money, authority, and family, and maps 436 unique metrics about what we care about: what we value, want, need and expect.

For the managers and directors at America's largest corporations, the values that rise to the top of the list are represented in the following charts.

The dark lines represent what we call the "Togetherness Values": various forms of how we look to engage with others. The gold lines are the top ten other most VIP values for this audience of team leaders working from home.

Why does this matter? Because our values determine how we behave. For C-suite executives, these are the buttons you need to push to keep your team leaders engaged so they can engage your front line workforce.





# valuegraphics profile executive summary

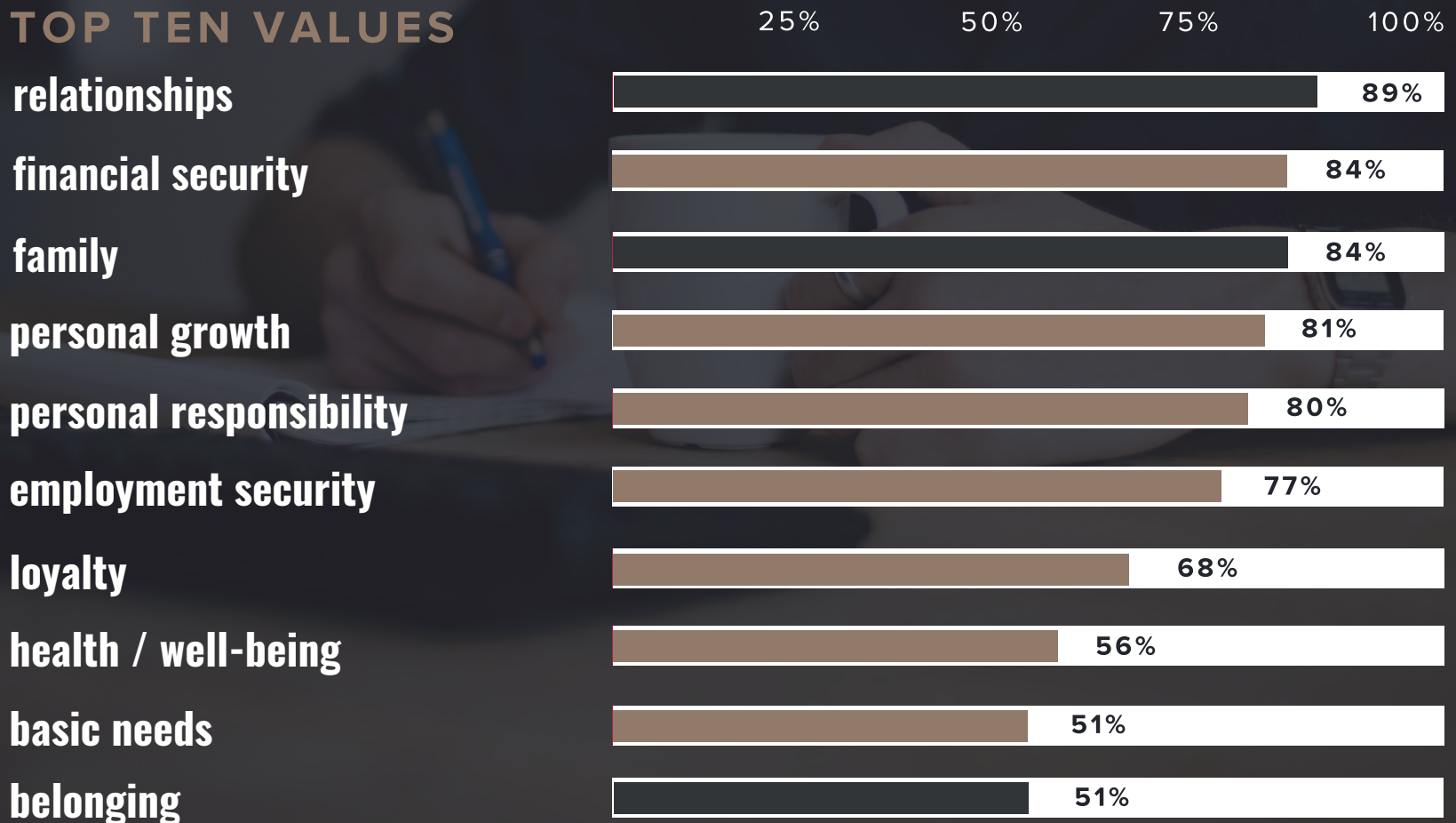
## TAM DESCRIPTION

People who work for companies with 5,000 employees, working from home, with the words manager or director in their job title

## UNLOCKING SAMPLE

1,850 Respondants across USA and Canada, 7% working from home before COVID-19

## TOP TEN VALUES



# love-hate-wish index

This index shows what team leaders at America's largest corporations love, hate, and wish they could change about working from home.

● LOVE ● HATE ● WISH



# values-thinking model

## the question

What needs solving? Why now? What objectives are we trying to meet?

## the feedback

Monitor KPI's and feedback loops. Have more questions arisen?

## the plan

Which option best leverages values? Create a step-by-step execution plan to implement.

## the opportunities

What options protect and augment the values? How do customer and employee experiences enhance shared values?

## the context

What's the situation? How did we get here? What will likely happen next?

## the audience

Actionable demographics and psychographics: Values that trigger behavior. Segment insights and Love-Hate-Wish Matrix.



CEO, FOUNDER &  
LEAD FACILITATOR  
**futuresight labs**

# seth mattison



Seth Mattison is an internationally renowned expert, author and business performance advisor. As Founder and CEO of FutureSight Labs, Seth advises many of the world's leading brands and organizations on the key shifts happening around talent management, change and innovation, digital transformation, leadership, and the future of work.

For almost two decades, Seth has shared his insight with millions of business leaders around the world and has received accolades from many of the world's most iconic brands including: MasterCard, Johnson and Johnson, IBM, The Dallas Cowboys, AT&T, Chevron, GE Energy, E&Y, Caterpillar, and The Walt Disney Company.

Today, Seth leads the org design and transformation firm FutureSight Labs to help organizations navigate the future with a purpose-driven, people-centered, heart-led ethos required for sustainable growth in the 21st Century.



# david allison



Human Behavior Expert and Values Thinking Pioneer David Allison is a bestselling author, an international speaker, and an advisor in a wide variety of industry sectors and disciplines. He helps global organizations with unique research that boosts influence and engagement with stakeholders as much as 8X more powerfully than possible before.

He is the Founder of The Valuegraphics Database, the research group responsible for the first global record of what we all care about; what we value, want, need and expect. Based on a half-million surveys in 152 languages and 180 countries.

His most recent book, *We Are All the Same Age Now*, was a #1 best-seller within 24 hours of its release, and Inc. Magazine named it one of the top ten Leadership Books of the year. Kirkus Reviews called it "a genuinely original contribution to marketing literature."

FOUNDER &  
STRATEGIC ADVISOR

**valuegraphics**