

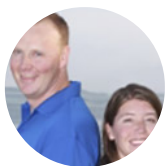
## VIRTUAL TEAMS

# The 5 Mistakes We Made When We First Launched Our Virtual Company

No one starts a business and does everything right, but if you're going to make mistakes, why not share those missteps with other budding entrepreneurs and help them avoid the same pitfalls?



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No one starts a business and does everything right. But if you're going to make mistakes, why not share those missteps with other budding entrepreneurs and help them avoid the same pitfalls? Here are five mistakes we made when we started our virtual company -- and how we corrected them.

## **1. Letting team members work whenever they want.**

To be honest, we thought that so long as the work was getting done, we didn't care *when* it was getting done. That was a disaster. No one was online at the same time and team members couldn't get timely answers to questions or the input necessary to make decisions. Productivity stalled, project deadlines were continually missed and the quality of the work overall was simply not acceptable.

**Correction:** We still allow our team members to set their hours -- within certain parameters. We have no problem with someone working 7am to 3pm instead of 9am to 5pm, but we are sticklers about adhering to the mutually agreed upon schedule. Overlapping time with other team members is critical to the successful collaboration and completion of projects.

**Related:** [10 Ways to Successfully Manage Virtual Teams](#)

## **2. Failing to create standard operating procedures**

In the early days, we taught people how to use our systems, add blog posts to Wordpress, send an email in our CRM, etc. Everything was fine until either that team member left the company or was out of the office. No one was trained on how to do their job functions so no one could actually take their

place in a pinch! That drained our productivity as we tried to get someone else up to speed, and sometimes forced us into hiring more quickly than we perhaps should have in a rush to get the position filled.

**Correction:** Every process (and I mean EVERY process) in our company is fully documented and explained in a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). These SOPs are critical to productivity, as even brief, unexpected absences can bring a company to a halt if no one else can take over! They have become the lifeblood of our company and operations now flow seamlessly.

### **3. Neglecting to create a company culture**

Without a physical office to build camaraderie, it's up to you to create a sense of community and respect amongst your team members. We learned this lesson the hard way and lost some really good people who just didn't feel a connection to our company. It was something we hadn't given much thought to, as we were so busy building the company that we forgot to 'build our team.'

Correction: Within our project management software we have created a 'virtual water cooler' where we post fun questions to learn more about each other, instantly chat with other team members (about work or personal things) and on Friday's we encourage everyone to give virtual 'high-fives' to others who have gone above and beyond the call of duty that week. The result? Happy team members!

**Related:** [5 Must-Ask Questions When Recruiting A Virtual Team](#)

### **4. Choosing the wrong software**

When you're working on a strict budget, it's hard to look at the long-term ROI and not just the cost to the business today. We purchased a CRM that fit the bill at the time and had a little room to grow. We grew quickly and the

software couldn't keep up. We had to create some unbelievably convoluted processes within this software and it held us back in many areas of the business.

Correction: We are now investing in a more robust CRM (and marketing software) to take our business to the next level. Prioritizing this kind of investment for the long-term benefit of the company is worth it—even when it feels like a reach at the time. Knowing when to upgrade before the software really slows you down and hinders your ability to grow is also a key to software success. Our new system is a bit of a stretch for us financially at moment, but it has plenty of room to grow into. And with the expanded functionality, we'll increase revenue quickly and the ROI will be realized much more quickly than our first system.

## **5. Hiring people who have never worked remotely**

Working remotely just isn't for everyone and we learned early on that it was very challenging to be part of someone's virtual learning curve. Our business model was too aggressive and we needed dynamic folks who could ramp up quickly. We spent far too much time hand-holding team members through their struggles with technology or their ability to discipline themselves in this flexible environment.

Correction: We have created an in-depth hiring process that places a greater emphasis on their virtual work experience. We delve deeper with our questioning to gain a better understanding of the challenges they faced in a virtual position, how (or if) they were able to overcome them, and whether or not we feel they will be the right fit for us. It's imperative to pay attention to the subtle clues provided during the interview process, those highly qualified on paper may not be successful in a flexible environment.

What mistakes did you make when you started your virtual business?

Inquiring minds want to know.

**Related:** [How to Fix Virtual Team Challenges Before They Happen](#)

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