

Developing a Sustainable Remote Workforce by Leveraging Technology the Right Way

March 9th and 10th, 2021 (30 minutes total)

Marina: Good evening (or morning/afternoon, depending on where you're located)! We are thrilled that you've decided to join us today to discuss leveraging technology the right way within a remote team structure.

I will take this moment to introduce myself. My name is Marina Ilari, I'm second generation CEO of Terra Translations. Our company specializes in translation and localization for the Latin American market. Terra Translations was started by my mother over 20 years ago, and I joined her over 10 years ago when I finished my translation studies. I'm a Spanish translator, I'm certified by the American Translators Association. And I'm currently based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Colleen, would you like to introduce yourself before we begin?

Colleen:

Yes! I'm Colleen Beres and I've been a member of the Terra team since 2018. I am currently the Director of Business Strategy, so my responsibilities include developing structured growth opportunities both externally with new client acquisition, as well as internally to support operational growth. The majority of my professional experience exists outside the world of linguistics and my education is concentrated in business, specifically in finance. I am also based in Wisconsin, just outside Milwaukee.

Marina: Our goal is to jam pack this session with tangible ideas and tips on how to best use technology to ensure a remote work structure becomes sustainable and an integral part of your corporate culture, and also how to make it a point of attraction for talent and clients alike. As a company that works with 100% remote based teams and has doubled our bottom line over the last two years, this is something we analyze and discuss regularly.

The conversation between Colleen and I will be approximately 20 minutes, we encourage you to brainstorm questions throughout so we can have a really dynamic Q and A. We'll have 10 minutes at the end to answer questions or take comments.

Colleen: We know that many companies have adapted to a virtual work environment during the current global pandemic because of necessity. Luckily, we live and work during a time in which technology has allowed the virtual team structure to be advantageous for companies - it creates access to talent, balance and flexibility for employees, and major cost savings.

I'd like to jump into the meat of our presentation. This conference is focused on advances in technology, but at its core, our industry is still about humans. Therefore, we want to focus on technological evolution to help develop and maintain strong teams, namely what are the technological tools. But really, we believe a sustainable corporate evolution requires a solid strategy to build, sustain, and nurture remote teams in *conjunction* with technology. So, we want to focus on HOW you effectively communicate with your company and your clients by leveraging technological advancements, but hold onto or develop a solid corporate culture to reinforce sustainability.

In addition, we will discuss the purposeful effort that must be invested to nurture this organizational structure - almost all of that leans on how a company communicates. In our world, people always come first, so that is where we want to begin - Marina, would you like to start by talking about the people component of this equation and recruiting for a remote staff.

Marina: Sure. The first thing I would highlight as a difference is that when you are working remotely, there is a lot more autonomy necessary. You are usually more in charge of the goals that you have to meet, the schedule, and the environment where you are working. In fact, being curious, self-motivated, and self-disciplined would be some of the most important traits to look for in a candidate working in this setting.

Colleen: This level of autonomy and being completely reliant on technology versus an in person environment was initially a component that made me really hesitant to work from home originally. Prior to Terra, I exclusively worked in an office setting with an occasional day spent at home. So I know first hand how jarring it can be to go from a completely in person work environment to working from a home office and as we all know, there is a significant learning curve. What we want to focus on is how you can help your team go from just 'surviving' in a virtual environment to thriving in one.

Marina: Totally. The other thing you need to keep in mind is that there is a different cultural and professional dynamic when working remotely. And finally, you have to think about onboarding and training. There needs to be a purposeful onboarding process to fill the gaps that happen more naturally when you are in person, in an office setting.

But let's talk about the technology component. How does this help with finding the right candidates in a virtual setting? Should we share any tips on how to find them?

Colleen: Yes. But before that, I think it is important that we take some time to talk about the evolution of recruitment - even over the last decade it has transformed dramatically, in most part due to technology! A few decades ago, job searches were not only slow, but shrouded in mystery. Prospective employees had very little transparency about the process beyond submitting a resume and hoping for a call. In addition, recruiters had very little control over how to find a good fit for a culture or position.

- Think about the days we *relied* on print resources - the process of finding even potential candidates was very out of control and not targeted.
- Fast forward to our options today - social media platforms and specific recruiting websites have allowed both companies and candidates to have a much more streamlined and focused approach to finding new resources.
- What is the best way to leverage technology to maximize your efforts? I suggest prioritizing investing time and resources in developing a deep and broad social media presence. This allows you to build a reputation with potential employees.
 - Use social media platforms to search for specific positions
 - Leverage job postings for more general roles
 - Use this as an opportunity to leverage your brand and display company culture so candidates can have a taste of your company before they even express interest in a role.

Marina: Working with the marketing team has really worked for us. It helps us to create awareness online of the positions that we want to fill-in and we can post about the searches with some attractive designs, and having a more creative component to it; which can help attract talent.

But how do you best utilize technology to make sure that the candidate is really a good fit for the team? You need to understand the dynamics of your current team to ensure you're finding

a good fit for them. We use some great tools for the assessment of strengths and style of working. So 2 of the tools that we use are the Enneagram and the Kolbe A index. The Enneagram is a system of personality typing that describes patterns in how people interpret the world and manage their emotions. And the Kolbe measures your instinctive way of doing things, so how you take action.

Colleen: To be clear, you do need to interview for the expectations for the role. So the tests are helpful, but do not substitute an actual interview. The major point here is, again, that by using these tools, you are supporting an intersection between a focus on human capabilities and using a very technologically advanced set of tools.

Once you find a potential candidate, then what? Like recruiting, think about how the interviewing process has evolved with technology! It wasn't that long ago that a phone interview was the only other option to an in person interview. Today, you have a wide variety of platforms and tools at your disposal to not only create flexibility for candidates, but also efficiencies for your company to wade through potential candidates. Most of us would likely say that using a platform similar to Zoom has been the most revolutionary adjustment to the interviewing process. So how can you maximize this technology to ensure you are still finding the right fit?

First, it's crucial to use a webcam on both sides. Second, it's very useful to conduct an interview based on competencies. Before the search and the interview, we define which skills the candidate needs to master for a certain position. With indirect questions and remarks, an experienced recruiter will be able to check these competencies during the interview.

Marina: And for some roles, let's not forget that you also might need to give a technical test to measure the required knowledge for a certain position. For example, we use technical tests for project management and linguistic positions. So it's important to have a well-rounded approach.

I think in the future companies will have to refine their virtual processes. Candidates for entry-level positions may experience a completely virtual hiring process, not setting foot in the office until they're onboarded. Executive candidates might continue to receive a more personalized process with onsite visits.

So, in the same way that a hybrid workforce of onsite and remote employees will become the standard, a hybrid hiring process that combines virtual and in-person elements might become the norm.

Another technology we are seeing get very popular in recruiting is the use of virtual reality. VR can simulate an on-the-job experience during the interview process. You can use VR to show off your office, your work environment, to give candidates more information about their role, and also to understand their way of thinking, their decision making.

VR is still expensive, but I believe this technology will play a part in the recruitment process in the future.

So now that we've talked about how to recruit and interview the right people, we'll talk now about how you communicate with the team. Communication in a virtual team is vital, and a lot of focus should be put there and this is where our current technologies can really be leveraged in a powerful way.

Colleen, would you like to talk a bit about some of the ways that we structure our communication?

Colleen: Absolutely! The way we communicate both personally and professionally has really exploded. Gone are the days of paper memos or even just waiting for someone to respond to an email. Companies have the ability to create a mix of different methods that works best for each unique culture. Regardless of which technologies you utilize, you need to create different approaches to communicating with the entire company, specific teams, and individual employees. Working in a remote environment can be both overwhelming and isolating. Purposeful and strategic communication is necessary to ensure that you are promoting transparency.

Marina: We'll continue to talk about transparency over the course of this conversation, because it's also extremely important when working with remote teams.

So, what are some of the specific technologies, including channels, platforms, and methods that can be used to communicate virtually? And, more importantly, how should we use them (and not use them)?

Colleen: It's important to think about forms of communication in three different categories - not all tools are created equal. I categorize these different tools as static, dynamic, and visual. These methods also reflect some of the evolution we've seen as modern technology has advanced. Static is email; an email is a relatively slow means of correspondence used to share a little or a lot of information. Dynamic tools are platforms like Slack, WeChat, and WhatsApp; they allow for quick bursts of information. And Visual are tools like Zoom and GoToMeeting with video capability. Most people don't typically want to spend 8 hours a day using any one of these tools. Think about how you are mixing these different communication mediums and if maybe there is some burnout.

Marina: Yes, and I would say also to listen to what the team prefers and give some flexibility with that too. We have teams that for example work together in a Skype call for hours, they're each working on their own projects but would sometimes ask a question, or make a comment, and they feel like they're in an office like that, they feel the companionship of their team members. This doesn't work for other teams. So it's also about finding what works for the dynamics of your team.

Something to keep in mind when working remotely is that you need to prioritize information to be shared so that you avoid overloading your employees. This doesn't mean not sharing the information, but rather giving priority to it. In fact we're in favor of oversharing just to err on the safe side, until balance can be found.

Colleen: Marina, speaking of oversharing, can you discuss how we've managed to scale information sharing and how our internal technology has allowed us to create access equity across the board?

Marina: Sure, when working virtually you might want to consider decentralizing information. Previously, confidential information was associated with hierarchical (hɑɪə'rɑ:kɪk(ə)l/) ranks and a situation of power, but today when working with collaborative teams it is important that the entire team has all the necessary information to be able to have a global vision of the short, medium, and long term objectives of the company. So I would recommend having most company documents in a shared drive with your employees, for easy access. That doesn't mean that everyone has access to everything. But rather each role has access to everything they need. Certain documents have higher levels of need-to-know information, such as human

resources documents, technology related documents, and if you are ISO certified, the documentation of your quality management system.

Colleen: While all of these advancements have been vital to truly expanding a company's reach, have our over connected tendencies and the technology we just discussed removed the human component from professional relationships? Again, we believe that a harmonious intersection exists amongst our industry, technological advancements in communication, and our relationships allowing companies to become more efficient with more satisfied workforces - and this is done through the development of a purpose driven corporate culture.

Let's cover how to build a thriving culture and professional loyalty because transparency and decentralized information are components of our cultural strategy. Beyond these key ingredients, creating a successful and sustainable remote team relies on creativity to develop connections without regular in person interaction. Marina, can you highlight some resources we use to support our company culture?

Marina: Yes, I think this was the greatest challenge we have faced since starting this company is growing it without sacrificing its culture. It's hard to keep the company culture alive when working virtually so you need to be very purposeful and pay a lot of attention to it.

Our company culture is based on "family first" values that are extended to every member of our team. We work a lot to make sure everyone feels that their voice is being heard and valued. Supporting our employees' whole being is part of our strategy as a company. It has resulted in employee loyalty and extremely high retention rate. Some of the technologies we use to support company culture help us with the social aspect of work, the team building. Our team organizes spaces to chat informally and play games online.

A great company for doing virtual team building events is teambuilding.com and a great site for playing games with the team is [Jackbox Games](https://jackboxgames.com).

Colleen: One of the best ways I've seen this is through our meriendas. A merienda is a planned meeting where small groups of people within the company who don't directly work together have an opportunity to meet via Zoom with Marina and talk about anything but work. We discussed our passions, our families, and took an hour and a half out of the work day to create points of connection at all levels of the company. When leadership is able to truly

execute a 'human first, employee second' attitude, allowing for accommodations especially during unprecedented times, it will pay off dividends.

From a practical business perspective, recruiting and onboarding is an expensive component of a budget and so are the tools you invest in to build communication infrastructure. Therefore, it is critical that once you find the right talent that you keep it to 1) offer the best experience both internally and externally and 2) build industry and client reputation. But at the end of the day, your staff needs to be your priority, because without them there is no company. What are proactive ways we support cultural growth in the company?

Marina: Something we do is an annual company-wide work climate survey, this is an anonymous survey where people can freely express how they are feeling. We use the GREAT PLACE TO WORK model survey. Out of this survey a lot of great ideas can come up. For example, the internal newsletter we publish every month. In this newsletter we include personal pictures, book and movie recommendations, we highlight people's birthdays and anniversaries, and it's a fantastic way of keeping everyone on the loop about what's happening with everyone else within the company.

Another initiative is creating an online newsboard about the company, where everyone gets notifications in real time about anything that's happening company-wide, so everyone is in the loop and updated.

Colleen: I love it! Well, our time is drawing to a close, but we hope this summary has offered an opportunity for you to reflect upon how your company is leveraging current technology to foster communication, build remote teams, and cultivate a sustainable culture. The future of work environments has been fundamentally changed because of technology, and now COVID, but as a company that has always operated this way, we hope you can see the true benefits in embracing a truly global approach to work.

Now, we'd love to take any questions from the chat box with the time we have left.