



## Commercial Insights with Regions Bank Episode 4: Managing a Hybrid Team

With some people heading back to the office and others remaining remote — and some doing a flexible mix of the two — how can your company promote collaboration and make sure workflows remain efficient? This episode explores best practices in managing a hybrid team, both in terms of processes and communication and in terms of culture and collaboration.

### *Episode Transcript*

Kelley Brown-Murro:

I think the idea is to take the best of the pre-pandemic world and the best learnings from the pandemic world, and how do you merge them together?

Chris Blose:

That's Kelley Brown-Murro, SVP and Market Executive for Regions Bank, describing how she views the future of hybrid work — that mix of in-person and remote work that has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like countless managers and workers across the country, Brown-Murro navigated a new landscape in 2020 and into 2021. She and her team in the West Palm Beach Area in Fort Lauderdale have adapted and evolved through the quite sudden all-remote days of the early pandemic to later rotating in-office hours.

They've laughed at each other's pet intrusions during video conferences, gotten intimate glimpses into their clients' and coworkers' lives and even homes, and found new efficiencies in a new mode of working.

And now Brown-Murro is here to help us think about what comes next. Welcome to Commercial Insights with Regions Bank. I'm your host, Chris Blose, and today we're talking about how to manage a hybrid workforce.

That hybrid workforce is a new reality, and one that is likely to continue to some degree even when people start returning to offices. According to a recent PwC survey of executives, nearly one-third responded to a question about their feelings toward remote work with, "Business performance is not suffering. We'll likely increase the level of remote work." And a whopping 83 percent say their approach to remote work has been successful.



Attitudes are shifting, by default, and so are workforce models. Let's talk about how to make those models work.

Chris:

Well, welcome, Kelley. And thank you for joining us today.

Kelley:

Thank you so much. I'm happy to be here.

Chris:

I'm curious — you're interacting with clients, obviously, throughout the course of 2020 and early 2021. But you're also dealing with changes within your own team, too. So I'd love to get your perspective on how the nature of the workforce has changed in the past year, both from your experience and from what you've heard from clients, as well.

Kelley:

I think I'd be remiss if I didn't mention how much technology has impacted how we navigate our daily lives inside and outside of work. And certainly, when you look at work, technology's played a huge role in how we communicate with each other in a remote environment. So I think to address that is just having our teams really embrace the technology that we're using today, that's been huge for us.

Chris:

And is that specifically video technology? Are there any other examples of things that you've adopted?

Kelley:

So we use them all here. It depends on our clients, too, because we like to meet them and communicate with them in how they like to be communicated to. It's usually video conferences that we've migrated to. A lot of phone conversation does take place as well. And I think in the beginning of the pandemic, there was a lot more phone calls that quickly turned more into video meetings. So use the platform that our clients like to use.

Chris:

And how have your teams actually changed in terms of where they're doing their work?



Kelley:

So I think in the beginning, we all pivoted mainly to home. And we thought it was going to be short term and we'd be right back in the office within a week or so's time. And as time went on, we realized that this is going to actually be much longer than just a couple weeks. So in the beginning we all pivoted that way, and now we actually have a fair amount of employees that rotate through the office. So we've become and evolved into more of a hybrid team. And I think as time goes on and we look to return that that will continue to be the pace.

Chris:

And as that does become more the approach, that hybrid approach, what are the sort of lessons from this remote time period that you think do apply well — the kind of lessons learned that we can carry forward?

Kelley:

So I think that there's a lot of efficiencies in the hybrid team that we've learned as well, the biggest lesson I learned upfront is communication. It sounds really simple, but I don't think we can really overemphasize that enough, and we have to communicate to our clients and to our team members, a lot more than we may have been doing in the office. We're all there. We're kind of following along and, you know, we could ask questions right next door to each other, over the water cooler. A lot of things that you weren't even really conscious were taking place were happening in how we communicate and interact with each other.

Kelley:

And what I found during the pandemic, particularly at the beginning, is that you have to be really clear and you have to say that in a group, and then you have to back it up individually. Sometimes you need to utilize email. Sometimes you need to utilize just an informal phone call, and sometimes the more formal team meeting to just keep relaying the same messages that you're trying to get out, because we're all operating in a different environment, and we often don't have our partners and our peers around us, so we have just to be really clear in what we're communicating what needs to happen. So I think that that has been a big lesson learned from me early in the pandemic that I carry forward with me now.

Chris:

In terms of efficiency or productivity, what things have you done now, or have you done in the past year that are maybe different from the way things were done before that you think, "Oh, we could continue to do it this way."



Kelley:

I definitely think there's a big area of remote work that will stay in place because it makes efficiencies, right, for our clients and for us. So we need just to look at simple things. You know, spending time in the car and traveling, and how you can be a lot more efficient with office space as well. So I think those things as we look to evolve this environment are things that we'll pay careful attention to because a lot of those learnings work really, really well. You know, that being said, I don't think anything really replaces some human contact, right? And there's certainly a place for that in a safe way, and that's really, really important for us to get back to doing that.

Kelley:

But at the same time, I think that we can leverage those efficiencies that we've learned during this pandemic to carry us forward to be more efficient in the new world, right? So I think the idea is to keep the best learnings that you've had during the pandemic and merge them with the best learnings before, right? And to kind of get the best of two worlds and where that interfaces is really where we want to be is, you know, what does that look like, right? Do we need to have every meeting in person like we used to? Or now can we leverage our technologies so we can interact maybe a little bit more often, but not always in person, and be more efficient? So things like that.

Kelley:

And our clients. You know, they're absolutely the ones that are dictating how much we return to in-person meetings. It's what they feel comfortable with, what they're doing, and just, you know, being available and ready safely to meet our clients where they want to be met is really our top priority for our team.

Chris:

I think it's interesting looking at the client perspective, too. And you're talking about their preferences dictate how you're going to interact with them. But beyond even your interaction with them, what are you hearing from them about how they're managing their teams?

Kelley:

We're kind of all in it together, so everyone's evaluating what role technology plays. What this will do to their culture, and how much office space they need. Those seem to be the things that they're all talking about. Certainly when it comes to nuances like onboarding a new employee in this market, what does it look like? So based on their industry, that might differ a little bit. But I think the same fundamentals that we here at a bank are evaluating are the same as our clients. So it's sort of nice to be able to share that when you're talking to clients.



Chris:

Well, I would have to assume, too, that some of that client growth conversation, which is a traditional client interaction, some of that's going to be affected by how they're thinking about a hybrid workforce or how they're thinking about how they return to work.

Kelley:

Yes, absolutely. So a lot of that is very applicable to them and what that does to them, and their business, and how efficient that they can be. And a lot of their best learnings, such as traffic, travel costs, commute time — same things that we're seeing here. Where they're saying, hey, there is a role for a hybrid in the new world. But what that looks like really depends on your position within the organization and also the line of business that you're in. So I think everybody's evaluating it the same way. They might not get to the same answer because they're servicing a different client base or a different need for the market. But we're all evaluating that and looking for: Where is that line? What have we learned from this? And how can we pivot to some more remote work where it's efficient without losing all the great benefits of in-person?

Chris:

We've talked a lot about what you can learn from the remote environment. But what things do we have to carry forward from the past, too, from that in-person environment?

Kelley:

You know, there's nothing that really replaces in-person contact with humans, so I think that that will always play an important role to some degree in our business. And like I said in the beginning with that communication, if you are staying in more of a hybrid team, and those that maybe aren't regularly visiting the office — how do you make sure that they're part of the team, feel engaged, get the same communication, and that you're all one team. And those are some of the challenges that I see, and some of the things that we're working through?

Chris:

I'm curious about your approach to communication. How do you handle one-on-one communication versus, say group meetings?

Kelley:

When I'm talking to my employees, and particularly in the beginning, you have to show first and foremost that you care for them. So you have to take kind of a step back and say, "What's going on? How are you? You know, what do you need? What challenges are you facing at home? How are you?"



And just really stepping back and just waiting for a response on that. I think on a more day-to-day world, we don't often get a chance to really sit down and do that. And now it's really important to understanding, what is it that they need?

Kelley:

And the same with our clients. It's just understanding that that their world is different, too. And how you kind of take that to build trust with your employees and your clients in understanding that we are all in this together, and sometimes it takes especially for your team members, for you to show a little bit of the challenges that you're facing yourself, and being very authentic, and saying, "This what I'm dealing with at home right now, so I understand." While it might be the same or different than yours, we are bonded by this. And then just taking that into consideration and realizing what their strengths are, where they might have challenges based on what's going on at home, and how you fit that in with what we need to accomplish as a team, and be understanding of that.

Kelley:

And it also means holding them accountable. I think taking our employees and showing accountability is caring for them. If you understand what's going on at home, and maybe there's certain things that can be done that the team needs at different hours than other people have needed. You know, maybe some people are caring for a sick relative in the evening, and others have children at home. So when are the best hours that I can get from them to still, meet all the goals of the organization and absolutely meet our client's goals, and be there for them?

Kelley:

And if we work together as a team and sort of understand all of that, then we're able to deliver efficiently and to keep our employees and our clients healthy and safe. And just create an environment where you want to really excel your culture.

Kelley:

For some employees, it means returning to the office. You know, some of my employees have self-selected and, we've talked through those things and what's going on at home to say, "You know what? I think the better place for me is to go into the office." And there's certain tasks that we have to do in the office, so we make sure that our employees that are going into the office feel safe. We rotate them through because it makes us all feel part of one team. What I didn't want is a team that feels, hey, I'm the office team. I'm the home team, and we're two teams. So we sort of share that responsibility, and it works for my team.



Chris:

Well, I think you've hit on something with the not having a team feel like I'm in the in-office team and I'm the home team. That's something that has come up, actually, in the research I've read on this topic. And that gets back to what you've said about really trying to know everybody's strengths, everybody's needs as individuals. Do you feel like throughout this process you've actually gotten to know your team, the people you work with, the people who may report to you even better than you did before?

Kelley:

Oh, my goodness — way better than before, and the same for our clients. So when you're Zooming into somebody's home, you see pets and children and all kinds of art work and home projects that are going on in the background. It's really become quite wonderful, and I think you get to bond with that. You've learned more about the people that work alongside of you. And when I say that, I absolutely include our clients in that. I don't often get to go to the CFO of one of my top client's home, but now I do, and see inside of there.

Kelley:

And I think that what really, really bonds all of us and makes us, able to lean into each other and trust each other. And I really think while a lot of people worry about their culture and what you're losing by not going into the office, in a lot of ways I think it's improved as well, right? We try to understand each other's challenges and see into their lives.

Kelley:

And to our clients, it's quite refreshing. I mean, before the pandemic, a dog barking in the background or a baby crying was almost something you tried to avoid, right? You didn't want that to really be shown. And now it's almost welcomed. It's like, "Oh. Let me, let me get my dog up here." That's great, you know? And then you kind of move on from that and get into the business at hand. But everybody sort of welcomes that.

Chris:

Well, I think the bonding aspect is a huge part of this. It gets to something that I think a lot of people have concerns about, which is building that positive unified culture for a team that may be scattered in different places. So I'm curious beyond the kind of bonding aspects, how have you replaced those office birthday parties or spontaneous gatherings in the office? That sort of thing that people got when they were in-person.



Kelley:

We've done a lot of the traditional ones that you've seen. We've had some scavenger hunts. You know, I always keep my desk full of green items because green items are always at the top of the list as scavenger hunt item. So we've done some virtual scavenger hunts, and things that people in the office and out of the office can still do.

Kelley:

We've done Name That Tune on our meetings where we've played songs and tried to name that tune. We've had coffee and pajama parties just to mix it up a little bit. We've stamped yards. You know, that's a new thing. I didn't know what stamping a yard was before the pandemic with, you know, thank you signs and all of that. We've had drive-by birthday parties for the team. And then a lot of individual communication as well one-offs. So we've had some fun with it, I will say that.

Kelley:

And some ideas I've gotten, actually, from my clients and others, you know, from other teams within the organization. I would say that that's the part that's been the most fun is how we share those. And actually, you know, because we're so efficient with technology, we've got to share a lot more than we may have been in the office.

Chris:

Well, I've been impressed in general, I think, with how adaptable people have been throughout 2020 and early 2021. And I think, what's interesting is people have adapted very well to remote work and even in some cases to rotating it back into the office. How do you think you address going forward this hybrid approach? Because things are not likely to look the same in six months that they do now. You know, how do you keep people adapting and getting used to new realities?

Kelley:

So I think one is to keep the communication. I think the idea is to take the best of the pre-pandemic world and the best learnings from the pandemic world, and how do you merge them together? So it's certainly going to be more than we're doing today, but I don't think it's going to be what we did before the pandemic? So you try to take what's the best, the things that you liked the best. And it may differ from your role in the organization. It may differ from the team that you have and what their skills and strengths are. But the idea is how do we work together as a team to absolutely hold each other accountable, achieve our targets and goals, be there for our clients.





Kelley:

So it's just about communication and finding out how we can leverage our own strengths to make that happen. So I'm kind of excited about the future. I think that, you know, we'll continue to evolve. And I think that we'll take a lot of great learnings from this. And some things will absolutely stay the same in how we relate.

Kelley:

I think the advantage that we have to going back is it's not an overnight thing. We don't have to all return to the office on this day and assume our old life like we did pre-pandemic. You know, it was a big surprise. One day we were working, and one day we were at home, and no one saw that coming. Now, you know, we get to work with our leaders and, and our clients, and sort of ease our way back into what's the right approach. When is it safe? When are we ready? And we have the time to be thoughtful and to bring that back at a right pace versus the drastic pace that we went to when we pivoted this way.

Kelley:

But I think the key is just communicating with each other and trying to savor the best of both worlds and where they meet all while, you know, meeting the demands of our clients and our business. And I absolutely am very confident that that can be accomplished.

Chris:

Brown-Murro's point about timing is worth heeding. 2021 is a year in flux, we have the time — and a little bit of breathing room — to truly figure out the best policies for hybrid work.

So dig into your policies. Think about which tasks and roles in your organization allow for flexibility, both in timing and physical location. Examine how you onboard employees. Analyze your approach to travel, meetings, communication and more. Take the best efficiencies gained during a global pandemic and apply them in a world where in-person interaction is returning.

Thank you to Kelley Brown-Murro for joining us today. Get related resources for commercial business and listen to future episodes at [regions.com/commercialpodcast](https://regions.com/commercialpodcast). And be sure to subscribe to this podcast on your favorite podcast service.

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