Discover some of the nuances of managing employees inside the office around, or MBWA. Peters wrote that if a leader really wanted to know what the business is performing in nearly real time.

In Search of Excellence was written more than 25 years ago, though, and the way firms are structured that make MBWA impractical. High speed in contributed to the rise of a new breed of virtual legal professional, whether any other employees of the firm except they work some or all of the time.

Thanks to the march of technology, there are relatively few functions in a virtual intake assistants can answer incoming calls and route the inquiry as needed:

- virtual paralegals can work with scanned documents and pdf creation;
- virtual attorneys can draft documents, negotiate with opposing a
internet connection;

This virtualization has been a boon to law firms, clients, and legal professions as they create the majority of available legal work. It has, however, also created
firms tend to use fewer formal management structures than other businesses of comparable size, and th
directive sessions to guide and manage employees. Leaving aside the issue of whether these typical law
business practices, the increasing virtualization of the legal workforce renders these techniques much ha

Despite this (or perhaps because of it), for most law firms, utilizing virtual employees continues to make
and deepens the pool of available talent, drives down the cost of talent acquisition reduces overhead cos
alone make virtual employees worth considering.

If using virtual employees is a sensible and efficient business practice, but typical law firm management
manage virtual employees, what is a lawyer to do?

Here are five tips on how to effectively manage virtual employees:

1. Use Video Chat

There is no substitute for in-person, face-to-face communication. It's the reason most sales people still t
Something undefined and essential occurs (or at least can occur) when people are face to face that digi

However, digital communication has come pretty far in that direction. In particular, video and audio chat
provides a relatively strong stand-in for face to face communication. It makes sense: with email, the pec
voice, sight and proximity; with chat software, they are separated by voice, sight and proximity; with pr proximity; with video and audio chat they are separated only by proximity. It’s as close as you can get t

With many laptop computers featuring built-in webcams and with instant messenger services like Yahoo
free audio and video chat, the only other ingredient needed for a face to face conversation is high speed

employees already have anyway. If you need to manage teams of virtual employees working together or
one chat to web conferencing offers the same benefits for multiple participants. There are many vendors
-ranging from free and simple to very expensive and elaborate. Go To Meeting ($49 per month for unlimi
participants) is an excellent choice for a pay service and Dimdim is one of the many great free options.

If you haven't already used video chat or web conferencing to connect with your virtual employees, you
it provides than a phone call.

2. Weekly One-on-One Meetings

Part of not being able to wander around to talk with your virtual employees means that the interactions
with on-site employees must be planned for and scheduled. One way to do this is to hold standing, week
employees. (Actually, you should have these meetings with your on-site employees, too, but that is outs

Schedule the meetings for an hour on the same day and time slot each week and convey to your employ
are a top priority. The agenda for each meeting should follow the same pattern: check in on the status o
employee want to discuss; and discuss new issues that you want to discuss. Make sure that your agend
run short of time to discuss the items on your employee's agenda. The purpose of these meetings is to t working on and to communicate with him about any other issues important enough for him to raise.

If you are managing multiple people these one-on-one meetings can comprise a significant time commit
often feel too stretched to honor. The bottom line, though, is that using virtual employees is a tool for rl
is a tool for transportation; and tools require maintenance. If you go too long without changing the oil in
expensive and time consuming consequence of a blown engine, which is why most car owners bother to
like the waiting room at Jiffy Lube.

Managing virtual employees is similar: if you do not perform regular managerial maintenance you will su consuming consequence of turnover and diminished performance.
3. Invite Virtual Employees to Firm Events

Depending on how geographically distant your virtual employees are, another way to help keep them co-

including them in firm events. When a casual firm outing to lunch or happy hour spontaneously organ-

izes, the virtual employees who are not sitting in the immediate vicinity, even though they may work from a home office.

Over time continually failing to include virtual employees to these informal get-togethers contributes to the team members being somehow less a part of the firm than the people who physically show up. Employees behaving as less than part of the team and in short order the small problem of not inviting them to lunch behaviors that require more substantive management and intervention.

Even if your virtual employees are too far away to include in informal outings, take pains to invite them. If you don’t already have quarterly events, this is a great opportunity to start the managerial practice of quarterly. Invite all of your employees, virtual and on-site, spend the day reviewing the past quarter's per quarter, and cap the meeting off with a party or social event. It's a useful way to get a far-flung team al

4. Daily Check In Meetings

I know: you started rolling your eyes when you read the part about conducting hourly meetings each we-
suggested you have a day long meeting each quarter; now the suggestion of daily meetings is just too n

I understand. I don’t like meetings either. I would rather do almost anything than sit in meetings. Here's employee, you have decided to change your job description to include "manager." Being a manager means dealing with the people who report to you. It’s that simple.

The good news is that your daily meeting with your virtual employees should be a lightning fast one. Jus-
aligned on the most important things for the firm to get done that day. Any prolonged discussions that a

"off-line" and dealt with in the weekly one-on-one, or sooner if the matter is vital. If it takes longer than you’re doing them wrong.

Since these daily meetings are so brief, it is okay to hold them over the phone as a time-saver. They sh

ideally, at the very beginning of the work day before the first client arrives or the first calendar call at co

5. Manage By Numbers

The previous four tips have all involved interacting with your virtual employees more closely to help you differ-
different; it is the yin to all that relationship building yang, and is about managing by the numbers.

Each of your employees should have certain performance measurements, or metrics, that allow you to n
will vary from position to position, firm to firm, and practice area to practice area. The traditional metric:
skulls are hours billed, hours collected, and the resulting realization rate.

If these are the right metrics for your virtual employees, great. If not, you are going to have to decide w
provide the best dashboard for monitoring the performance of your staff. In the beginning, it can be very
critical, quantifiable and easily tracked. You may begin with some stutter steps of metrics that are too h:
random to be considered mission critical. Some examples of metrics are performance on client satisfactio

and percentage of initial consultations which turn into paying clients. The key is to find and use the right

Finding the right metrics for your virtual employees is an exercise that is well worth the considerable ti
provide a concrete, objective performance assessment which will offer a counterpart to all of the subjec
caching you have done. The real power of these metrics is that when you come to a point with a virtual value of his contributions to your firm (say, you have a virtual attorney who is really great at writing agr high percentage of his clients dislike working with him); your metrics will provide a clear, unflinching look
your firm. Or not.
Think of metrics like flying a plane. In good weather, pilots can operate aircraft by looking out the window. But in fog, looking out the window yields no helpful information, so pilots have to fly using only their instruments. If you are not qualified to fly under instrument flight rules, you can’t fly in bad weather.

Your metrics are the instrument flight rules for managing your virtual employees. When you are really an employee, good metrics help you determine which way is up.

**Conclusion**

Virtual employees can be a great addition to a firm’s workplace, but they require different management strategies. Lawyers who master the skills needed to make virtual employees efficient and happy members of the team will find their own, ongoing search for excellence.

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**About the Author**

**Erik Mazzone** is the Director of the Center for Practice Management at the North Carolina Bar Association. When he is not expounding on the virtues of bar association membership, he can most likely be found hanging over his computer yelling at his fantasy football team. He can be reached through his blog www.lawpracticematters.com.