Chapter II

Look Them Straight Between the Eyes

When you first meet someone, you start noticing things. You notice what the person is wearing, the color of their hair, their height, the build of their body, what their voice sounds like, and maybe some sort of pleasant or not so pleasant odor. You notice the expression on their face. They may look happy, nervous, serious, angry, or perhaps inquisitive. You begin to form opinions and perceptions about that person and maybe even anticipate the type of interaction you’re about to have with them. Some people say they can pick up a certain “vibe” when they meet people. But what happens when these physical cues aren’t available? What happens when the first interaction is on the phone or via e-mail? Many people would say, “That’s not the best way.” Of course, virtual teams do not have the luxury of meeting face to face frequently (if at all) and must do without many of these visual cues.

This chapter will discuss the dynamics behind the myths that revolve around the idea that in the business environment, you must be able to “look them straight between the eyes” to be successful.

• Myth #1: It’s always better to meet face-to-face.
• Myth #2: If it’s really important, you must do it face-to-face.
• Myth #3: Technology will solve all problems.
Myth #1: “It’s Always Better to Meet Face-to-Face”

Most people think that meeting face-to-face is always best and that working remotely in a virtual team is a compromise. In the many years that we’ve been working on and managing virtual teams, the following are the major benefits of face-to-face meetings that people talk about.

- You just can’t build a team virtually—you need to meet people face-to-face.
- You can get more done meeting face-to-face, locked in a room, and just cranking it out.
- Face-to-face meetings provide opportunities for creating meetings to discuss subtopics.
- The face-to-face meeting was good, but the best part was the opportunity to talk to people during the breaks and network with people they otherwise might not see.

Sometimes, it is not feasible or overly inefficient to function in a virtual team environment. For example, it would be difficult and ineffective for a hardware support engineer to repair a piece of complex equipment remotely using the customer as part of the virtual team. Likewise, a doctor performing surgery typically would not be in a situation where working virtually would be effective. However, with improved technology and processes, even these tasks someday may be done routinely in a virtual environment. As a matter of fact, in Australia, a liver specialist assisted surgeons in New Zealand during an operation by guiding them through the procedure based on what he saw through cameras that he controlled remotely.

We’re not saying that you should eliminate face-to-face interactions all together, but you need to determine which method is most appropriate for what you want to get out of the interaction. In some situations, face-to-face is better; on other situations, virtual is better.