

Federal Judicial Center
In Session: Leading the Judiciary
Episode 33: Leading Outcomes, Others, & Ourselves
in Remote or Hybrid Workplaces
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Kevin Eikenberry: The reality is, as leaders, we've got to get better at understanding and making clear what the expectations and the outputs are. And if we will do a better job of that, we'll be in a far better position to decide where we ought to be working. I don't know how remote the future is, but I know that the future of work is flexible.

Craig Bowden: Today on *In Session: Leading the Judiciary*, we talk with Kevin Eikenberry, organizational expert and co-author of *The Long-Distance Leader: Rules for Remarkable Remote Leadership*.

According to Eikenberry, the pandemic compacted about 30 years of organizational change into just three years. As a result, leaders can no longer rely on what made them successful pre-pandemic. In a remote or hybrid workplace, leaders must be more intentional about building relationships that engender commitment rather than just compliance and focus more on accomplishment rather than just employee activity.

Kevin Eikenberry is the founder and Chief Potential Officer of the Kevin Eikenberry Group and co-founder of the Remote Leadership Institute. He has improved the communication,

leadership, learning, teams and teamwork of organizations worldwide for over 25 years.

Kevin's been named one of Inc.com's top 100 worldwide experts in leadership and management and is the author of several books, including *The Long-Distance Leader: Rules for Remarkable Remote Leadership* and *The Long-Distance Team: Designing Your Team for Everyone's Success* released in 2023.

Special thanks to today's guest host Phillip Muñoz, Deputy Chief U.S. Probation Office in the District of Arizona. Phillip, take it away.

Phillip Muñoz: Kevin, I'd like to ask you. This book was published two years before the worldwide pandemic hit which makes me wonder whether you have some sort of premonition about the coming global challenge that we would be facing.

Kevin Eikenberry: No, I had no premonition whatsoever. But what we already did know is that there was a movement with more people working at a distance more of the time. My team is spread out across eight states. So we had been and I have been living this and working with clients on this for a very long time. That's the short answer. Perhaps good timing.

Phillip Muñoz: You laid out the premise of the book really clearly. You say that leading a team at a distance is first and foremost about leadership and the principles of leadership haven't changed, but how we apply the timeless principles of

leadership in this new world matters a great deal. So I'd like to ask you what are your top three rules for remarkable remote leadership would you say?

Kevin Eikenberry: The most important one you hinted at, which is think leadership first and location second. That way more is the same than different through all of the things that are changing in our world. We have a societal change in how we think about work, that's true even for people who have continued to, and will always work in proximity. The world is thinking differently about work than ever before. Even given that, it's still more about leadership than anything else. So it's not like we have to scrub everything we knew and start over. We need to lean in on what the leadership principles are. It's the context that we need to take into account.

Now one of the things that we have to do differently when we're leading a remote team, a hybrid team, a team at a distance, whatever, a flexible team, whatever you're calling it, we have to do almost everything with more intention.

For example, if everyone's in the office, we see each other in the hallway and we have little conversations. Right? That doesn't guarantee that we have strong working relationships, but it gives us a chance to get to know each other and to be connected in ways that we might not otherwise.

But if I'm leading a team at a distance, which as I've said I am and I know that you are as well, then we have to be much more intentional in building and maintaining those relationships with our team members. We have to find ways to stay connected, to be connected, to make it an intentional part of our work to maintain and build those relationships.

Phillip Muñoz: When you talk about the timeless principles of leadership, what would you say to leaders today about how to best apply them?

Kevin Eikenberry: One of the things that we introduced in the book is what we call the Three O model of leadership. Leadership is about reaching valuable outcomes with and through others which is two of the three O's outcomes. We're doing work to achieve something - outcomes. But it's other people that are doing it and we're not doing it by ourselves. Now, if we're doing it at a distance, the outcomes may not be different. But if they're doing it without that proximity, it changes the way we communicate, the way we collaborate, how cohesive our team is, et cetera, et cetera.

The third O is ourselves and certainly one of the things that's helped me make sense of what's happening in the workplace.

Now it is in those Three O's that there's a tension between outcomes and others. Organizations are saying we have to get

these outcomes. So maybe we're saying we need you to come back to the office or we need you to come back to the office more of the time. But oftentimes it's ourselves, the leaders themselves that are driving that not always in the best possible ways.

If you read most of the studies, 90 percent of people say I want to work at home. Well, that's sort of predictable 85 percent to 90 percent. But it's not the right question. If we ask a better question, we get a more informed answer. And the better question is asking a team member where would you be working to get the best possible outcomes for the organization. Then it's more like 70 percent will say I ought to be in the office once in a while. Then we could discuss what once in a while means. Right? But when you frame the question on not about what you want but what do we need, way more people will say we ought to be in the office at least some of the time.

But here's the interesting piece. That a lot of team members are saying "why do I need to come to the office if I'm going to do exactly the same thing I did at home" to which I would say you are 100 percent correct. On the days that you're coming into the office, if that's going to be our approach, then we need to do different work.

We can certainly collaborate at a distance and, when we're in the same physical space, in many ways it's easier or better to collaborate. So where we can collaborate in different ways.

Right? We can't always perfectly replicate at distance. So on the days we're together, that's when we should be having most of our meetings.

Now some of you who are listening, remember what it was like to work from home on a day back in say 2019, '18 or '19? On that day, man, you got so much done because you weren't being interrupted all day. But that wasn't the experience that we had during the pandemic. We were working from home, but we were being interrupted all of the time. Microsoft's data says, based on Microsoft Teams, that people were in more than twice as many meetings than they were before. So if we're going to bring people back together, we need to be clear about why. We need to change the nature of the work when we are together to leverage the advantages of together and the advantages of distance. I think that's the biggest key.

A lot of people, because I've written three books that have the words long distance in them, people think that I'm kind of the, hey, everyone ought to work remotely. And because I lead a remote team, hey, every one's teams ought to be remote. That is not my perspective at all. My perspective is what does our output, what do our outcomes say that tell us about where we ought to work, what would be a really good solution for us.

That doesn't mean that there's a right answer for everyone. We continue to encourage organizations even now, you know, in

nearing the middle of 2023 to continue to try stuff, to continue to pilot stuff, continue to figure out how can we get great results and take care of our folks outcomes and others.

Phillip Muñoz: Now let me ask you this. Is widespread remote work here to stay or will it be short lived? What is your prediction?

Kevin Eikenberry: Oh, more people will work at a distance at least some of the time in the future than ever we did before. The genie is out of the bottle. Now is the migration back? Back is to the office. Is that done? I don't think anyone can say that for sure. Thirty years from now there's going to be all sorts of really interesting case studies because what we've done is compacted about 30 years of organizational work change into three. So it's going to be very fascinating as to why to change things. Right? We've got municipalities saying to senior executives, man, you've got to bring people back because our downtown is going to die. Like we got people in commercial real estate saying, really?

I mean like there's all sorts of factors here. It's also the factors of senior leaders - and I know that you all can't see me - that have the hair the color of mine, which is gray, who were successful in a world that says: I know what it's like to come to the office. I know what it's like to network with people there. I know what it's like to find mentors. And you

know what? I was successful and we were successful that way, and I want my folks to have that same chance at success.

So to sort of discount or toss senior leaders under the bus for saying you need to all come back and just calling them old and decrepit, in many ways I think we need to grant them some grace because all they're trying to do is to get back to what they absolutely knew worked. What we don't know now is nearly as much as absolute. Right?

If the pandemic taught us anything about leadership, it taught us that we need to better understand our folks, what's going on with them, what their challenges are, what their hopes and dreams are, being more empathetic. I think that we can't lose that lesson that I think many of us sort of figured out during the pandemic. We can't lose that. In fact, we need to lean into it because it's by leading in that way that we have the chance to create a workplace of the future that can be highly effective and be a win for everyone. Right? Both for the outcomes and for the others. And I would say this, I don't know how remote the future is, but I know that the future of work is flexible.

Phillip Muñoz: Talk to us a little bit about the challenges of leadership in a widely remote hybrid environment. What do you mean when you say remote leadership is a first-order change?

Kevin Eikenberry: Well, it's a first-order change because it does change so much about the way that we've led. Suddenly even though the principles of the value of trust, the need to coach, like we could make a long list but those principles didn't change. But how we do them may change a lot. So it's a first-order change because it's not just sort of off there, oh, by the way, I ought to figure that out. Like it's right in front of us all day, every day, all day long. And that's really what we mean by that.

Phillip Muñoz: You also share in your book about the failures of remote working.

Kevin Eikenberry: I honestly think that there are a lot of leaders that are wanting people back because they haven't figured out how to lead differently and not because their folks haven't figured out how to do the work. There are a lot of leaders who haven't figured out that there's a difference between activity and accomplishment.

So a lot of leaders early in the pandemic would say to us how can I tell if they were working. I said you couldn't tell if they were working when they were in the building. They were like, what do you mean? I said, unless you were looking over their shoulders, all you could see is they were at their computer. And I'm not being cynical. I'm being realistic. You've all heard the story. Man, they are a hard worker,

they're here when I get there and they're here when I leave. And I'm like, okay, awesome. Are they getting anything accomplished?

Phillip Muñoz: Like what are the outcomes again.

Kevin Eikenberry: Exactly. It's about the outcome. It's about what we accomplished, not how long it took us to do it.

I'll tell you a pretty good story. Pre-pandemic the average American had a 27-minute commute each direction. So we're talking about, with the average American, an hour commute a day. Okay? And we knew that. We asked thousands of people on virtual workshops this question. What are you doing with your hour? What are you doing with the time you used to spend commuting? There were several answers. Some really good ones and, you know, et cetera. But the number one answer of about 50 percent of people, well, I'm working.

So my next question always was so are you getting more accomplished. I didn't get an answer nearly as quickly. So if we're spending more time to get the same amount done, we are not more productive. We are less productive. Right?

Now that doesn't necessarily mean that we should come -- oh, they're less productive, they need to come back to the office. That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is it's not just leaders that aren't thinking about productivity the right way. It's all of us. So productivity has a numerator and

a denominator. Right? So output per unit effort, output per unit time. The reality is, as leaders, we've got to get better at understanding and making clear what the expectations and the outputs are. If we will do a better job of that, we'll be in a far better position to decide where we ought to be working in what amount of time.

Phillip Muñoz: Has the balance shifted in a remote environment? Do remote leaders manage more?

Kevin Eikenberry: That's a really good question. I think that some. I think it kind of relates to what we were just talking about. I think some have sort of leaned back in the direction of managing the numbers and managing the stuff. But there are many leaders that have leaned the other way and have gotten -- you know, have become more aware of the needs of their folks. Have become more aware about mental fitness and mental health for example.

So I don't know that I could make a blanket statement, but I can tell you that a lot of organizations that have made announcements or have implemented new plans for people to be in the office two, three, four days a week - whatever that is - haven't done a great job of giving clear reasons why that's the decision. So it feels to the teams that they're just trying to manage us. Right? I'm not saying that there aren't good reasons why. I've been on the inside of many of these

organizations as a consultant. They haven't done as good a job as they could have in stating the case for why we're making a change back to the office some of the time.

Phillip Muñoz: A leader really is then focused on influence rather than on control?

Kevin Eikenberry: The most effective leaders realize that they are in the influence business. That we can't really control people anyway. If you go in Google management leadership, you'll see a whole bunch of stuff most of which I won't agree with because most of it will say management bad and leadership good. But what I would say is both are super important. Both are part of our job. It's not a good cop, bad cop scenario. Right? The good cop, bad cop scenario is do I want my folks to simply comply or do I want them to be committed. I believe with the best leaders, their goal is to build and find and engender commitment and not simply compliance.

Phillip Muñoz: You provide a remote leadership model, which is visualized by gears, with the middle one being tools and technology. Why do you say, with the tools and technology, why that gear is the one that is most different when leading remotely?

Kevin Eikenberry: Imagine the pandemic happening in 1975. Think about the economic impact that it had on the world today

versus what it would have had before we had the tools and technology that enabled us to make it work. So it's those tools in that middle gear that we have to become conversant with, comfortable with, confident in using so that we can get the outcomes we need.

Like there's this intermediary. Right? The intermediary is the tools and the technology. We got thrown into using Microsoft Teams or Zoom. If we want to lead more effectively, we need to lean into the technologies. Be more confident and comfortable with them. All of us got to some base level because we had to. Like know where to turn on the camera or not in Zoom for example. Right?

But that doesn't mean we're using Zoom in the way that we could to have our meetings be more effective and more collaborative. Like have you had a meeting in Zoom, for example, where you put people in breakout rooms to work on something rather than all of us being in the main room? Like you've been in a meeting with 12 people where you said that end of the table, this end of the table, we're going to talk. Like have you done that in Zoom?

There's just the simple example. So do you know that you can? Are you using it? Are you using it when you should use it? Right? And it's not just that. But when we're all in the

office, basically we have two ways of communicating - when I see you in the hallway or I'll send you an email.

Well, now we got like 16 ways that we can use and all of them have strengths and weaknesses. We've got to get smart about when to use which ones to get the best possible results. We didn't have to think about that before. Now we do.

Phillip Muñoz: So staying with technology, how do we coach and get authentic feedback in that remote environment?

Kevin Eikenberry: I lead largely a remote team and have for over a decade. So I've coached. Most of my coaching are coaching clients that I work with. Executives and senior leaders that I coach, many of them I never meet in person. So we can absolutely coach at a distance.

But I would say one thing, that those listening to us don't have the advantage of what you and I have right now which is we're looking at each other on cameras. So I want to use tools that create space and opportunity for it to be as rich a communication as possible. Which in the case of coaching was like, man, we should probably be on our cameras so we can see each other. Because there's so much more that we can get in both of us in the communication that way than without it.

But that doesn't mean that every moment has to be that way. It also means that, if we're going to coach at a distance, we have to look for those informal times because they're not going

to happen in the “oh, by the ways” in the hallway. So it goes back to that being an intentional piece, but it also is making sure that we’re creating ways to make the conversation work best.

Phillip Muñoz: This particular area of the book really struck me, Kevin, I will tell you. Because especially when you’re getting feedback remotely, we’re not able to read body language as easily. So the lesson for me was really assuming positive intent. Can you explain the golden suggestion and give us an example of it in practice?

Kevin Eikenberry: Well, yeah. Most of us think of do unto others the way you would want them to do unto you. Or something along that way. We say the golden suggestion is do unto others in ways that work best for them. In other words, send the messages in ways that work for them and not necessarily for you. The message doesn’t need to be different, but the way it’s delivered may need to be different. I’m not trying to say that we need to soften it or change the message. Just change the way we deliver it so people will actually get it.

Phillip Muñoz: Why do you say trust is harder to build and more easily broken on remote teams?

Kevin Eikenberry: I’m not the baseball fan that I was when I was a kid. But if you have 600 at-bats, every single at-bat doesn’t mean as much to your batting average as if you have 10

at-bats. If you have 10 at-bats and if you want to hit 300, like everyone that you miss puts more pressure on the next one. Every interaction carries with it more weight because, if we mess up one, it may be longer before the next one. And with fewer interactions, everyone takes on greater importance.

Phillip Muñoz: What advice would you share with us about how we either build or rebuild trust with our team and among team members that may have been fractured, if you will?

Kevin Eikenberry: Well, if it's been fractured, we need to talk about it. We need to get that on the table and talk about it. I'll just say this about trust. As you look it up in the dictionary, trust is both a noun - trust exists - and trust is a verb. I trust you. The more of the verb, we do. The more of the noun, we get.

So if trust has been fractured, then rather than I'm going to wait for them to prove that they're trustworthy again, I need to lean into what can I do to be trusting and what do I need to be trustworthy. Which takes us back to intention and, as you said, assuming positive intent. If we do those things, we can rebuild trust far more rapidly than if we sort of sit back and wait for them.

Phillip Muñoz: And the takeaway for me as I read your book, Kevin, was really this. The trust triangle as being foundational. It's a key concept to being a successful long-

distance leader because trust helps you dispel any negative thoughts about your team. For example, maybe not working when you can't see them. Therefore, you've got to really be mindful of even what is happening within your own space and thoughts and mind when managing remotely. Can you explain the asynchronous and synchronous communication and when we should use them?

Kevin Eikenberry: You and I are speaking synchronously. Right? We can have a true conversation because we're having it at the same time. But there are lots of technology tools that we use, communication tools that we use that aren't really designed for synchronous. I'll give you the example. Like everyone who's listening has been in an email thread that's three or four messages in that's not going so well. But the problem is we try to use email as if it's a synchronous tool, which it's not.

Email is awesome for asynchronous communication where I get the chance to read it when I have the chance, respond when I have the chance and a chance to think about what I'm responding to. But too many people want to use email and act like it can be a synchronous communication. In fact, the rule on our team is if you're three emails in and it's not working very well, someone needs to pick up the phone.

Phillip Muñoz: Good advice.

Kevin Eikenberry: In other words, we need to go to synchronous. Like I've had this conversation with team members, with our clients, and with my family. They're texting each other and it's not working. You're both on your phone. Why don't you actually, heaven forbid, talk to each other? Just say it. Right?

Phillip Muñoz: Yeah. So why do richness and scope matter and how do we find a good balance?

Kevin Eikenberry: The higher level of richness is when it's a synchronous conversation and with a fewer people. Like the richest possible communication is you and me face to face in real-time and everything else has less richness. Right?

Scope is, if something has a high scope, I can send that blanket email to 75 people and they all get a message at exactly the same time. That's high scope, but very low richness. So the point here is that every tool or every approach that we could take to communicating is a tradeoff between richness and scope. When we start to think about the nature of our communication and the nature of our particular communication goal, we can start to say how much richness versus how much scope we need.

Like this podcast is high scope. Lots of you can hear it. None of you can ask me a question. Lots and lots and lots of people can listen to this over a long period of time. Great

scope, low richness. So we have to think about how we balance richness and scope all the time in terms of which communication tool we're using to get the results that we want.

Phillip Muñoz: And how important is it to model boundaries when you're trying to decide which tool to use?

Kevin Eikenberry: First of all, if we want our teams to do stuff, they're watching us. That's the first thing I would say, but I'll give you one example. A lot of us as leaders say, man, I got a lot to do. And you know, sometimes on the evening or on the weekend, I'm going to work on my email. Now I don't want my team to do that, but I need to do that.

I've got two things to say. One is don't. But if you have to, make sure you're not sending them emails when you don't want them to be reading them. And you're saying, well, how can I do both? Well, you go into Outlook and you click two buttons and you delay delivery. So people will get emails at 8:00 on Monday morning, but they're not going to get the emails at 4:00 Sunday afternoon or 4:30 Monday morning or whatever that time would be for you.

Because here's the thing. Even if you tell them you don't want them to respond, they've got devices and they're seeing it. Even if they're not responding by typing, they're responding in their head and they're thinking, man, I want to be the first one to respond. Just don't do it. Create boundaries for yourself,

live to those boundaries, and encourage your teams to do the same by your behavior.

Phillip Muñoz: Good advice. Would you say IT departments might not be the best candidates to provide training on tech tools? Why is that?

Kevin Eikenberry: Well, the thing is that - and this is no disrespect to our friends in IT - often they want to talk to us about the features and how to deliver on the specific feature. But what we really need to do is what are the things we're trying to accomplish and how do we accomplish those things. It's just that oftentimes, when training is built directly around what the tool can do, it doesn't take into account what do we want to use the tool for enough. That's not that IT people can't teach others how to use tools. It's just that oftentimes the focus is slightly different, and that sometimes gets in our way.

Phillip Muñoz: Kevin, what do organizations most need to know and do to train others to be long distant leaders?

Kevin Eikenberry: If we want our leaders to lead in new ways in a new world of working, then we need to give them new tools. That's one of the reasons we wrote the book. It's to give people the chance to say I know you know how to coach. Or there's lots of other ways you can learn how to coach, but how do you do it at a distance. Right?

In other words, we need to be incorporating the realities of leading a team at a distance - hybrid or whatever - into the learning that we're providing them and for an individual leader to be thinking about that as a part of how you're doing your own development. Not just I'm going to read. I'm going to read another book on leadership, but I'm going to read a book that helps me think about what the differences are doing it at a distance.

Phillip Muñoz: Where can our listeners go to learn more about you and this topic that we've been talking about today, Kevin?

Kevin Eikenberry: Well, thanks for asking that. Certainly you can go to kevineikenberry.com where you can find out about all of our services. But we have tons and tons of free content there about leading at a distance. And if you can spell my name, you can find me on nearly any social channel. Again, for example on LinkedIn, if you want to connect with me there, let me know that this was where you found us. I'd be happy to be connected and answer any questions that you have.

Phillip Muñoz: Well, Kevin Eikenberry, thank you very much for your time. I really enjoyed our conversation.

Kevin Eikenberry: I did as well. Thanks for having me.

Craig Bowden: Thanks, Phillip, and thanks to our listeners. To hear more episodes of this podcast, visit the

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