Learning Journal

Post-Pandemic Virtual Team Leadership Essentials

Course Overview and Components

Welcome to our course on **Post-pandemic Team Leadership Essentials**! This learning journal is to help you jot down your thoughts and reflections at the end of each session. It also contains worksheets for practice and self-assessment. The course is organized around six weeks -- in addition to the free sample lesson with a refresher on the basics of team leadership. We will cover the following topics:

- Team Leadership: Back to Basics (free sample lesson)
- Virtual Team Leadership: Specific Challenges you May encounter
- Virtual Team Leadership: Specific Solutions
- Virtual Team Management Tips, Tools and Tricks
- Conflict Management in Virtual Teams
- The Resilience of You as Virtual Team Leader, and That of your Team

Learning objectives

The following are the objectives of the course:

1. Help you understand the reasons behind some team dynamics and the added layer of complexity caused by virtuality

2. Help you learn strategies of motivating teams and maximizing productivity

3. Equip you with management tools, tips and tricks that can be used on a daily basis to keep your team(s) 'humming'

4. Increase your *resilience* and that of your virtual team member

5. Help you apply your best conflict management skills in the setting of virtual (or hybrid) teams

6. Introduce you to strategic design for working virtually and discuss long term learning objectives

Before you start the course, please write down any additional individual goals for taking this course:

My Learning Objectives

Sample lesson: Team Leadership: Back to Basics

Based on what you have learned in this lesson:

What have you found to work the best in:

- Reinforcing team building and team culture formation?

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- Motivating your team members?

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- Monitoring your team's performance?

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What leadership *practices and behaviors* do you need to:

- Use more of?

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- Use less of or stop doing?

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- Continue using?

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In reference to Theory X and Theory Y, what type of management assumptions do you hold?

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Now, let's take a self-assessment and see what specific management assumptions do you hold. As you know, that can be a significant discrepancy between our "espoused theory" (what we think we do and are, as team leaders) and our "in-use theory" (what we really do as team leader):

Please answer based on your beliefs
1. A good pay and a secure job are enough to satisfy most people.
    o A. Yes
    o B. No
- 2. A manager should help and coach subordinates in their work.
    o A. Yes
    o B. No
- 3. Most people like real responsibility in their job.
    o A. Yes
    o B. No
4. Managers should let the workers control the quality of the work.

o A. Yes

o B. No

- 5. Most people are afraid to learn new things on the job.
    - o A. Yes
    - o B. No
- 6. Most people dislike their work.
    - o A. Yes
    - o B. No
- 7. Most people are creative.
    - o A. Yes
    - o B. No
- 8. A manager should closely supervise and monitor the work of his subordinates.
    - o A. Yes
    - o B. No
- 9. Most people tend to resist change.
    - o A. Yes
    - o B. No
- 10. Most people work only as hard as they have to.
    - o A. Yes
    - o B. No
- 11. Workers should be allowed to set their own job goals.
    - o A. Yes
    - o B. No
- 12. Most people are happiest off the job.
    - o A. Yes
    - o B. No
- 13. Most people do care about the organization that they work for.
    - o A. Yes
    - o B. No
- 14. A manager should help subordinates grow and advance in their jobs.
    - o A. Yes
    - o B. No

If your answers to: statements 1, 5, 6, 8, 9 10 you lean more towards theory X management style.
If your answers to the following statements were a yes (2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14), you are more of a theory Y manager.

Please reflect on these self-assessment results and how they pertain to how you trust/ distrust team members in virtual work:

Reflection on Self-assessment Results

In being a virtual team leader, how do you need to coach your team members in being good virtual managers of other people?

Week One: Specific Challenges You May Encounter

What challenges that are specific to virtual / hybrid teams have you been facing, as a leader?

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What are the differences between leading and managing virtual and non-virtual teams? What have you discovered already?

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What distinct challenges have you encountered in leading your virtual team(s) thus far?

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What have you experimented with to solve for these challenges? And what has been the experience with this?

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Now, read the following case and reflect upon it:

Scenario: Taifa's Virtual Team

The virtual team has 11 members, all experienced project and campaign managers under the program leader who sits in headquarters. Only three members are co-located with the program leader, Taifa, who is wondering if she actually has a team. Things are going fine. All the deadlines are met, but teams are supposed to be creative, self-directed and interdependent. This team is not there yet.

The team meets weekly using Zoom-like technology that does not always work for everybody, so that the team still occasionally loses anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes per meeting. No one really complains except the manager from New Zealand who is the one that suffers the most from the time differences. The team tries to rotate but it does not always work because the location of the majority of team members, in effect, often determines the timing. Everyone is nice to each other but Taifa notices that at least four members are on their computers or phones doing other things during the meetings. They claim they are taking notes -- or are they really multi-tasking? She wonders what notes they are taking. Each week, the team updates each other on their progress. They have done this for a year until two weeks ago, when Peter complained that this was a waste of time and that kind of basic information should be shared on the intranet, not at the meeting. Taifa asked if the rest of the group agreed with Peter and no one said much, so Taifa agreed. She was not sure how to fill the time left and suggested that the team discuss this off-line and provide suggestions. So far, the three co-located members have provided ideas, but no one else – she assumes because they are so busy with project deadlines.

Last week, one of the project managers was absent because of a medical leave. Taifa assumed that everyone knew but found out that only half of the team was informed. She suggested that the team send a card and volunteered to organize it. The team agreed that this was a good idea. Taifa has instituted some team-building. Each birthday is celebrated during their virtual meetings with singing, and when a project is completed, she awards the manager during their next virtual meeting. Plus they meet at the global annual face to face staff meeting (at least she did before the global pandemic), and she takes the team out for drinks during those occasions. Still each member seems pretty independent and there is little sharing of new ideas and techniques among them.

Yesterday, things got a little crazy. During the meeting, Peter commented to another team member, Harish, that his strategy was not aligned with the new philosophy and was stuck in the old charity paradigm. Peter brings this up every so often and the team seemed to be used to it. This time, however, Harish told Peter and the team that he was fed up with the perpetual arrogance of most of the group members who think they know his region better than he does - in fact, to Harish's mind it sounded like white feelings of superiority. Taifa had no idea he felt that way. This is really problematic because Peter does have a point in some ways, in her mind, and Taifa was hoping that Peter could bring Harish along. Yet, she also needs to honor Harish's regional expertise - and she wonders how the team can engage competently, virtually, in uncomfortable conversations that involve topics such as white supremacy culture, decolonizing organizations, whose knowledge counts etc.

This is also a tough time because performance evaluation is coming up. Taifa has good measures for each project manager and, in fact, Peter and Harish are the two star performers both in terms of quality and productivity. This means they will get a bigger percentage increase than the others. How will the others take this, if it comes out?

Reflection on the Case

1. **Does the case ring a bell in the context where you work? What resonates?**

2. **What challenges is Taifa dealing with in this case?**

3. **How would you address them, if you were her? Use the strategies you learnt in the course, where possible?**

4. **What would you do as a leader to make sure your team uses inclusive behaviors and actions, and is sensitive to everybody's needs in the team?**

5. **What questions do you still have, after having worked through this case?**

Week Two: Specific Leadership Solutions

After reviewing the materials of this week, what specific tools, techniques and insights have you come up with that will help make your team more cohesive, productive and resilient?

<div style="background-color:#C0542E; color:white; text-align:center; font-size:2em; padding:20px;">Reflection on Tools Learned</div>
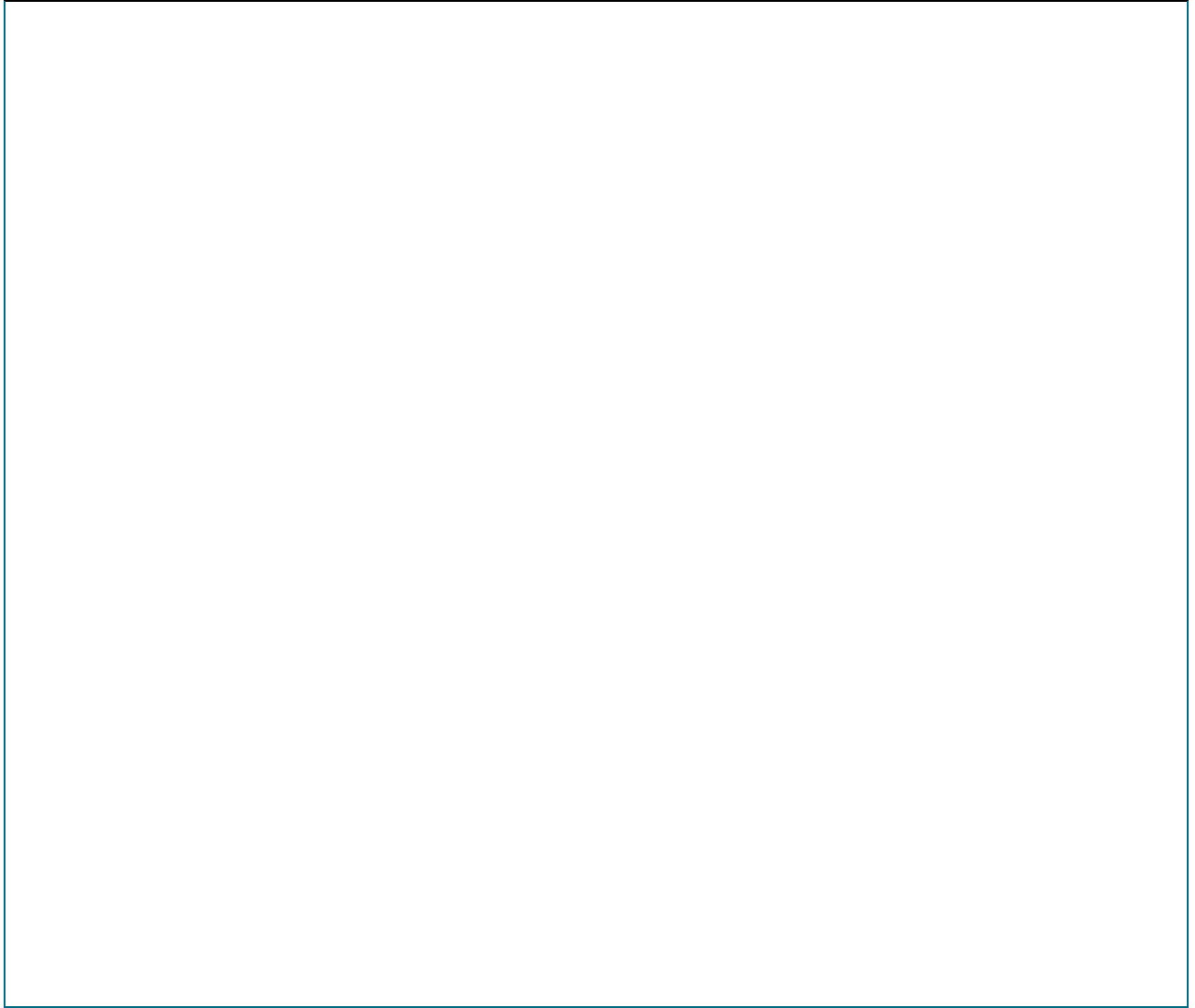
Week Three: Management Tips and Tricks

Which management tools, tricks and tips have you found to work the best to:

- Emphasize relationships over tasks in the team?

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- Recreate social rituals and closeness in the team?

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- Make consistent and appropriate use of your organization's communications means?

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- Make your virtual meetings more engaging?

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- Contract with your team on goals, respective roles, tasks and work flow protocols?

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- What specific management practices, behaviors and actions do you need to:

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- Use more of?

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- Use less of or stop doing?

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- In being an effective virtual manager at this time.

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- How do you need to coach your team members in being good virtual managers of other people themselves?

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Reflection based on Week Four

Week Four: Conflict Management in Virtual Teams

After learning about the best practices of problem solving and conflict resolution, what specific tensions are inherent to virtual team work:

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What specific tools will you be using to be a better conflict manager in your virtual/hybrid team:

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Now, consider this hypothetical case. Either find a partner from the cohort, or a colleague, a friend or family member to play the roles. If you intend to role-play make sure you randomly choose sides and *read your role only*. In case you are unable to find a partner, read both roles and reflect upon the cross-cultural as well as virtual collaboration related layers of complexity that this situation entails.

Art for Peace: A Case involving Cross-cultural Problem-solving in a Virtual Environment

Key issues (interest-based problem-solving; inclusion; fairness; cross-faith dialogue; virtual communication; non-verbal communication**)**

Learning Objectives from the Case:
- The overall objective is to stimulate discussion among the participants on the importance of cultural awareness in multicultural teams
- Risks of jumping to conclusions in the virtual space (lack of intensive communication: scarcity of input and lack of non-verbal cues)
- Inclusive practices in cross-cultural teams/ navigating time differences and understanding cultural sensitivities
- Importance of communication and asking "why"
- Flexibility and looking for third alternatives

Role A: Jim (Director)
Art for Peace- Headquarters- New York

You are Jim, Director at Art for Peace International, a non-profit that works for capacity building and peace. The organization has a contract with a very important donor and you are working under a very tight schedule of 6 months. You have recently developed a Global Art Program to sensitize people to the global pandemic's implications by using art like singing on social media. You manage almost everything in the program virtually and your teams stretch across three continents.

Ihsan is a program officer from Jordan who has joined your organization recently. Though she is very talented and used to send reports in time, she lately failed to meet the team norm of video-on during meetings, and she is behind on deadlines in many tasks. In your mind as team leader, having your

video under during Zoom meetings is vital as it facilitates communication by maintaining eye contact.

In your previous meeting you agreed on some hand gestures to use for agreement, disagreement and other reactions. You think it is a handy and practical way to facilitate virtual meetings.

Ihsan also failed to show up in two of the daily meetings you set at 6pm Jordan time, a timing you think is most appropriate for most of the staff as you have your staff scattered across time zones. That's the only time you feel is not too late for colleagues in Peru, India, a colleague in Fiji and those in the Headquarters in New York, as well as others scattered across the globe. You think that people need to accommodate meeting timings that are feasible given these circumstances, and that daily virtual meetings are important to ensure the smooth running of the flagship Art-based Pandemic campaign. Given the tight schedule, the need to respect deadlines is very important as well.

On the whole, you feel that Ihsan has not showed enough effort lately (perhaps she is working a second job?), and is not compliant with the team's informal norms. You have been frustrated by her absence from meetings twice, and her lack of responsiveness during certain times of the day.

You asked Ihsan for a meeting to remind her of the need to comply with the team's rules and to give her feedback on her seeming lack of effort lately; you also want to inquire about the reasons for this.

Role B: Ihsan (Program Officer)
Art for Peace- Country Office- Amman

You are Ihsan, a peacebuilding professional with over 15 years of experience. You have recently joined the Art for Peace organization. You were excited to work for Art for Peace, and from the beginning you have done your best. Since the COVID shut-down, all of you of course have switched to working from home.

You have been frustrated, however, by the organization's lack of recognition for diversity - specifically for your background. You never felt integrated into the organization's community: while Art for Peace celebrates the Gregorian New Year and the Chinese Lunar year, nobody sent you a card on the Hijri New Year that you celebrated a few months ago. You were also hoping that the day of Eid which is a very important day when Muslims celebrate the end of the month of fasting would be a day off for you. As an observant Muslim you have two important Eid days to celebrate.

You have been consistent in celebrating colleagues' special days, but nobody has sent greetings for the Holy Month of Ramadan that started a week ago. Just weeks ago Jim, your boss, sent virtual greeting cards to colleagues from another religious background celebrating theirs.

In addition, you have been reluctant to use your camera during meetings because you are fasting and the timing of the daily meetings is 6:00 pm. Following your Sect of Islamic Jurisprudence, you cannot put on makeup during the hours of the fast and you feel too weak by 6:00pm and you prefer not to use the camera.

Jim circulated some pictures of suggested hand gestures, to use in the virtual meetings and one of the gestures of crossing fingers signifying consensus is highly inappropriate in your culture -- you do not even want to think about it.

While you are willing to give up your nightly religious prayers of Taraweeh (which are optional during Ramadan), you prefer to have a lighter workload in the evening during Ramadan, when you are weak from fasting. The team meetings are planned to be just an hour before your Iftar dinner when you break the fast after the long 16+ hours of fasting. You really want to use the hour to prepare the food for you and your two kids. You think that the organization should know better and accommodate the specific requirements of the Holy Month of Ramadan like it does for other staff from other religious backgrounds.

You are asked to attend what seems like an important virtual meeting with your boss Jim, who did not clarify the purpose of the meeting ahead of time, which makes you wonder.

Reflection & Learning:

- What are the positions / interests in this case?

- Analyzing differences between thoughts, feelings and identity

- How to balance the etiquettes and needs of a global organization with the need to respect important national, cultural and religious identities

- What are some potential solutions or creative alternatives you can come up with?

- What have you learnt around the importance of language/ and cultural awareness when managing multicultural teams?

- What inherent risks does virtual communication have?

- What are some long-term communication strategies to ensure the language and the modes of communication are inclusive and culturally appropriate?

- NGO professionals should be self-aware vis-a-vis the cultural differences amon staff, especially religious dimensions that may provoke tensions

Debrief: some suggested solutions (you will have been able to come up with many more)

- Change the hand gestures to reflect cultural appropriateness

- Annually, share the Ramadan timing restrictions with the team as reminder; Ihsan to share what times to avoid; see if the team can work along those preferences

- ask other team members to accommodate the needed time change during this period. Alternatively, organize two regional meetings rather than one, at two different times

- Establishing rules of open and honest communication e.g. Ouch! rule

- Making special arrangements during Ramadan to share the workload differently

- Jim models team leadership by learn about the different religious observances of members of the team

Personal Reflection

How did you approach the case? What did you learn from it?

Week Five: Resilience

As you have seen in this lesson, virtual work exacts a psychological and emotional toll and may lead to mental health issues, stress and social problems when the employee does not find the right life/work balance. What would you tell somebody else whose resilience needs some shoring up? What would you say to a close colleague, friend, family member when they feel overwhelmed by adversity?

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What would you tell yourself if you were overwhelmed?

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 Is there any difference? If so, why do you think that is?

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What are your concrete behaviors, actions and tools to 'bounce forward' from adversity, i.e. not just bounce back?

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- Where could you improve? Be specific and concrete!

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How do you need to coach your team members in developing better individual resilience?

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Reflection on what you learned

The following self-assessment surveys are to help you improve your self-awareness of how good are you in stress management, how you feel currently and will help you plan to bounce forward and take care of your well being:

Self-assessment for Stress Management

Personal Reflections – Your Current Level of Self-Care	
List three work related stressors	1. 2. 3.
List three personal stressors	1. 2. 3.
List three ways you know you are stressed (signs and symptoms)	1. 2. 3.
List three ways that your loved ones/friends know you are stressed (signs and symptoms)	1. 2. 3.
List three methods at work by which you manage your stress	1. 2. 3.
List three methods during non-work hours by which you manage your stress	1. 2. 3.
List the first name of co-workers who are part of your work related support system	Co-Worker Name: Co-Worker Name:

List the first name of loved ones/friends who are part of your support system	Love One/Friend Name:
	Love One/Friend Name:

Checking Basic Emotional Needs:

Checking Your Basic Needs			
Basic Self-Care Needs	Yes	No	Goal
Do I usually get enough sleep?			
Do I usually eat some healthy food every day?			
Do I get enough sunlight, especially in wintertime?			
Do I see my medical practitioner at least once a year?			
Do I get enough exercise that I enjoy?			
Do I experience human touch?			
Do I make time for friendship? Do I nurture my friendships?			
Do I have friends I can call when I am down, friends who really listen?			
Can I honestly ask for help when I need it?			
Do I regularly release negative emotions in a healthy manner?			
Do I forgive myself when I make a mistake?			
Do I do things that give me a sense of fulfilment, joy and purpose?			

Do I make time for solitude?			
Am I getting daily or weekly spiritual nourishment?			
Can I remember the last time I laughed so much?			
Do I accept myself for who I am?			

Please reflect upon your results:

Reflection on Resilience

Based on what you learned, what will you:

- do more?

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- do less or stop doing?

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- Continue doing?

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Long term strategy: the future of work

Wrap up: Now that the course is coming to an end…..

What did you learn that will stay with you?

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3.

What will you do or change?

What actions do you plan to take to be a better virtual team leader?

Objective	Strategies/Tactics	Implementation Description
Objective 1. How to become better at trust-building *Make the objective SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound)*	Strategy 1 …………………………… Strategy 2 ………………………………	*Describe specific tools/approaches/methods you will use*
Objective 2. How to become better at virtual communication	Strategy 1 …………………………… Strategy 2 ………………………………	*Describe specific tools/approaches/methods you will use*

Objective 3 How to become more resilient	Strategy 1 …………………………… Strategy 2 ……………………………	*Describe specific tools/approaches/methods you will use*

<u>Thank you</u> for being a part of this course: you were an asset for your cohort, and it was our honor to have you!