

Hey! What's New? 2025-25

Remote Control: Tips from A Firm Founder and Remote-Work Trendsetter

In an article in the latest issue of the *Journal of Accountancy*, Brian Strickland writes about Michael Ly, who launched his CPA firm Reconciled in 2015 with his then-revolutionary work model – a fully remote firm. “The reality is, few leaders have a decade of experience leading a fully remote operation.”

Strickland quotes Ly saying that "when the pandemic hit, remote work all of a sudden became relevant. Everything we thought was impossible with remote work had to become possible."

Of course, Ly had already been doing the "impossible" for several years. He recently shared some keys to success with attendees of the AICPA Personal Financial Planning Summit 2025.

"Everyone in your company that comes and works for you in a remote setting, they need to have very clear communication and transparent expectations," Ly said. "The rule of thumb with remote work is that overcommunication is normal communication."

Getting employees on the same page when they're not in the same physical space isn't easy, he pointed out, but Reconciled sets the tone with a curated journey for employees on their first day, from videos that walk them through the basics to a mentoring system. "Most people had never had a remote-work job. They're just not prepared for it," Ly said. "So, you have a mentor or buddy to say, 'Hey, that question you're thinking you want to ask, go ahead and ask it. It's actually not a dumb question.'"

Strickland emphasizes that “leaders of fully remote teams shouldn't assume that even their seemingly common-sense expectations are shared by employees. For example, while virtual meetings are the lifeblood of communication in a remote-work world, it's important to carefully spell that out to new meeting participants.”

According to Ly, "it might be normal for everyone to show up just a little bit after the start of the meeting because they're grabbing their water, their cup of coffee, they're going to the bathroom. Well, in a remote-work setting, you might want to communicate, 'Hey, we have to start the meetings on time.' You need to look at your calendar, you need to click on Zoom or Teams five minutes early to make sure you don't need to restart your computer, and you have to have your water, your coffee, your bathroom break all done before you come.

"You'd think that's a common expectation everyone has, but it's not. If you run a growing remote company, all the people that come to work for you have different expectations of what's acceptable. You want to clearly define those things so you can have mutual trust and then hold people accountable to that."

Strickland writes that “how you conduct meetings is one thing; why you conduct meetings is the main thing.” Quoting Ly again: "To have a thriving remote team, everyone in the organization has to understand: Why do we exist as a whole company? Why are we doing what we're doing? From my laptop in my house, how do I contribute to the company's overall sense of purpose, direction, and goals?"

The vision needs to clearly tell employees they're crucial to company success, like Reconciled's mission statement that it aims to empower 10,000 entrepreneurs in small business and impact 100,000 jobs in their communities. And, in lieu of an office building where leaders can personify the company's purpose and signage in the hallways can reinforce the message, Ly sends out a two-page "culture document" to all his employees. "You work for a purpose and a direction that we all share together. It's really thinking about that intentionality so that everyone understands."

While it's important to overcommunicate how things work at a fully remote firm, the same can be said for less formal forms of communication. Ly learned that the hard way when a key Reconciled employee resigned. She was doing a great job; she just didn't know it. "You don't give enough verbal affirmation," she told Ly when handing in her notice. "That, for some people, is worth more than the thousands of dollars you can give them in raises or bonuses."

For more, see [Remote control: 3 tips from a firm founder and remote-work trendsetter](#).