BEST PRACTICES FOR MANAGING AND SUPPORTING TELEWORKERS
EVENT ID: 4954961
EVENT STARTED: 3/23/2022 1:00 PM ET

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Thank you all for joining us today for Best Practices for Managing and Supporting Teleworkers. I'd like to now introduce our presenter, Karin Hummel. Karin Hummel is a licensed clinical social worker in Virginia, Washington DC, and California, and is also an employee assistance specialist. She has more than fifteen years of clinical experience counseling individuals, groups, and families in hospitals and non-profit settings. Ms. Hummel has provided education, grief counseling, crisis intervention, and suicide prevention services to clients, and has expertise in performing psychosocial assessments. In 2021, Ms. Hummel joined the Federal Occupational Health Employee Assistance and WorkLife Programs as a field consultant serving the United States Patent and Trademark Office. And with that, I'll turn it over to Karin to begin the presentation.

Thank you. I can't wait to share the research for Best Practices for Managing and Supporting Teleworkers. For many federal agencies, they have offered employees some form of flexible work. This probably included the ability to work telework. So there is a good chance that, prior to the pandemic, you managed remote workers in some capacity. Then with the way that things unfolded over the past few years, it's almost certain that you have managed and/or will continue to remote workers. Today, how can be an effective manager of telework. How to avoid the pitfalls and what are the texts for best practices. For many leaders, this is still a learning curve but, thankfully, more information and research has been completed over the past few years that can help you to manage a remote workforce. So let's start with a couple of polls to see where you are all at in regards to your work remotely.

With the first poll, you're going to choose one answer that best fits you. How experienced are you with supervisor remotely, either being remote yourself or having remote staff?

Sorry, Karin. Can you go to the next slide? I think the poll -- you can see the question there. There you go. The poll is open. We do have about 20 seconds left to put your answers in.

The answers is I've been supervising remotely for years. I began remotely supervising at the start of the pandemic or I recently began remotely supervising but not due to the pandemic. A few more seconds.

Okay. I'm going to open those for you. That will take just a second to do that. So either between I've been supervising remotely for a few years or only started supervising remotely. A little bit more started due to the pandemic. That's a good split there. Great.

Let's do one more poll. How often do you currently telework? This is full-time every day. Part-time which, you know, we now call hybrid. That's a makeup of home and office days. And never supervised remote workers. So, again, you'll have another 20 seconds or so. Go ahead and answer there.

We have lots of answers coming in. About 10 more seconds.

How often do you currently telework?

All right. There you go. We'll pull up the results for you now, too.

So most of you answered full-time every day. A few more of you would answer hybrid and then very limited to say they've never supervised remote workers.

We'll get into presentation. Today's presentation, we'll review and identify ways to build trust in the remote workforce. We're going to discuss to discuss what it means to be successful as a remote manager and supervisor. We will review remote workforce communication tools, explore hour to develop expectations for remote workforce success, examine techniques to build and retain team cohesion in the remote environment and then we'll offer some suggestions on how to take care of yourself in the remote environment.

So one more poll. I know you thought you were sitting back already. One more poll to see what your thoughts are on this. The question is what percentage of U.S. workforce do you think worked priority from home before the pandemic T give your best guess. The options are 6%, 18%, or 24%. So this is prior to the pandemic. You have about 20 seconds there. Two years ago. How many do you think? What percent?

Okay. All right. Looks like about to be -- okay.

Majority of you thought 6%. A few thought 18. The answer is 6%. When it was captured, there was about 6% of the U.S. workforce working remotely in 2019. When captured again in May of 2020, this percent what jumped to 35%.

So, today, we're going to start with building trust and being accessible as a manager. These are two important elements of managing and supporting remote staff. Building trust is essential, essential for all managers and supervisors but also essential as remote manager. Employees who do not trust their supervisor or an employer, they tend to be less productive and less engaged in their work. A lack of trust from employees can lead to a lack of production, self-protection from an employee and this becomes a problem. And it is at the expense of the team and the team outcomes. So, for example, if you have an employee who is giving just those bare minimum responses, maybe when you ask the question, they are saying, yes, no, okay. Or you asked for some information and they only give that you bare minimum. You may want to ask yourself if you created a space of trust. The more they trust, the more they share, the more new ideas are developed and building the trust between you and your employee, you'll see this grow. Building

the trust between you and your employee starts with you. And the good news, though, is that there are several ways you can do this. So step 1 is to create those clear expectations. Trust requires a shared understanding of priorities. This starts with setting clear expectations with respect to consequences. What are going to be the consequences if they don't meet those expectations and remaining consistent with that. When everyone knows what is expected of them, then the dependability grows and you are seen as a trustworthy leader.

Some research has suggested that if you have some staff who work remotely and some staff who work in office to not use that working remotely as a reward or taken away due to poor performance. Again, you want to measure your employees by their expectations, by their performance. This remains the same regardless of where they are working. That's the only difference. So continue to address an employee he is work performance and this allows the employee to focus on the expectations thatyou have established.

2 is to establish communication avenues. That's another key step to building trust. Clearly and consistently communicate with your employees encourage them to engage openly back with you. Doing so shows that you are listening to them, that you support them and you support the work that they're doing. Open communication sends the message that it's okay for them to speak up when needed. One way to begin establishing these lines of communication is schedule you will individual and team regular check-ins for your employees. Use these sessions find out what is and what is not working. Do your employees have what they need to be successful to meet those expectations? And when they tell you what they need, if possible, take action. Engaging with your employees in this way and following through on the reasonable request shows your employees that you are listening when they speak and that you are a reliable ally, that you care about their success. Overtime, these interactions will turn into trust. They come to know they can rely on you to keep you informed and they also know that they can come to you with issues, questions, even their new ideas. They don't fear any consequences for their communication. They know it's encouraged.

Communication is really important so we will continue to review it throughout the presentation as well as how to set expectations. Let's move on to the next step.

Another key step to building trust involves allowing autonomy of your employees. Giving your employees autonomy allows them to think and act freely. They can make decisions and take ownership of their work. You trust that they're going to do a good job an employee is more likely to do their best work. Autonomy allows employees time to do their work. It's called the head down time. It signals to them that that they are in charge.

Avoid frequent check-ins. Instead of asking a couple of times a day or even a couple of time as week how it's going, establish at the start some timetable of check-ins. So, you know, today, you give the employee that project. And you say, hey, can I check in with you Friday before the end of the week. Maybe we check in at 2:00 and see how it's going. And then you check the next -- establish the next check-in. Remember, you already communicated to your employee that you

are available for them and that they should reach out should they need your guidance. You also set clear expectations.

Now that you have set expectations and a clear avenue for communication, you have given the employee their autonomy. The next way to build trust is to acknowledge the successful outcomes and productivity goals that have resulted from this. Stand up for your team by acknowledging their hard work and their great outcomes. Celebrate the individual and team successes. Once your employee sees that you are aware of their accomplishments and you celebrate it, they'll trust that their hard work is not going unnoticed.

With the remote environment, building trust means giving your employees the benefit of the doubt. Not being able to physically see your employee, we get it, that can be difficult. It's each more challenging when you can't see them and then, now, they are not meeting expectations. In these situations, it's easy to assume that they are not working. You can't see that. But to build trust, you also need to give trust. That means giving the benefit of the doubt to the employee first. So you have to believe that they are working.

When you address an employee that's underperforming, first asking them what's going on. If they are used to working well, acknowledge. Then say, you used to work great. Now it's slipping. What's going on? Ask them if they need some training. Is there training that they could use? Maybe they have been taken out of their usual responsibilities.

Say that you E-mailed tasks to an employee a few days ago and have not heard back. The first instinct might be to jump to the conclusion they are ignoring you, they are not working and you are getting upset. Instead of jeopardizing the trust and the working relationship that you have with an employee, it might be better to follow up and say, hey, did you get that e-mail I sent regarding the project? Okay, can you address it by Monday at noon? So, you see, this gives a gentle nudge to the employee reminding them that you can't have the task overlooked.it does not also say, hey, I don't think you are working. What it does is give a specific deadline, helps to prioritize the task. This will gain trust but lessen the stress for the employee and for you as a supervisor.

All right. So, then, neck step is going to be about productivity. Before we get to it, we have another poll to see how you think remote work has affected productivity. We'll get that poll up here. So, how has the rise in remote work affected productivity? You can go ahead and enter your answers. The options are there was a 15% decrease, a 7% decrease, a 10% increase, or a 5% increase. So the first two are decrease and the second two are increase. How has the rise in remote work affected productivity? A few more second here and we'll see what most of everybody thought.

Just one moment while I pull up these results.

So most of you thought there would be a 10% increase. So there was actually a lot of studies on this and a lot of varying data. Probably depend on the type of work but this answer comes from a

March 2021 study by Stephen Davies and Dave Guerrero and their research did show an increase. It showed a 5% increase with productivity with remote workers. Now, we'll go to that next step.

Don't assume remote employees are less productive which, happily, we see from the polls that you guys have either seen or acknowledged that increase. But managers, sometimes, tend to assume because they can't see their employees, they can't assume they are actively working. Again, that's not what research has shown. It is a misconception about remote working. You have seen the memes, maybe the comment with the air quotes comment, working from home. Or the favorite pajamas. But productivity has increased with remote work increasing. The same study found that research active engagement and work. So the time you are not sitting at the desk and reading the same e-mail over and over, on average, for remote workers, that was 42 hours per week compared to 36 hours a week for in-office works. However, the productivity remains the same. So why or how? Maybe consider this.

Have you had an office employee who struggled with productivity or quality of work? Do you know what your office employees are doing every minute of the workday? You assume that they are working on being productive just because you see them sitting at their desk? The only way that we know how employees are doing is to focus on outcomes. This is that last step that we have here for building trust. Instead of assuming that your employees are not doing their job, switch it. Assume that they are and let the results be the judge. To create trust in the remote environment, you need to remain focused on the outcomes of the work produced by the employees. Don't question if they are taking an extra 15 minute break because you don't know. You might think is the employee folding laundry? Maybe. Of course, you don't want 15 minutes here or there to turn into hours away from work but the point is don't get caught up on unscheduled breaks, what the employee is doing for every minute of the day but, instead, focus on the work getting done and it's on time and it's good quality. The quality is not diminished. And then, as needed. As you would always, address concerns with individual employees, one on one. And continue to set those clear expectations.

As manager, you already need to be accessible. Employees need to know that they can reach their manager, just as they would in an office setting. You need that virtual open door policy. Schedule regular and team check-ins. Regularly team check-ins prevents employees from feeling micro managing. Set some goals, successes. Allow time for questions. Check-ins should allow time for both you and your employee to review topics and situations. This should be a two-way communication.

Also, outline communications. Be clear in how your employees can and should reach you. For example, should they call if it's an emergency? What about nonurgent matters? When do you want them to call? When should they e-mail? When is it appropriate to send you a text or that instant message that we have on our computers?

Finally, share your availability. Let your employees know when you're going to be out on vacation, attending a training for a day or gone for an afternoon appointment. Make sure they

know who to contact in your absence and how to reach this individual. Sorry about that. My arrow ran away for a minute.

Let's move on now to some specifics in regards to communications and setting those expectations. As I said, we'll have a little bit more about those because it's important. As with any relationship, communication is crucial. It's especially true in the remote working environment. Here are a few key points for to you keep in mind regarding communication. First, model your expectations. You need to model how to communicate. Be mindful of how your communications might be perceived. So, for example, you decide to work late and you write an e-mail to your team at 9:00 p.m. but you don't expect or even want your employees to work at 9:00 pm. So, a good option would be to save the e-mail in your drafts and send this at 8:00 a.m. Or if you use outlook, you can schedule e-mails and send it automatically at a later time.

Also, what message does that send to your employees when you say, please, take your lunch break or scheduled break and then you reach out during those breaks. If the communication tool such as maybe an e-mail is too long, too short, it's not going to be effective. A brief communication can not contain enough details to really be engaged with. And too detailed can create disengagement.

An example of this is Zoom meetings. Maybe you two hours once a month. And that's not effective because your staff is tuning out after an hour. So you can switch and move one hour. It's the same amount of time.

One way to do it is to Shrek the right communication tools and avoid overcommunicating. Think about what communication tool is best for the information that you wish to share. Can the information you are about to send out be saved for the next staff meeting? Does it need to allow time for some of that discussion? Or it is urgent and needs to go out right away. Should the information that you want to communicate go to an employee individually or the whole team as a training. You establish a weakly e-mail and write it as things come up during the week send it on the same day each week. This avoids interrupting and overwhelming your employees with multiple e-mail messages throughout the week.

Also know and be okay switching communication methods. We send to use e-mail or instant message as a communication. If the message is long and has lots of different parts, or if it's turning into a lot of back and forth, perhaps a phone call would be better. And the same could be said in reverse. A quick question likely does not need to be a call. It can be an instant message or an e-mail. Also, don't forget some of the other advantages that we have, such as screen sharing to help an employee visually see what you're discussing.

Another key for manager communication in the remote environment is to say something sooner than later. As the supervisor, you need to know when to start communicating. Preempting a situation or concern before it has intensified is best. For example, you notice an employee's productivity or performance is beginning to slip. Ask them when they need anything. Don't wait to bring up your concern when they are facing a more formal direction.

And finally, avoid multi-tasking when you are engaging with your employees. Don't work on your computer or answer the telephone during staff or individual meetings. If you are fine that -- if you find that you are one who is easily distracted, turn off your computer, put down the phone. This allows the staff to see you properly engaged and model the same behavior because we hope that staff will do the same back to you.

Setting expectations. Again, these are two really key parts of the remote environment. Setting clear rules, expectations, and parameters for employees at the outset allows employees and managers to both gain and agree on a clear picture of the word standards. In addition, it helps avoid potential frustration on both sides. So just as those performance expectations define what doing well something looks like, focusing on the goals and productivity accomplishments with telework guidelines focused on what is and what is not acceptable while working remotely.

Here are some examples of categories with rules and expectations that you might set. So we have work sides. What are workload expectations. Can employees work at locations outside of their home? What if they are going on vacation? Visiting a family member but they want to spend a day or two working. Is this allowed? And if so, do they need to get permission to work from somewhere other than their regular remote location? And they need to let you know. Are there connectivity guidelines that they need to follow? Shore category to set expectations are distractions. Are there limits on dependent care during working hours? What about watching or listening to TV?

I'm an attendance is another category. There are core hours? If so, what are they? Some places allow employees to work eight hours. Others have a range of 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. if they need to. And some are very structures.

What if an employee runs an errand or goes to an appointment, do they need to let you know? Is it different when it's 15 minutes versus two hours? How does an employee report the schedule change to you or is that not something that you need to know? Information security because even if you are working regularly, you need to maintain that. So lock in the computer. What are the document storm and destruction protocols at home?

Finally, emergencies. Make sure that you review and update employee contact information. You probably need to check in during and after severe weather and definitely after a crisis situation.

Again, these are some examples of categories. Before setting expectations around telework, Check with your agency about if there is a distinct telework policy, ethics and guidelines. Ask what you can and can't ask of employees who telework. And gather information that you can distribute. Be clear and specific and avoid the temptation of overset limits. Assume that employees are working and working hard. Set expectations and set goals and discuss whether they are being met. If goals are not set, wait. Don't wait for two or more separate occurrences. Remember that remote employees work from home but the agency's policies and expectations still remain the same.

Now, we've discussed being accessible, built trust, have an idea on communication and setting expectations. All of these will help you manage and support your teleworkers. They can also, though, be key to build team cohesion. So let's discuss what team cohesion is and discuss ways to collaborate and team bonding. Team cohesion is when all team members are united towards the common goal. Strong team cohesion increases team morale, relations and performance. Teams with strong cohesion, they are more likely to succeed. So let's review some key points to building team cohesion. Communication. Sounds like everything is so important. But communication for team cohesion, it opens the dialogue between you and your team and also among the team members. So facilitate team cohesion and effectiveness through productivity, exchange of information. Encourage your employees to brainstorm together to connect with one another, to ask questions and learn from each other and to stay engaged as a team. Then establish guidelines and goals. As we discussed earlier, gentle guidance allows employees to define their rules within the team. Guidelines and goals create team cohesion environment like keeping the team together on the same page. If there is a big project that requires collaboration, set some general guidelines and responsibilities to ensure that your whole team is on the same page. As an added benefit, you define the goals. It allows the team a chance to ask questions and to brainstorm. So this generates more team cohesion. All focus is on the common goal.

This brings us to the third point of making time for the personal side of being on the team. Engage in small tack at the start of meetings. Maybe have a virtual chat session. If time allows, establish a weekly or maybe monthly -- I understand everyone is busy -- a virtual coffee break. Maybe have some fun trivia. These moments seem trivial but they are very important for establishing working relationships. It keeps the morale up amongst team members and that strong working relationship for morale maintains the team cohesion.

Finally, set parameters for team meetings. This means encouraging your employees to participate in virtual meetings. Probably with cameras on. Of course, be mindful that there are some limitations. Audience sizes will limit the bandwidth and the ability to have everybody on the camera. So the larger meetings, you can't have the cameras on. Sometimes, you see and hear about what's called Zoom fatigue and that is real. But not everything is a Zoom meeting but when they are, have the cameras on. Again, continue to assess communication tools and which ones work. Ask that everyone gives their 100% attention to each other. They are 100% engaged in the meeting, 0% multi-tasking during the meeting. Doing so ensures that the communication is there and is not missed. A team cannot be cohesive if during the times that they are together, everyone is only 10% focused on the meeting. Maybe they are responding to e-mails, writing up documentation or just otherwise engaged. So ask for their attention.

Now time to discuss some self-care. Why? Because to be effective as manager, you need to take care of yourself and model self-care for your employees because everyone will benefit. In addition, encouraging your employees to take care of yourself during work just as you would in the office continues to be important. Maybe even more important. Working remotely requires a decision on when to work, when you're going to work, ensuring boundaries between work and home. Here are some self-care tips that can help with that.

How would they start their routine? Maybe likely, you start morning with coffee and breakfast as you watch TV and news. Maybe you are somebody who goes out for walk and you take the breakfast to the desk. Whatever you do, ask yourself, what signals to me that I have now transitioned from work, from home into work? Without having a commute, what signifies that you have transitioned from home to work. That same routine.

Also, create a schedule and acknowledge that you have flexibility in remote work. So, maybe, you want to start work at the same time every day or the same time Monday, Wednesday, Friday and different times Tuesday and Thursday, due to how your work schedule is. Remember that flexibility. An example could be, you had a really bad night's sleep. It happens and you have flexibility in your core working hours. Maybe what you do is sleep a half hour, start a half hour later and work a half hour later that evening.

Also for home, set ground rules for others at home. When the door is closed, that means don't knock and don't come in. And set lunch break. Working from home could allow more time with loved ones. If you coordinate those, that may stop the noise from others while you are working. Do you need to establish a no-television rule? Or you can not hear it? What rules do you need to set with other household members in order to succeed in your remote setting?

In an office environment, there are breaks. You call them interruptions. A coworker could come in and show you pictures from vacation. Those are micro breaks. Micro breaks are considered 30 seconds. Just do few stretches after you've worked a few hours. Walk to your kitchen, get your tea or water. Take the time to text your family member. Make the time to make that dentist appointment. Studies have shown that mike crow breaks help you be more productive. Get outside and take the sun. Have a designated workspace. A specific room is ideal but even a designated desk space only used for work, that will help.

Take sick leave when you are sick. Just because you are remote does not mean that you have to power through when you are miserable and just want to crawl under your desk. Fortunately, being remote also will allow for quicker return to work.

Update your training. Talk to someone whose skill you admire for mentoring. Ask them how they keep them fresh. Finally, at the end of day repeat, turn off your computer, take a couple of minutes to stretch and breathe. If you have a separate room, close the door. Just in some way now, signify the transition from work to home. And keep these techniques in minds when communicating with staff. Remind your team when they are not working, they should unplug. Encourage them to develop those healthy habits. Even share successes with each other. They share with team members. You share with them. Now, another example could be at the start of the meeting, you ask everyone to stand up and shake out their legs for a few seconds before you begin. You are encouraging good work behavior. By establishing your own self-care, and encouraging your team to take care of themselves, this goes a long way to prevent burnout. It also allows for better productivity during the working hours.

We showed that productivity goes up, we show 245 there's ways for to you create a strong team cohesion. Practicing and encourage staff to take care of themselves in a remote working environment. Focus your management not only on expectations and outcomes but be sure to build the trust and be accessible and effectively communicate to create a happy and productive work environment.

As I mentioned, due to the increase in remote work, there has also been an increase in research on remote working. With the handout you'll receive, you will have some. If you are interested in learning more as you grow your own knowledge on effectively managing the remote work force, know the information is there. There's even podcast, articles from human resources from training industries and Forbes magazine. And, again, don't forget to also look up the telework guidelines for your agency.

Again, thank you so much for coming today. We're going to have some time for your questions. We just wants to also point out to always use and there is a strong research for you and your employee.

Thank you so much, Kaine. That was wonderful. I know that this information is very relevant right now so we appreciate you doing it. We're going to get to your questions in just a second. I just wanted to remind everyone that if you would like more information on this or any other health and wellness topic, the EAP is available 24 hours a day. So don't hesitate to give us a call if you have a very specific question about a unique situation. We're here to help. I just want to remind before we get to the questions that you still have time to submit questions if you would like. We'll get to as many as possible and we'll send out the slides and the resources that Karin mentioned 24 hours after this live session.

Karin, we do have a few questions. The first one is about something that you mentioned earlier in the presentation about productivity. So what is it about teleworking that -- or working remotely that increases productivity for some people?

Yeah, so good question. Some of what I saw when I was reading through the information is that some employees are using some of the time that they maybe spent getting to and from work. That commute time. They may give some of that time back to the workday. Even though we worry about home distraction, there is actually a lot less distraction with the employees. Finally the other thing that is interesting is that there is a lot of discussion about sleep. Remote workers seem to sleep more efficiently and, as a result, I believe that probably leads them to being more productive. They can focus better and get down and do that work.

I department think about that. That's actually very interesting. The next question is, what are some negative aspects to remote work?

Yeah. So I think that remote work, as we saw today, can be done and be done efficiently, but obviously, there can be some negative sides of working remotely. One of the big things -- and that's why it was an ongoing topic throughout even today's presentation, that communication

gap can occur. You know, we think about texting or instant messaging. Same can be said for e-mail where maybe somebody may read something into an e-mail for statement that's not there. So be sure to continue to communiqué, have the varieties of ways that you are communicating can help bridge the communication gaps. And also technology is so relied upon when working remotely. Making sure that employees have proper tools and training so that they are successful in using the technology that they need to use. Great. Thank you. The next question is going back to the things that you were talking about with the parameters or the expectations and guidelines. Someone is asking, you know, whether it's micro managing and it goes against building trust to require people to not have a television on, for example, in the background.

Yeah, I think it varies. If, for example, there is an agency where there is a lot of communication back and forth, it may be appropriate to explain that. You don't want them to have the television on in the background or radio on where other customers can listen in. Or maybe, they need to do a lot of reading and you have the radio on in the background, that may be a concern.

Several people asked questions about, I know that we can't require anyone to put their camera on or require them to participate in a certain way. But are there -- some people are saying it's been challenging to engage people when you are trying to call on them to answer a question and they refuse to turn their camera. Any advice on trying to get people tone gauge in when you do not want to require that they turn their camera and on interact that way?

You know, I think that, one, make sure that you modeling it. Make sure that camera is on. So that does not seem like that's the issue here. The other thing is to maybe individually address it and say, hey, I have not seen you on camera in a while, do you need some resources? Is your computer not working well? I want to make sure that there is nothing that you need to help if a sill date that. Encourage the communication as to why without being -- you can say, I wish you had your camera on because it's nice to see you but make sure to address any concerns that the employee may be having and ask those questions. Is your camera not working? Are there concerns that you have us your Zoom not working? Address that. Some people don't like it.

Yes. Every time, right. Sometimes.

A couple of questions about a similar thing as well about, you know, is there -- are there any other tips that you might have specifically when you are managing part of your team remote and part of your team is in the office?

Yes. So, one thing that can be challenging, especially for meetings, for example, is if you have multiple people in one setting, so if you had five people, for example, in a meeting virtually, and then you have five people in an individual setting, when those people in a group are talking, it is going to be very hard for those who are remote to hear. And they may feel disengaged. So you probably need to set some parameters on your meetings, for example. They have them individually, even though you have come together as a group. Another thing is to just be sure that your expectations at work are the same and that you're meeting with your employees the same. So you are having one on ones with both sets of employee at the same time.

Great. Great advice. Well, I think that we covered all the questions that have been coming in. So we can go ahead and end it but I do want to thank Karin for doing this today. This is valuable information and I want to thank all of you for coming and joining us and I hope that you enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you.

[Event concluded].