

# THE INSIDER'S GUIDE

## The Art of Teleworking

## About the Authors



Vicki Wrona, PMP, is the founder and President of Forward Momentum, LLC. She has over 20 years of leadership and project management experience, more than 15 years public speaking, and more than 15 years training and development experience. She has trained thousands of people, has mentored individuals and organizations, and has authored multiple white papers and blogs. She was selected to serve on PMI's committee to write and review the PMBOK® Guide 4th edition and co-developed the program that won PMI's Professional Development Product of the Year award in 2007. She has served on the Board of Directors for the Texas Soaring Association. Her passion is equipping individuals and organizations with practical knowledge and tools so that results – and bottom-line impact – are consistently achieved.

Tiffany Robinson is an accomplished full-time Instructional Designer and all-around boundary pusher. She has taken her 10+ years of Human Resources experience and combined it with her educational background in Computer Animation to build a diverse portfolio of exciting training materials in the Fortune 500 arena. Her specialties include multimedia design, (graphic, print, web, motion), virtual engagement, instructional design, adult learning, new-hire on-boarding, and engagement.



Since retirement, Bill Flury has been developing and teaching process improvement to help the next generation of project managers and systems engineers succeed by applying the lessons he has learned. He is a successful project manager, process improvement consultant and systems engineer with a lifetime record of 85 projects all on-time, within budget and with fully satisfied clients. He successfully developed major government information systems and taught project management and process improvement to government clients. Bill has published five books with practical advice for all managers, all of which are published by Amazon CreateSpace and can be found at <https://www.amazon.com/author/billflury>.

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## Introduction

Whether you are an old pro at working from your own personal castle, or you are just embarking on this new adventure of the digital age, there are always new challenges (and advantages!) to consider.

This eBook is written by Forward Momentum's most experienced workers-from-home, with decades of work/life juggling under their proverbial belts. They're sharing tons of tips picked up doing everything from running a successful business and managing multiple projects, to making the Great Transition from corporate office to cozy abode.

We hope this will help any of you who are thinking of migrating to your own home office, and those of you who may have had that choice thrust upon you.

Good luck!

# Debunking the Myths of Working from Home

By Tiffany Robinson

I am approached regularly both personally and professionally by people asking, “What is it like to work from home?” This is usually followed by a statement along the lines of, “I wish I could find a sweet gig like that”.

Before you go off thinking that working from home is the easiest gig in the world, let’s take a few minutes to chat about the realities of the situation.

I’ve decided to approach this by systematically debunking a list of “work-at-home” statements I hear on a regular basis:



(sorry)



*“You’re so lucky not to need a babysitter”*

This is the statement I hear most often so I’m debunking it first.

Let’s start with a mental exercise. Imagine bringing your 16-year-old to work with you. What would your day be like? How long will your teenager sit in the corner quietly and complacently waiting for your shift to end? Let’s assume there are one or two “challenges” that occur during their visit to your office, how would that impact your work for the day? Now let’s bring them back the next day, and the next. How about every single day? What will your work look like then?

*Now let’s apply that same scenario to a 10-year-old.*

*5-year-old?*

*3?*

*How about a newborn baby?*

*Now think about bringing multiple children with you.*

*How long did it take you before you began thinking about options for childcare?*

Working in a professional setting with the distraction of your children won’t be as productive as your job may require. The same goes for working from home. I do have a babysitter who just happens to be a wonderful stay-at-home dad and in order to successfully perform my job’s

functions I NEED to have my own space, behind a closed door where I can focus on what needs to be done without interruption.

Now, does this mean I don't poke my head out from time to time to say hello to the kids? Of course not! No one said there weren't perks.



*“It would be nice to be able to watch TV all day”*

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Boy would it ever! I mean if I could figure out a way to earn a decent paycheck just by surfing through reality television, I'd be all over it.

But the reality is, I was hired for a different job. One that involves conference calls, creative thinking, and some hefty deadlines. I can't imagine any of my job requirements would benefit from frequent intermissions to watch television. Furthermore, I have no idea how I would justify to my boss that Brittany, Megan, and Justin's love triangle took precedent over our client's project.

*So how much TV do I watch each day?*

About one hour before bedtime, and since I can only manage one a day, it had better be a riveting investment.



*“You work from home; you don't have a boss and co-workers to deal with”*

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I earn a paycheck as honestly as the next guy, which means, as you may have caught already, I do have a boss! In fact, my boss has a boss, and that person has a boss, all the way up the chain. And guess what? I also have co-workers! Being virtual means that I have a whole global department of co-workers in fact. Coworkers from other states, other time zones, and other countries!

Whereas you may have to “deal” with Susie Q co-worker’s constant tapping of her pen, I am considering cultural differences, scheduling etiquette, and how to best collaborate in a virtual conversation. Meaning my communication with my team must be on point, all of the time. If my boss, my co-workers, or myself is feeling the pressures of the day, one short-sighted instant message can bring down an entire project.

Working from home requires me to be constantly in tune with the “voice” of each team member in order to guarantee our collaborative efforts are as bountiful as they can be. So no, I do not “deal” with my team, but I am very aware of how much I need them in order to be successful.



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### *“I wish I could work as little as I wanted”*

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This is one of the biggest myths of working-from-home because working from home takes a fair amount of self-control to stop working!

*How much time do you spend on your morning commute? 15 minutes? 30 minutes? An hour?*

Just because I don’t have a commute, doesn’t mean I get to work later. It typically means I get to work earlier. The time that you are spending driving to and from work are hours that I am typically working. It really isn’t so bad. If I have plans to meet with friends, I’d have to wait until they came home anyway.

Additionally, I need to be available to work with a variety of different time zones, and sometimes that makes for a long day. While I have the flexibility to take on some personal projects throughout the day, ultimately I will work extra hours to accommodate for that.

The problem I run into most often is the inability to remove myself from work. Having a home office means hearing your email ding in the middle of the night, your phone ring early in the morning, or the tempting glow of the monitor at 2:00am that beckons you to finish that one last little task you forgot to do earlier. This is another reason to have a closed off room that is solely dedicated to your office.



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*“You get to take vacation whenever you want”*

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Whereas trips to the grocery store may occur during the middle of the day, my vacation time is limited and scheduled around my project times. Oftentimes months in advance. Furthermore, if my deadlines are at risk, my vacation gets cancelled.

*Sounds harsh right? Cancel your vacations if you are behind in your work?*

What it actually does is keep me on target. Vacation is important, and nothing is coming between me and a white sandy beach or a trip to the fresh mountain air. That means that I must schedule out exactly how much time each portion of my project will take, and then stick to it. I even need to schedule buffer time. If something goes awry, I'll put in overtime to get it done on time... but I'm not missing my vacation.



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*“I could never work a job without being social”*

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Neither could I. In fact, many people couldn't. Communication is critical in a virtual world. It is the single most impactful recurring event for a virtual team. It keeps us from becoming depressed, self-absorbed, and single-minded.

Earlier I said that we are required to be in tune to each other's "voice". The way we accomplish this is through consistent and frequent scheduled and impromptu meetings that span both professional and casual content. In order to form the bonds needed to have a meaningful working relationship we need to know how we each think professionally, creatively, and personally. Only then can we leverage each other effectively.

So, working from home does have its benefits, but can also be a challenging endeavor if you aren't a self-accounting, extremely organized, effective communicator... with a babysitter.



# Managing Virtual Team Members

By Vicki Wrona, PMP



I have always prided myself on my ability to manage and motivate my team as well as to get many of my employees promoted. I took the time to get to know their business and personal goals, to clear roadblocks, and to coach and develop them. However, it is a little different story when your team is completely virtual.

When I moved to the role of managing virtual team members, some aspects of my old management approach still worked well while others fell woefully short. Even the aspects that worked, though, had to be modified. For example, I couldn't walk around and casually talk to everyone to see what they were working on, where they were concerned, and understand the daily nuances of the work at hand. This made a difference when communicating with my new virtual team. I found that much as I tried, I couldn't relate to everyone as well as I used to. I started to be taken by surprise by things that happened (or more often, what didn't happen), to hear of obstacles that I didn't know were presenting themselves, etc.

What did I learn from this?

1

**Extra touch.** My general management style was still good, but needed to be modified to include good use of technology and more conscious effort to keep in touch with everyone. It takes extra time to talk to people and get to know them. It also means making an effort to schedule a few more and focused meetings. When working remotely, the team default is to stay separate and not schedule any meetings. Also, it is not enough for me to talk to each person individually; I also have to make sure they are talking to each other. Surprisingly, often they aren't.

2

**Increase feedback provided.** In an office it was easy for me to provide ongoing, informal feedback to individuals to let them know how they were doing and to help develop them. Remotely, that is more difficult. I have to make an effort to let people know what has been done well or what was not done as I expected and encourage interaction with that person. I have to create a feeling of trust and openness so the dialogue can occur even when I do not initiate the conversation.

3

**Additional planning.** I have to perform additional planning when communicating work to be done. This may include putting instructions in writing or creating more checklists than before. It may also mean creating processes for task management and completion, problem solving or conflict management. Sometimes, processes need to be created for things taken for granted in a co-located office. Processes for version control, hand-offs, checklists of the common errors in completing work may have to be created to produce a consistent, quality product among scattered team members.

4

**Use technology, but don't let team members hide behind it.** I had to adapt to relying a little more on lack of touch, such as using email, but not too much, because so much of the message is lost with this method of communicating. In today's society, the bigger problem is getting people *away from* email and IM and getting them to actually call and talk to another team member. Yes, more communications are conducted using email and IM, and much of it is fine and has served us well. However, more misunderstandings do arise when using this medium and I have to be ready to step in when necessary to coordinate a call or a meeting to ensure people actually talk to each other to work things out. Other tools such as shared sites or collaborative software are essential.

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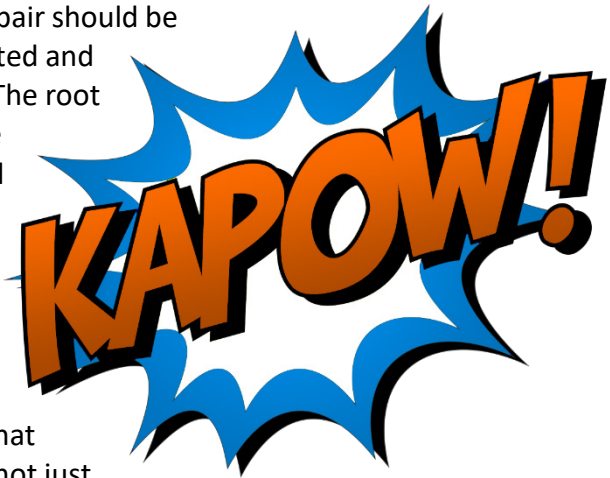
**Meet in person.** Make an effort to bring people together in person where possible. Have you ever noticed that you can build a pretty good working relationship with someone over the phone or over email, but once you meet, that relationship has moved to a whole new level? It's different. That's the power of face-to-face. Try to get everyone to meet each other at least once. Then the interactions are a little more personal and (hopefully) even better.

## Resolving Conflicts Within Remote Teams

By Bill Flury

A few years ago, I was manager of a Law Enforcement Assistance Administration project on which we had small teams working in eight different cities. Each team was tasked to work with the local police, courts, or corrections agencies to seek out and document ideas for improving operational processes or equipment. We found office space in each of the eight specified cities and relocated the team members for the full year of the project.

Each team consisted of two senior engineers. All team members were experienced senior systems engineers with strong backgrounds in operations research and information processing. In most cases they worked well together, sharing the lead on pursuing the various ideas that came up depending on their specialties. However, in three cases, strong differences of opinion emerged regarding what the pair should be focusing on. The differences of opinion became heated and I had to intervene to keep the work going forward. The root of the problem was that both team members at the problem sites had very strong different technical convictions about what they should be doing. They both considered themselves as equals, and were unable to resolve their differences on their own.



In each of these cases I had to work with the two to reach a decision based on the full scope of the project, not just their local situation (i.e., what approach would be best for all police departments, not just their police in their assigned city). Escalating the discussion to this level seemed to make it easier to find a solution that would be equally satisfying (or dis-satisfying) to both. When that worked, things were fine. It did not always work. In cases where one of the original choices prevailed, I had to reassure the team member whose idea was not chosen that my decision was a business decision, not a bad mark on his technical expertise.

After the project was over, during our “lessons learned” sessions, we discussed this situation. Some thought the escalation process that we used worked well. One person suggested that we should have designated one of the team members as the site leader at the beginning of the project, before we sent them out. Another suggested we should have had a steering group to discuss and resolve such questions. A third suggestion was to have three person sites with one person clearly designated as the site leader. The final suggestion from this session was that, for projects like this, we should pre-brief all potential site members on this problem before they go and ask them how they will plan to resolve such situations.

# Top 3 Survival Tips for Working from Home

by Tiffany Robinson

I've been in a medium-pressure, corporate, work from home job since 2012. I can honestly say I would have to be offered some pretty extreme benefits to consider going back into an office environment on a daily basis.

However just because I'm over-the-top happy in my work situation doesn't mean that it doesn't come with its struggles, and I've found that "isolation" and going "stir crazy" are probably the two biggest struggles that I've had to overcome.

And for the most part, I have!

So here are my top 3 survival tips to working from home!

## SURVIVAL TIP #1: SCHEDULE BRAIN BREAKS

Contrary to popular belief, breaks don't happen as naturally when you work from home. There's no one saying, "lunch can't get here fast enough!" or stopping by my desk to chat about "decoration ideas for little Bobby Sue's birthday party".



That means I can get deep into my work, hyper focused, and eerily productive. Many times, I get so deep that I don't come up for air. Hmm... what happens when you're underwater for too long and you don't come up for air? You see where I'm going right?

I've electively drowned myself more times than I can count. So, since I can't seem to remind myself to take breaks, I've chosen to create a virtual office mate that will do it for me!

### Here's how:

1. Using your calendar of choice, think about all the things you NEED to do this week and how long they will take to do. These are the boulders that you know are there and you just can't move no matter what.
2. Now set a meeting with yourself putting the task's name as the subject, make sure to set a reminder!
3. At the end of each task meeting, leave 10 minutes for a "brain break". Then schedule the next task.

4. Repeat the 10-minute breaks at the end of each task block throughout the week. If a task will take longer than 2 hours to complete, either break the task into smaller sections or schedule a break after 2 hours anyway.
5. Let your calendar be your virtual office mate! It will remind you when it's time to take a break!

### **What does this do?**

- Let's you plan out all the things you need to do in a week and keeps you on track.
- Calendar reminders ding and interrupt you when it's time to take a break, just like when Mary Sue wants to talk about Bobby Sue's birthday party.
- If you get one of your tasks done early, you've earned yourself a longer break. Go You! More productivity, and more YOU time!

So, what do you do on a brain break? Anything you want, really! Sit in a hammock, do some laundry, browse Pinterest, cook, garden, it's your time, you do you!

The trick is to remain hyper focused during your task times, and to respect your break times. You'll find yourself uber productive with no hint of drowning!

## **SURVIVAL TIP # 2: FIND AN EVENING COMMUTE**

When the day ends, you would normally hop into the car, make the long drive home, and think about your day. About halfway home you start to think about your evening and your thoughts transition from work to home-life. It's the beauty of the commute – it gives you time to decompress, de-stress, and leave work at work.

Only, work IS at home and it NEVER leaves!

The time it takes for me to travel from my office to my living room is about 12.2 seconds and I assure you that at the 6.1 second mark I'm still thinking about my office. (I'm probably still standing in it!) This means that, even if I close my office door, I'm not giving myself time to focus on my home life before actually being in my home life! And since there's no clear division, I wind up being in work mode trying to solve a workforce strategy while "listening" to my kids adventures in bubble painting at school. Not cool man, not cool.

So I decided to find a way to make an evening commute in between leaving my office and entering my living room!



**Here's how:**

- 1.** Leave your office space and close the door behind you.
- 2.** Cut through your living room and head outside.
- 3.** Find an activity that you can do outside for a **minimum of 10 minutes**.
- 4.** Do that activity every day. Period. No excuses.
- 5.** Enter the house and head to the living room.
- 6.** Ask your kids what colors they painted with today!

**What does this do?**

- 10 minutes gives you the time to shift your focus.
- Being in an environment that is outside of what you've been staring at for 8 hours forces you to observe and assess it (human response to change). That means you are thinking about your new environment, not your work.
- Since outside your home office is probably your yard or neighborhood, your thoughts will immediately shift to feelings of home, kids, neighbors, etc. Your thinking will quickly transition to your home life.

What's my activity? A simple walk to the community mailbox. Every day I take my keys and trot down the street to open my little box. See what's inside, enjoy the sun for a moment, and then trot back. It's something I look forward to every day because it gives me the sense of leaving my office by walking away from it, and on my return trip I can see my house ahead as if I were driving home!

**SURVIVAL TIP #3: PULSE CHECKS**

This tip shows up in just about every work from home article I write... because IT IS THAT IMPORTANT!

No one stops by to say "hello" anymore, when I fill my water bottle up at the fridge... I'm the only one standing there, and gosh darn it my desk isn't decorated on my birthday (although this year my husband took note of me saying that for the past 7 years and totally did me a solid, thanks hon!)

Socialization is another office element that doesn't happen naturally when you are at home. Furthermore, when I'm feeling less-than-productive (we've all been there), I automatically envision my team to be working super hard creating awesome stuff all the time which is demoralizing and makes me LESS productive (and also not true, they are not, in fact,



super productive robots). I believe this seclusion is the number one pathway to becoming the crazy cat lady.

“Pulse checks” can save your life and the life of a teammate.

These are random, and somewhat forced, check-ins that occur at least once a day with someone or a group of someones that have nothing to do with work and remind you that you are human, your teammates are human, and we all need relationships in order to survive.

### Here’s how:

1. At least once a day, **start** or **participate** in a random IM (Skype, messenger, group me... your team’s choice) conversation that is not about work.
2. Start the conversation with the words “Pulse Check!” so that everyone knows what the convo is about.
3. Goof off with your team until you feel human again. Chat about personal wins, stresses, house moves, gardening tips, latest blockbusters and your theories... NOT WORK.

### What does this do?

- Your team relationship will strengthen because you know more about each other.
- You can see how your teammates handle personal stresses through writing or phone conversations, which helps you navigate communication styles and shorthand when it comes to work issues.
- You will relieve yourself and your teammates of the demoralizing super robot shame.

So, there you have it: Your keys to beating the work-from-home blues! Now that I’m done writing, it’s time for a “brain break!” Oh look, I did it 4 minutes early... *Woo Hoo!*



# 5 Tips to Avoid Echo Chambers and Post-Truths While at Work

By Vicki Wrona, PMP



We may be familiar with the terms echo chamber or post-truths in terms of politics or the news (fake and otherwise), but have you thought about how it applies to our work? I believe that the echo chamber and post-truth is just as true at work and on projects as it is in politics, the military and the news. If you manage projects, manage remote team members, or work from home, don't let yourself get sucked into the echo chamber. Here are some tips to help you avoid that.

Before we explore this concept, let's define the terms. An echo chamber is a [closed environment in which beliefs are amplified by repetition and limited input](#), or an environment where [existing views are reinforced and alternative ideas not considered](#). Post-truth is a situation in which [people are less influenced by factual information than by their emotions or by beliefs they already hold](#). In short, post-truth values feelings over facts.

Now let's explore how they affect us at work by exploring how they impact teleworkers, projects and teams.

## Echo Chambers and Teleworking

When working from home, the loudest voice we hear is often our own, echoing in our heads.

In this case, the echo chamber effect can be magnified due to the lack of feedback, both in immediacy and in variety. Feedback is delayed, and the volume and variety of feedback is less than what we tend to get in an office. If our primary perspective is our own, we may be more sensitive to the feedback that we do receive if it conflicts with our perspective. This is where post-truths apply, because here we value our feelings about our work over the feedback provided by others.

When working from home, we are not exposed to the diversity of thought necessary to expand our perspectives, or the diversity of people that we typically encounter when going into a work



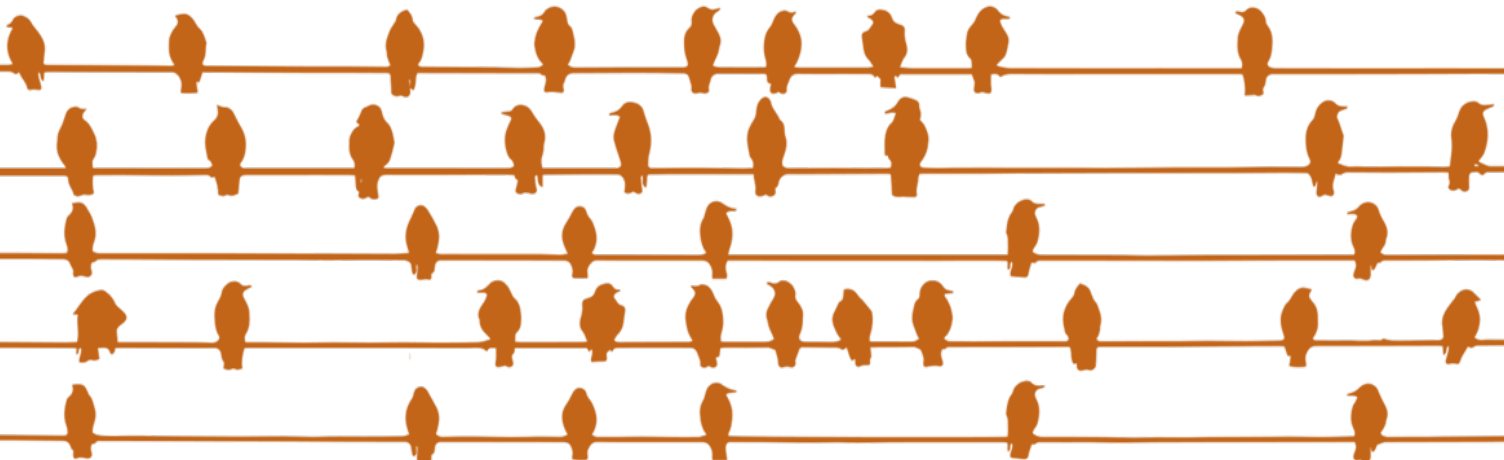
environment. Even if our peers' offices are located in a diversified center or complex, it is likely still only a small representation of the diverse perspectives that exist. For example, if your work is centered around professionals or those who have a high school or better education, the perspective and mindset of a large portion of the population is consciously overlooked, and eventually that perspective bleeds into other aspects of our lives.



However, diversity isn't restricted to cultural or ethnic diversity. It also applies to diversity in experiences, backgrounds, educations, skills, perspectives, hobbies, and more. If you make an effort to really think about this for even a few minutes, I'm sure you can think of many perspectives that you don't automatically get.

### Echo Chambers on Projects or in Teams

If you are working with teams or on projects, are you involving each stakeholder at the appropriate level? I can hear the quick and resounding "yes, of course" here, but are you sure? Take the time to identify all stakeholders for your project and create a plan that properly involves each one. That doesn't mean that all stakeholders are deeply involved, but that they are appropriately involved. Some will be involved more, other less. Not only do stakeholders include people or groups who are impacted by your project, but also those who *perceive* themselves to be impacted. Internal stakeholders can include your boss, project sponsor, customer, Finance, Project/Program Management Office, IT, HR, other interested functional areas, experts, project team members, and more. External stakeholders could include the customer, vendors, partners, special interest groups, grassroots or grass tops leaders, social media leaders, regulatory bodies, and more.



What about opposition stakeholders, or those who don't support your project? Truly listen to them, and work to understand their reasoning. They may have valid points, or they may not, but at least you know for sure. Hold discovery meetings with the opposition. These may provide a valuable perspective because they will challenge your beliefs and force you to think differently, possibly giving you a better end result. An added bonus is that you make a new career ally when you show respect for their point of view.

## Well-Meaning Co-Workers and Friends

Whether at home or in an office, is it possible that you believe you are meeting everyone's needs because your circle of friends and co-workers are trying to be supportive by telling you what you want to hear, or telling you everything is fine because they are conflict-averse and don't want to have to deliver bad news? If you need a dose of reality, find more diverse input.

They say that you are the average of the five people you are around the most, so choose wisely. If those five strongest influences in your life exclude important input and opinions, find ways to get other perspectives. Make an effort to get input from others, scary as that may be. None of us like to hear that our perfect idea really isn't, or that our performance could use some improvement, but we must be willing to go there to avoid fooling ourselves.

## Tips to Avoid Echo Chambers and Post-Truths

- 1 Realize you have a bias.** We all naturally gravitate toward like-minded people. According to The Guardian, [we are much more homogeneous than we think, and tend to interact more with people who echo our beliefs](#). That bias drives our thought process and influences our decisions.
- 2 Actively seek feedback.** Make an effort to hear perspectives that are different, and possibly the opposite, of your own. It helps not to hear the same message over and over. If we do, we actually start to believe that message. Others will then believe us because we are confident in our beliefs. But if those beliefs do not reflect reality, **our projects and/or our careers are in trouble**. If you are not presented with ideas, opinions, or facts that make you think, then your sources are likely not diverse enough. In addition to meetings, maybe automated tools, such as group testing, polling, or surveying, can allow you to see if you/your team's performance is meeting expectations for the wider audience.

3

**Evaluate and use feedback received.** Here is your chance to course-correct, if necessary. Don't get emotional if the feedback doesn't line up with your internal echoes and views. Think of this as an investment in your future or a business decision, rather than an attack on your character.

4

**Keep your team out of the echo chamber.** Encourage your team to bounce ideas off each other rather than relying solely on your input or their manager's input.

5

**Make sure you are not part of someone else's echo chamber problem.** Beware of those in higher positions who are perpetuating the echo chamber effect. If your boss provides a warped and incorrect view of what is happening within the organization, isolates you/your team so that they control all information regarding the project and team, or who forces you to adhere to only their perspective, then you are likely stuck in that person's echo chamber. See what you can do within the organization to get a broader perspective or other inputs. I realize that office politics may make this easier said than done. For ideas on how to do this, please see my eBook on [Overcoming Organizational Dysfunction](#).

In summary, understand that the echo chamber and post-truth impacts our projects and our work environment. Stop the echo and enhance your career by getting out of your head and stepping (a little) out of your comfort zone. Good luck!



## About Forward Momentum, LLC

Forward Momentum, LLC is a woman-owned small business (WOSB) specializing in project management training/consulting, instructional design services, and custom learning solutions for commercial, government, and non-profit organizations. Since 2000, Forward Momentum has grown to develop, manage, and deliver award-winning Instructor-Led Training (ILT), virtual Instructor-Led Training (vILT), eLearning, and blended learning programs physically on five (5) continents and virtually to all seven (7) continents. Our eLearning is rigorously tested by DHS Certified Trusted Testers for Accessibility and is Section 508 compliant.

To date, we have trained over 40,000 people, including over 6,000 on the Project Management Professional (PMP®) certification exam preparation. We co-developed the innovative blended learning PMP® exam preparation program that earned PMI's Professional Development Product of the Year award in 2007. We are a PM Training Alliance® (PMTA) Certified Training Provider (CTP), and Project Management Institute® (PMI) Global Registered Education Provider (REP).

As a boutique firm, we pride ourselves on our responsiveness and dedication to understanding your business, analyzing your learning and development needs, and driving efficiencies and growth. Visit [www.forwardmomentum.net](http://www.forwardmomentum.net) or email [dobusiness@forwardmomentum.net](mailto:dobusiness@forwardmomentum.net) to learn how our approach can optimize your learning experience, improve your processes, or empower your team.