Creating and Managing A Virtual Team during the Pandemic

It's hard enough transitioning an existing team from a physical office to a virtual environment, but how do you build and entirely new team from scratch for a virtual environment, when you've never even had any staff to begin with?

Helpful tips from **Christina Loewen**, Executive Director at **Opera.ca** on building a brand new 8 member summer team, *The Portfolio Artist Collective*, that bonded and got work done over the summer months at Opera.ca – virtually and in only 8 weeks.

1. **Be bold.**
   I think I always knew that I wanted to create a big summer team and had been joking of hiring a summer brigade of out of work artists for the first few months of the pandemic. But I opted for traditional route and posted a full-time job. After being inundated with hundreds of solid applications, something didn't feel right. It felt like on old world solution to new world problems. The moment I decided I was going to hire 7 people on different sized contracts, according to their strengths and interests, everything was right again in the world. I took the leap and sent the offer letters.

2. **Hire a team manager.**
   Don't under-estimate the amount of work it takes to coordinate a team especially if you are used to doing all the work yourself. Hire one person on the team to be the manager. I hired Andrew Adridge as the Operations Associate based on his background in catering, food and beverage and scheduling of event staff. He was right in his element.

3. **Use a communications platform, and the right tools**
   We chose Asana and a special Google drive for the team. We worked with Office 365.

4. **Give your team agency**
   Once hired, bring them all together on a shared assignment. Our team's first job was to name themselves. They came up with the Portfolio Artist Collective, as well as the social media campaign to promote themselves.

5. **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate**
   We had two staff meetings a week. Tuesdays were mandatory, and Thursdays were optional for anyone who had lingering questions or were unclear on any assignments.

6. **Create a Master "Jobs to be done" Document**
   I started this in Excel with just enough to get everyone started, and then it got built out over-time.

7. **Create actual IRL moments whenever possible**
   Our team was all over the country with concentrations in Montreal, Toronto, and BC. The Montreal and BC team found time to meet face to face, and the Toronto team attended Tuesdays at the office in the large boardroom for physically distant co-working.

8. **Relish the in-person time and prioritize relationship building over getting work done**
   Our in-person co-working days were so rare, a delicacy in a sea of zoom meetings. On co-working days, I tried to not to focussed too much on actual work, preferring to use the time to discuss large issues with the team, laugh and get to know each other, without time restraints.

9. **Be realistic and flexible in your expectations**
   There's a reason that many jobs begin with a three-month probationary period. It takes time for people to be trained and get up and running. Eight weeks is not a lot of time, although I was surprised how quickly things started to move along after the first few weeks. Before I knew it, we had two weeks to go and were finishing up projects, tying up loose ends, and ordering the t-shirts.

10. **Let go**.
    I'm still mastering this one. There is a mindshift from doing everything yourself to providing enough direction for others to take it and run with it. It's a beautiful thing to see so many moving pieces progressing, and being an orchestrator or conductor, rather than chief, cook, and bottle-washer.