

The Ultimate Guide

# How to Manage Effective Filipino Work Teams

HEY, ANNA! ARE YOU FREE FOR A CHAT THIS ARVO?



UH... WHAT IN THE WORLD IS AN "ARVO"?



## **Meet your Filipino Virtual Employee.**

Our entire workforce is Filipino. Or, at the very least, they live in the Philippines. Cultural relevance goes a long way.

This guide is not meant to generalize or tokenize Filipino hires, and neither is it built off of broad cultural assumptions. The concepts in this guide are based on widely accepted Filipino work culture – as well as my own experience managing a Filipino workforce for 15+ years.

If you start this new chapter with an open and flexible mindset, you'll find working with your new Virtual Employee truly rewarding.

*Tim Reading*

CEO, My Cloud Crew

# Business Process Outsourcing in the Philippines

The Philippine economy is primarily driven by its Information Technology – Business Process Outsourcing (IT-BPO) industry. The industry's continued growth has spawned bustling business districts throughout the country.

Source: dti.gov.ph

In a 2020 Doing Business Report from the World Bank, an annual study that measures the ease of doing business in countries, the Philippines scored 95th out of 190 economies across the globe.

The Philippine government has played an active role in improving the country's infrastructure and relaxing constraints to doing business in the country.



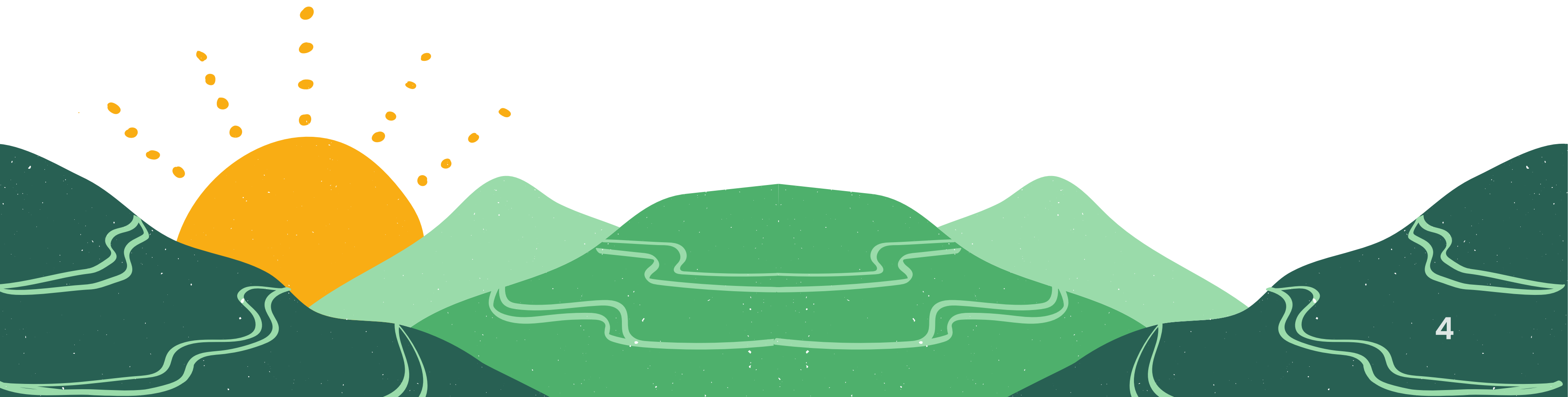
# Filipino values in general

The distinct value system of Filipinos is rooted primarily in personal alliance systems — especially those based in kinship, friendship, obligation, and business relationships.

Diverging from these values typically results in *hiya* (roughly translated as "sense of shame") and compromised *amor propio* (sense of pride or self-esteem).

Other elements of the Filipino value system are optimism about the future, pessimism about current situations, respect for female and elderly members of society, and fear of God.

Life experiences dictate the philosophy of the Filipino, augmented by other sources like proverbs, folk sayings and folk tales.



# Filipino values in the workplace

The Filipino business culture is hierarchical.

Decision making is typically deferred to those in higher-ranking positions. Negotiations often progress slowly, as Filipinos like to check in on how their colleagues feel before arriving at a group consensus.

Westerners are used to calling their superiors by their first names. Most Filipinos observe a clear hierarchy in the workplace and address their superiors as “ma’am” or “sir” – even if you insist otherwise. It’s simply their way of being polite and showing respect.

Filipinos are deeply protective of their reputation in the workplace. Great emphasis is given to *hiya* and *amor propio*.

Networking is not done passively. Filipinos heavily invest time and effort in cultivating relationships. Personal contacts are considered crucial to professional success.

Family takes priority above most things, in both a personal and professional context. The everyday language of Filipinos shows how rooted family values are to them, as they will sometimes call their colleagues *ate* (older sister) or *kuya* (older brother).

# Practical Tips

# Give clear instructions

You'll be communicating with your VE largely over chat and email, so try not to leave anything out when assigning tasks. Encourage your VE to ask questions or get clarification.

Avoid using slang. Most Filipinos speak English fluently but may not be familiar with certain Western colloquialisms. A lot of context can be lost in translation.



# Write a clear job description – and try to stick to it

Most Filipinos will often go above and beyond their job description.

It's important to note that this can become counter-productive.

The most experienced VEs often specialize or niche down, so expecting them to work as a one-person team will make employee morale suffer.





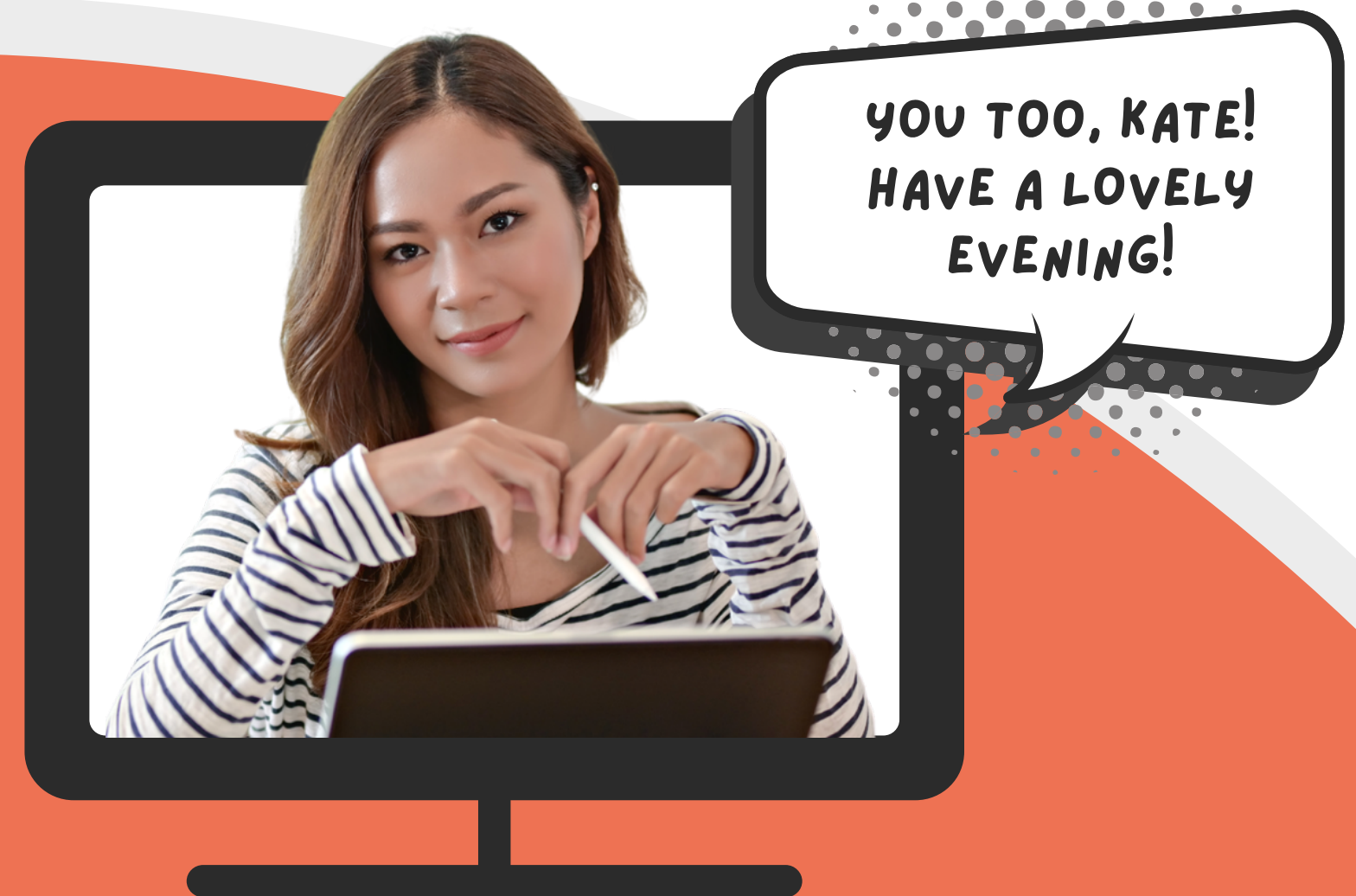
# Respect agreed-upon working hours

Your VE may occasionally go above and beyond what is expected of them, but overtime work may not always be welcome. Evenings and weekends are usually reserved for family and friends, and many Filipinos attend church on Sundays.

By all means, delegate plenty of relevant tasks to your VE during their working hours. But always keep in mind their need for work-life balance.

**UTC +8**

Philippine Time (PHT)



# Be direct – but kind – when giving out negative feedback

The key to giving criticism is to be constructive, not corrosive.

Choose your words carefully, and avoid calling into question your VE's intelligence. Emphasize facts, not feelings. Focus on the fix.

You might want to try the Feedback Sandwich method: start with a positive comment, followed by the negative feedback, then wrap up with another positive comment.

## **THE FEEDBACK SANDWICH**

### **TOP SLICE OF TOAST -->**

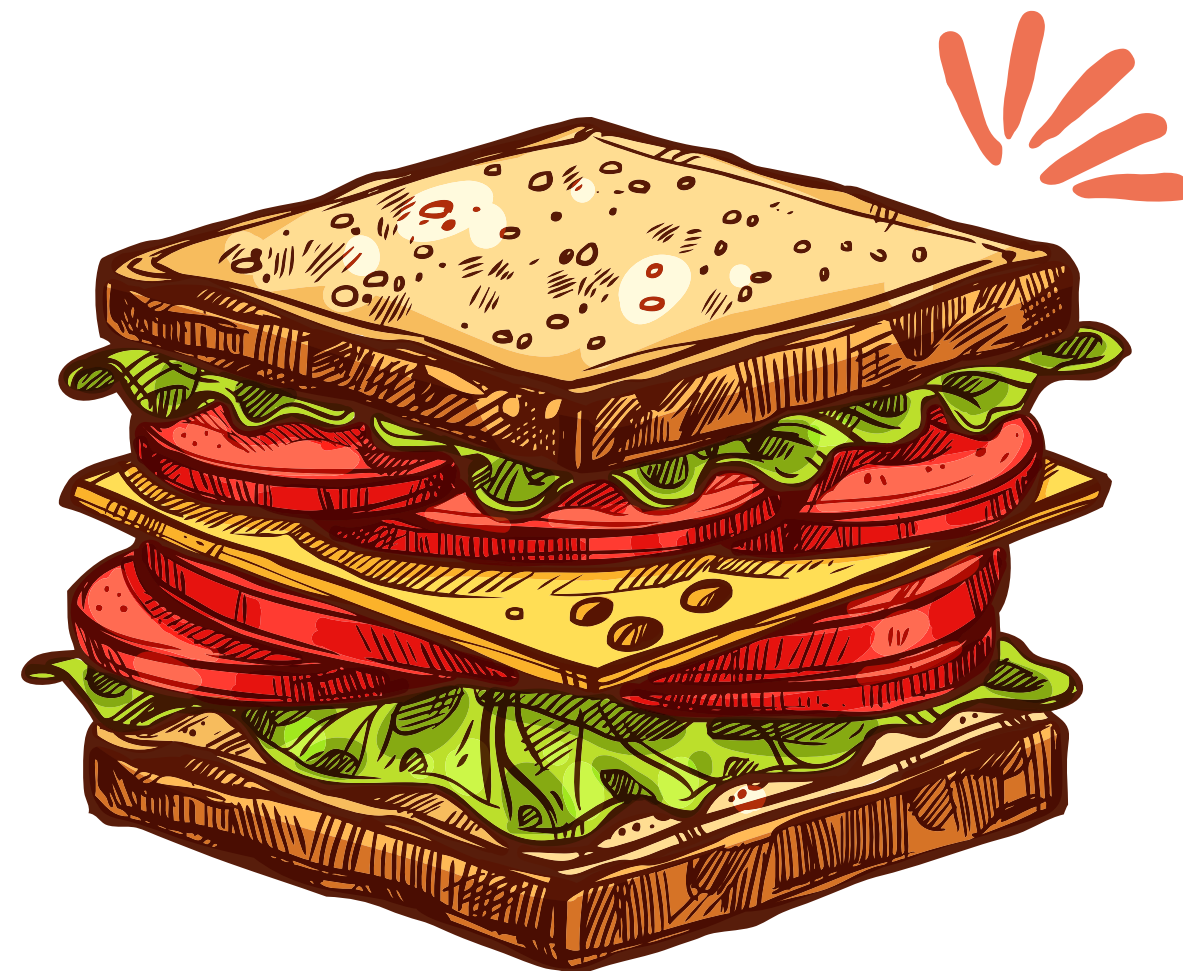
"I enjoyed reading your most recent article."

### **MEAT-->**

"It's too generalized, though. There needs to be more specific examples."

### **BOTTOM PIECE OF TOAST-->**

"Well done on the first draft! I can't wait to see the final article."



# Reprimand in private

If you need to reprimand your VE for making a serious mistake, don't do it during a Zoom conference call or over the group chat. These are surefire ways to make your VE resent you.

East Asians aren't the only ones who place great importance in "saving face."

Instead, call or message your VE privately to discuss what they did wrong and how you would like it addressed.



# Start and end meetings with "water cooler" conversation

Filipinos are known for their warmth. It's quite common for some of them to engage in a little chitchat before and after a business meeting. They might ask about each other's weekends, family members, etc.

They will often be eager to get to know you and may ask questions about your personal life. This may come across as direct or intrusive, but it's not intended that way. Feel welcome to ask questions, too!



# Read between the lines

In contrast to low-context Western cultures where things are relatively straightforward, the Filipino work culture is highly contextual. A "yes" and "no" are often not absolute and could mean anything from "yes, but..." to "maybe."

What isn't said out loud can instead be communicated through body language or with facial expressions – such as raising both eyebrows for affirmation, and opening the mouth widely for clarification.

Over time, it will become easier to recognize these contextual cues.

Because they can be preoccupied with avoiding *hiya* (a sense of shame), some Filipinos will not directly refuse a request or contradict something you say, even when they don't agree with you.

Listen to what they say, but also pay close attention to what they *don't* say (or implicitly mean).

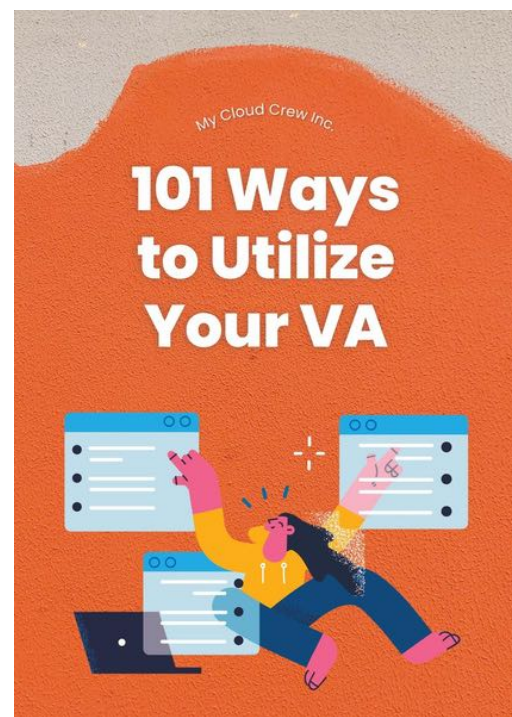


# Other guides in this series



## How to Onboard Your Remote Employee

In-person onboarding and remote onboarding are fundamentally the same. But there are potential constraints to consider when onboarding new hires across time zones.



## 101 Ways to Utilize Your Virtual Assistant

An essential guide for startups and small business owners with helpful insights on how to grow your business and tips on utilizing virtual support services for competitive advantage.

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