



How to Keep Employees Engaged Remotely

According to Gallup, 43% of U.S. employees work remotely some or all the time, and with the current COVID-19 outbreak, that number has risen dramatically. Remote workers can be more productive and profitable than their in-house counterparts, according to several studies, but many employees and managers thrust into remote work are grappling with understanding what is going to happen and how to make the new arrangement work.

These suggestions can aid in the transition and in maintaining a productive level of engagement.

Stay Calm and Positive

This sudden change in working expectations and environment coupled with the economic struggles will increase people's anxiety, and they are going to look to you to be a calming presence. Understand it is OK for you to feel anxious and stressed but find a way to be that rock of positivity for your staff moving forward. You are going to have to offer more support and encouragement to calm your staff.

Focus on Small Wins

One of the biggest struggles in this current situation is people developing a sense that they can't do anything to control or change the situation. This will lead to a sense of learned helplessness that can limit productivity. A leader looks for tasks and duties that will most certainly have a positive outcome so the group can feel a win. These small wins will instill a positive feeling and help to prevent distressing thoughts from becoming overwhelming.

Don't Leave Them on the Island Alone

Make sure to check in with your staff daily. The COVID-19 virus is bringing about regular change, and that means that the lives of your staff are changing every day. It is good to schedule a formal time of the day to check in with people as a group. The purpose of these huddles is to see what people are working on and if there is anything that people can do to assist someone else. To keep the focus on work during the huddles, make sure to schedule informal times to connect either via video chat, instant messenger, or email. This will help to calm the extroverts in the office. Keep the lines of communication open, honest, and transparent.

Encourage Self Care

We may feel a lack of control right now, but it is important to remember that we only have control over ourselves and nothing else. This means that as leaders we need to encourage our people to turn off the computer, close the emails, and get off the clock. Challenge people to go for a walk, get some sleep, and abide by their normal boundaries. They will need that separation to rejuvenate their hearts, minds, and bodies.

The Village EAP is taking COVID-19 very seriously and we are working to provide the best continued services to you. If you feel like you or an employee could benefit from talking to a counselor and have an EAP contract, please contact The Village EAP at 1-800-627-8220 to access your free and confidential sessions. We are here so you don't have to go it alone.

Be Flexible

Life is still happening and probably in a more intense manner because now there are kids, spouses, and/or parents in your employees' workspace. As a leader, make sure your staff knows that you are less concerned about the hours worked and more concerned about the results. This means that maybe someone takes the morning off to help their children with schoolwork and works in the evening to accomplish the tasks needed. The need for flexibility may mean that projects get extended, so consider this when creating priorities and deadlines.

Reassure Everyone

This situation lacks the level of clarity that we are used to, and people are going to need to have reassurance. For example, offer support to an employee who is sharing their feeling of concern with an assurance that the conversation will remain confidential. Provide reassurance that they are doing good work, or state clearly and repeatedly that you are doing everything you can to guarantee they will not be furloughed or laid off. Your staff is looking for you to be strong. This means offering them support and helping them to focus on things that they have control over rather than the things they don't have control over.

Show Gratitude

Gratitude is a natural anti-depressant, which means that we need more and more every day. As the leader, show your people that you value them not just through words, but actions. Here are some examples of what we can do to show gratitude:

- Send each employee a note or email telling them how much you value them, including details.
- Give them an afternoon off (which is easier now that they are working from home).
- Just take time to check in on them.

In showing gratitude, it is important to also recognize that people are not alone in the struggle. If you can, recognize their families. (They're probably not used to spending this much time together!) If you are financially able, send them a gift card for a food delivery service, a code for an on-demand Redbox rental or maybe a toy for their children to encourage more enjoyable quality family time.

References:

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