

7 Ways to Keep Remote Teams Engaged

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Raise your hand if you thought at the beginning of 2020 that your organization would be working 100 percent remotely today. I'd venture to guess there aren't a lot of raised hands out there.

We've all had to be agile in our approach to work environments this year, from where work gets done to the tools that enable it. With a growing number of employees working from home, small businesses have embraced the benefits of remote work.

But working away from the office can make some employees feel isolated from their team, leading to lower engagement, lower productivity, and higher turnover rates. To prevent these problems, you need to know how to keep remote teams involved in what's going on. Here are a few tips and best practices on how you can keep everyone on your small business team connected.

7 ways to engage teams working from home

When employees are [highly engaged](#), productivity rises 17 percent, while turnover falls 59 percent. If your small business depends on a remote work force, it's critical to know how to work with employees who work from home.

So how can you better engage remote employees? You don't have to think too much outside the box because many of the strategies for on-site employees work well for remote workers too. And when all else fails, you can use technology to help bridge the distance between remote workers.

Here's more about how to engage remote employees.

1. Establish communication channels during the hiring and onboarding process

When you're working with a remote team, you need to make the most of your available communication channels to offset a lack of in-person contact.

For employees who are full-time remote workers, it's important to establish reliable communication patterns early during the hiring and onboarding process. Taking this step early can help start off your relationship with remote workers on the right foot. Let prospective and new hires know what communication tools your company expects them to use. Train them on the tools and procedures they need to know, and share best practices.

At Cisco, we drink our own champagne, using [Webex](#) for team and one-on-one video meetings, messaging, file sharing, and calling. Collaboration helps keep everyone on the same page and provides much needed (video) face-time with our teammates. Small businesses can implement these communication practices from day one by conducting video interviews with hiring prospects.

2. Offer flexible work hours

A FlexJobs [survey](#) found that before COVID-19, many work-from-home employees sought remote job opportunities for a better work-life balance or because they had family obligations that demanded their time.

Now that most of us are in remote work environments that can be a bit chaotic, not to mention exhausting, flexibility is a necessity. Offering your teams flexible scheduling can help keep them more engaged with their work. Flexible work hours can also promote higher productivity.

And don't forget the [power of technology](#) to aid in establishing and maintaining that work life balance. From apps on mindfulness to effectively using calendars to ensure that employees are taking breaks throughout the day, embrace the technology at your disposal to keep everyone engaged.

3. Assign new workers a mentor

Onboarding remote workers can be a bit of a challenge when it comes to forming personal connections with managers and teammates. One best practice is to assign a contact person or mentor to each new remote worker. (Assigning a mentor is a best practice for traditional offices too!)

Relationships with mentors give workers a personal connection to your company and culture. These relationships also can be a source of support, feedback, and guidance. Mentors can help workers learn procedures, answer questions, and overcome challenges. They can also provide much needed introductions to colleagues and insights to other areas of the company. These connections can prove invaluable as new employees look for new projects and opportunities as they grow with the company.

4. Hold periodic video conferences

When working remotely, it can be easy to fall into a rhythm of asynchronous, text-only communication. Even with the best gifs and emojis, this type of communication can feel impersonal. You can offset it by using [videoconferencing](#) for more face-to-face interaction.

Encourage your employees to hold regular video conferences. Group or one-on-one meetings can provide opportunities for team members to pick up on nonverbal cues, which is key, considering [70 to 93 percent of communication is nonverbal](#). In addition to forming closer relationships with your peers, you can also share content and better collaborate with video chat tools, and record conversations to share with those who cannot be present.



5. Encourage social media interaction among team members

Social media is another technology tool you can use to interact with remote workers. You can set up social media discussion groups for your team both on company intranets and on public platforms such as LinkedIn. Groups can be devoted to company-related topics as well as social topics.

For instance, workers might start a group where they discuss their favorite sports, movies, books, or recipes. Employees can socialize online in these types of groups, which can serve as a virtual water

cooler. Social media can be a helpful tool for team building exercises, such as group picture sharing, personal fact sharing, and trivia quiz games.

6. Hold performance reviews

On-site workers have easier access to daily guidance and feedback from coworkers and supervisors about their performance. However, remote employees often need to make extra efforts to receive this type of support. One way to overcome this challenge is to ensure that both on-site and remote workers receive periodic performance reviews.

Performance reviews give workers an opportunity to receive input from supervisors and the chance to ask for assistance. They also create an opportunity to give praise and rewards for a job well done.

7. Offer career advancement opportunities

Performance reviews can be used as opportunities to discuss worker career goals and to express support. Employers can boost remote worker engagement by taking proactive steps to support career advancement. Mentorships, employer-sponsored training programs, certifications, and support for continuing education can all help communicate that employers care about advancing the careers of remote workers.

Keep your remote team engaged to maintain high productivity

Knowing how to keep remote teams engaged can help you promote [higher productivity](#) and reduced turnover. With the strategies outlined above, you can help your work-from-home employees stay engaged. Making the extra effort to keep remote workers engaged will not only show in your company's bottom line, but also your employees' well-being.