

10 ways to increase remote employee engagement

Savvy organizations have always been concerned about employee engagement. Engaged employees with strong connections to their company, and the work they perform for it, typically exhibit greater productivity, loyalty, and morale. For the employer, this satisfaction translates into increased retention and a reputation as a great place to work.

The COVID-19 pandemic, though, has brought additional challenges to employee engagement. Employers need to think differently about the issue as they continue to deal with remote teams operating fully or partially from home during a global crisis. What worked before may need changing or tweaking.

“It’s no longer enough to set up a foosball table and a craft beer tap in the office and call it a day,” says Mads Fosselius, CEO of [Dixa](#). “Employers need to focus on their employees’ mental health, flexible workspaces, clear career paths, the opportunity to grow and learn, and most importantly — prioritizing listening to employee cares and concerns. This is crucial to be able to attract and retain a sufficient talent pool in a new and very competitive time.”

Employers also must get rid of notions that remote employee engagement is a temporary issue. Dealing successfully with it now bodes well for the years to come.

“At the end of the day, there’s no putting this genie back in the bottle: Remote working will increasingly be an expectation employees will have of their employers,” says Terry Traut, CEO of [Entelechy](#). “Many leaders have used 2021 to establish new methods of communicating with and developing their employees; those leaders — and their employees — will continue to thrive in new situations. Other leaders, specifically those who merely muddled through the pandemic holding out for the return to normal, will find themselves left behind in this new world we’re all living and working in. The lessons learned during and from the pandemic will be valuable lessons for all future work moving forward.”

How might companies go about building remote employee engagement? Here are 10 strategies.

1. Utilize technology to the fullest

Staying in touch is no longer as easy as gathering everyone in a conference room or dropping by someone’s cubicle for a chat. Take advantage of the full range of collaboration tools and communication channels available to keep interaction flowing.

Video conference as a staff or one-on-one, being sure to keep cameras on to enhance personalization and view body language. Cloud-share files to promote real-time collaboration. Use project management software so everyone can see where things stand, including who is responsible for what. Set up a Slack channel for casual conversation that mimics hanging out at the water cooler. Send an email to inquire about how someone is doing. And don’t dismiss the value of a good old-fashioned phone call.

2. Keep remote employees in the loop

Technology particularly proves a godsend when it comes to ensuring the same news gets delivered to all workers at the same time. Remote workers should never feel that they are “the last to know.”

“Poor communications impacts employee engagement by making team members feel removed from decisions and devoid of any sense of ownership. In many ways, poor communication — or a lack of communication — signals to someone that they’re not valued enough to be included,” says Carlos Castelán, managing director of [The Navio Group](#).

For written announcements, send everyone an email blast at the same time. If you want to announce something important in real-time, instruct all employees to join a Zoom call from the office or from their off-site location.

3. Provide remote workers with what they need to do their job

A remote employee eager to work on an assignment will quickly become discouraged if she sits down at the computer and discovers an obstacle. Maybe nobody assigned her login credentials, she doesn’t have access to a client file because it wasn’t done on the cloud, or the next step of a project requires managerial approval that she asked for two days ago but still has not received. Such scenarios frustrate employees and kill their momentum.

Try to anticipate potential pitfalls and deal with them beforehand. As part of this effort, ensure each remote worker knows who to go to for various problems and has their up-to-date contact information. Workers feel empowered and supported when they can call a specific person in the tech department for a computer problem or contact a knowledgeable individual in HR when there is a paycheck concern.

Pay especially close attention to new hires. People are highly impressionable during their early days on a job. Failing to provide them with the necessary tools can have long-term consequences. Nobody wants to come into a new role excited only to feel helpless and confused. Establish a solid onboarding program that enables new employees to start doing meaningful work from day one. Assign a mentor to each new worker. This seasoned employee can answer questions, offer encouragement, and help the newbie better understand the company culture.

4. Give each remote worker individualized attention

An employee should never feel that out of sight is out of mind. Make a point of conducting one-to-one check-ins. As remote workers often worry if they are doing things “right” during these challenging times, offering feedback and instruction will help ease concerns. You can also use the time to remind individuals of the bigger picture and their specific role in helping the company succeed. Take a moment to learn about the person’s life beyond work, too. Employees appreciate your concern for their well-being and the insight aids in truly understanding what someone has on her plate.

“Listen and pay attention,” Traut says. “We’re all going through a different journey together, so it’s easy to lump everyone together. Don’t. Some employees are struggling with kids home from school. Others with a stricken parent. Others with the fatigue of it all. Some are itching to get back into the office while others are perfectly content working from home. Listen to each and respond to each.”

5. Encourage flexibility

In many ways, remote work looks a great deal like in-office work. Employees have duties and deadlines to fulfill regardless of location. But since remote work does hold the potential for structuring responsibilities in ways that promote better work-life balance, let your remote workforce benefit from greater control over their workday.

While there will be times when they must be available for meetings or other scheduled activities, let them manage the rest themselves as long as they continue to meet established benchmarks.

“It is crucial to give flexible working hours to employees and not limit them to sit in front of the screens with ongoing video-conferencing throughout the working hours as this will make them feel trapped and burned out. Because of this, employees are more likely to lose interest. Thus, it is important to give them a free hand and let them do things as per their own comfort level. However, it is important to set expectations and ask the employees to fulfill those expectations,” says Marilyn Gaskell, founder and business leader of [TruePeopleSearch](#).

And when you say you want people to manage their time as they see fit, mean it. You’ll destroy trust by micro-managing or trying to “catch” someone away from his home office environment.

6. Respect work-life balance

Remote employees run the danger of never truly feeling “away from the office.” Just because someone works and lives at the same location does not mean he is on-call 24/7. Avoid intruding in the evening and on weekends. Look for signs of burnout, engagement decreases as stress increases. Make it clear that every worker should make time to attend to well-being, especially during these challenging times. Encourage all employees, regardless of location, to use the PTO to which they are entitled.

7. Solicit feedback from your virtual team

Want to know how your employees are doing and what would increase their job satisfaction? Try asking. Talk as a group or one-on-one. Distribute surveys asking about employee experience and how it could be improved. Hold virtual office hours in which anyone can voice concerns or suggest initiatives. Most importantly, do what you can to act on what you hear.

As Traut notes, “This global health crisis has shown us that employee engagement is so much more than comment boxes, monthly happy hours, and ping pong tables in the breakroom. Employees don’t just want their organization to engage with them; they want to directly engage with the organization as well. People are eager for their voices and ideas to be heard, acknowledged, and acted upon.”

8. Celebrate accomplishments

Every person enjoys employee recognition. Managers may be slower to extend kudos, however, when the achiever is not physically around.

“Employee appreciation, in my opinion, is the primary motivator of employee engagement,” says Kathryn Smithson, CMO of [Path Social](#). “Employees who receive regular recognition from peers and superiors feel more connected, respected, and valued.”

Make a pointed effort to acknowledge the contributions and achievements of remote employees. Sing their praises in the company newsletter. Send an email shout-out. Create a place on Slack where anyone can tell a co-worker “Great job!” or “Thanks for the help.”

Ensure, too, that remote employee recognition comes in the form of advancement. Remote employee engagement is bound to plummet if they feel like second-class team members always passed over for promotions.

9. Look toward the future

Along that same line, remote employees want to grow as professionals and evolve with the company.

Engagement rises when they are challenged to do new things and move the organization in exciting directions.

“One of the most effective and proven ways to increase employee engagement is by investing in learning and development. Today, growth opportunities mean more to many employees than office perks,” says Jonathan Finkelstein, CEO of [Credly](#).

Evaluate what skills might be valuable for team members to acquire, and solicit opinions regarding individual interests. While travel to seminars may not be realistic at the moment due to safety concerns, a wealth of online classes and virtual conferences exist.

Likewise, get people excited about a future with your company. Let them know they are valued and seen as important to the organization’s long-term success.

“Outline a career path for every job role in your company,” says Anthony Martin, CEO and founder of [Choice Mutual](#). “This works for every kind of team, remote or otherwise. It is human nature to be on the constant lookout for greener pastures. Having a clear outline of career paths will show employees how they can grow into bigger job roles and also help envision a longer future with your company. This will promote a sense of loyalty to the firm, and anyone seeing their jobs as temporary will feel differently.”

10. Value fun

Lastly, don’t underestimate the importance of socialization to remote employee engagement. Working from home can at times be lonely and boring. Look for ways for staff members to break the monotony and enjoy each other’s company.

“When you’re in the workplace, it’s simple to walk over to someone’s desk and suggest an impromptu lunch. Similar spontaneous exchanges can be enabled virtually,” says Steve Scott, CTO at [Spreadsheet Planet](#).

A few team building activities to consider include:

- Virtual coffee breaks or happy hours (co-workers video call together while drinking beverages)
- Multi-player video games
- Fun online classes such as cooking or yoga
- Trivia contests
- Movie afternoons
- Online show and tell of pets, holiday decorations, etc.
- Delivering pizza to home offices and eating it together over Zoom

Ask remote employees for other suggestions. They will become more engaged simply by being given a voice.

Don’t, however, go overboard. You’re not a cruise ship entertainment director. Read your audience. You might think virtual home tours sound fun, but if your staff seems hesitant, respect how your team feels.

Likewise, don’t pressure people to participate. The past year or so has been difficult for many individuals. Some may wish to refrain at the present time. Extend the invitation and stay welcoming; they may decide to join in at a later date.