

7 Top Tips to Keep Remote Employees Engaged

Use digital tools to keep your team together



1. Use “chat” programs to keep informal communications flowing.

More casual than email, chat programs are a great way to replace the hallway and over-the-cube-wall conversations that typically happen in an open-plan office. You have plenty of options—including Slack, Hangouts, Yammer and more—just pick one that everyone can access easily.

2. Hold “virtual” lunch meetings.

Maybe your on-site, local team celebrates birthdays, baby showers and other celebrations by going out to lunch. So how can you include remote employees, especially if one of them is the “guest of honor”? Consider hosting a virtual lunch and a video meeting—just buy the work-at-homers a meal that can be delivered straight to their front doors.

3. Set up purposeful extracurricular activities and social connections.

After-work outings provide an opportunity for team building and socializing. If your team can't go to an escape room together, think of “virtual” experiences that can serve the same purpose. Maybe it's a book club, or a multiplayer gaming competition or fantasy football league—it all depends on your employees' interests. Schedule these optional events outside the nine-to-five and include a video conference if appropriate.

4. Hold brief, daily team video meetings.

If you can start each workday with a 15-minute conference call or video meeting, do it. If time zones are a challenge, consider recording a brief video that your team members can watch at the start of their day. Part pep-talk, part check-in, part information-sharing, this meeting makes everyone feel included.

At this very moment, hundreds of thousands of employees are working from home, many on a permanent basis and some just temporarily. As a manager—or even an entire enterprise—what can you do to keep them engaged with work?

We've put together seven top tips that are easy and actionable.

5. Consider what it's like to work when the kids are home.

At some point during every workday, employees with school-aged children will have kids at home asking for a snack, declaring "I'm bored!" or doing any number of disruptive activities. Here's where you can be the superhero: give the gift of activities so your employee can stay engaged with work. Options are endless, from eGift cards for gaming and streaming services to age-appropriate books and projects.

6. Pamper your employees' pets.

It's a bit of a cliché these days, but conference calls are notorious for including unexpected background noise. With remote employees who have pets (and most do, as it turns out), you can have food, treats and toys delivered. Your employees will love the thoughtful gesture, and hopefully Fido and Fluffy can be quietly entertained during your next online meeting.

7. Hold virtual open office hours with no agenda.

Whoa! A meeting without an agenda? Yes, just an open line of communication with you, the leader, and anyone else on your team who wants to join the call. Your remote employees can't pop by your office for a quick chat, so this is a time that they know they can catch you. It's merely an open forum for questions to be asked, ideas to be shared and, if needed, fears quelled.

If you manage remote workers, the good news about remote employees is that they are often more productive, not less. A recent Forbes article* points to research that reveals:

- 77% of employees are more productive when they work remotely
- They tend to work an extra six to seven more hours per week
- They also tend to return to work sooner after an illness
- 30% say they accomplish more in less time when they work remotely

So take heart if you think your remote employees are distracted simply because they're not in an office where you can see them on a daily basis. Keep them engaged with the tips we've included here, and they can continue to be great team players—and top-notch performers.

*Source: Abdullahi Muhammed, "Here's Why Remote Workers Are More Productive Than In-House Teams," Forbes.com.

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