

How To Create A Remote Working Culture For Productivity



A workplace culture isn't about snacks and break rooms. It's about fostering a connection between a company and its employees.

It takes intention, mindfulness, and thinking about how your employees work together.

It becomes more difficult when it comes to remote workers. How does a great distributed team build a winning culture?

It starts with a specific vision for your company culture which you manifest through your hiring decisions, your goals, and the way your team communicates.

You maintain a culture through a series of virtual team building activities, frequent meetings where the entire team can sync, creating one-on-one time between employees, and providing channels where employees can chat with one another.

Even if you've never worked as part of a remote team before, and the COVID pandemic has forced your company to change the way things are done - you can still keep a strong culture going with regular Zoom check ins. But of course, it's not just the video chats that matter - it's how they are handled.

Understand the Value in Remote Working

Multiple studies have shown that remote working has valuable effects in terms of productivity, general well-being, and happiness.

The Harvard Business Review points to an experiment with a Chinese call center where employees were given the opportunity to volunteer to work from home for nine months.

Half of the volunteers were allowed to telecommute while the rest remained in an office as the control group.

Both survey responses and performance at the end of the study indicated that when compared to the in-office group, virtual employees were less likely to quit, happier, and more productive.

There's also evidence to support that employees aren't the only ones who benefit from working from home. A company can benefit just as much, with benefits like:

- Increased productivity
- Reduced absenteeism
- Talent pool expansion
- Saves money
- Better employee satisfaction

Create a Foundation of Trust and Psychological Safety

A big deal for any company because a great culture fosters a work environment characterized by mutual respect and Trust.

According to Harvard Business School Professor Amy Edmondson, psychological trust is, " a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish someone for speaking up."

The rewards for building psychological safety in the workplace are tremendous.

Leaders set the expectation that it's okay to make mistakes. They should be

proactive and promote participation.

The best leaders are curious, interested, show up with fallibility and humility. As leaders, ask your remote employees for feedback, either through town hall, surveys, one-on-ones, or all-hands-on-deck meetings.

Ask your teams to do the same with one another. Display the behavior you want to see for the top-down.

Teach teams to give constructive feedback that avoids making things personal and placing the blame.

Ensure feedback is always a part of how you work together to set up sessions and meetings that are designed to really critique work and give candid feedback.

Make sure feedback is given via video so employees can have it out face to face to avoid misunderstandings. All of this helps to boost employee engagement for everyone.

Invest in Onboarding Processes

When you bring new people into the company, your responsibility is to make sure the person has everything they need to be successful in their role.

Develop a 2-week plan. Full-time remote workers take longer to onboard. Build a 2-week plan that sets all of the meetings to reduce stress and anxiety for the new hire.

This ensures they will be introduced to all the right people, processes, and projects, they need to right away.

Develop a clear plan to help the employee know what the onboarding process looks like 30, 60, or 90 days out.

Give them small tasks or projects at first and do a little hand-holding by introducing them to cross-functional Partners if checking in on a regular basis.

If and when possible, consider onboarding in groups. It is a great way to minimize effort in redundancies during the onboarding process but it also creates a sense of community among your new hires.

Easy egg, uses this approach. They hire in groups and in point experienced employees at a squad house to welcome them and functional stewards who provide technical support.

Set a Clear and Explicit Work Policy

The term remote or flexible work can mean different things to different people. Are your employees expected to be online for a certain time?

Or do they need to travel to your headquarters regularly? include specific expectations in your job description so applicants are completely clear about what they're signing up for should they be hired.

Communicate Company Missions and Goals Clearly

Creating an efficient remote culture is much easier if all team members understand the company's vision.

Describe your mission in a clear and concise way then communicated to your team and continued to reinforce it.

This reminds people of the importance of what they are working to accomplish together.

The clearer your communication, the better for everyone.

Create Rituals

Recurring team meetings that establish the pace for the projects you're working on.

You can read early conduct sprint planning, retrospectives, and backlog grooming for projects.

You may also consider bi-weekly calls for one on ones, department meetings, and quarterly meetings for everyone in the company to attend.

When you're on a video call with one or more team members, pay close attention to their body language. This will help you see who is engaged, and who may be on the verge of burnout.

When you schedule these meetings, be mindful of timezones. If you're dealing with an international team, this may mean scheduling meetings first thing in the morning so your meetings occur in the afternoon for the other team members.

This way, no one has to be up at unreasonable hours to attend meetings live, and no one has to be left out and watch recordings later.

Place Priority on Meaningful Work

With a remote team, it's easy for people to feel like they have to respond to requests immediately to show that they are actively engaged.

However, it's crucial to agree that everyone has space to carve out for me for work that requires uninterrupted attention.

That's why it's important to create boundaries within remote teams.

Together, you can agree on how to do it. Whether it means the setting of time blocks on the calendar, scheduling a full workday without meetings, or relying on status settings in Slack or another team communication tool.

Schedule Some Face Time

Meeting face-to-face is important to build relationships. If possible, leverage offices to bring teams together during onboarding.

If not, try scheduling regular in-person team gatherings or summit meetings. If you're working on a lean budget and cannot afford to host people in expensive cities like San Francisco, plan off-site meetings in a less-expensive metropolitan area.

Have your entire team meet and rent a local co-working space for meetings. Hosting regular meetings with video conference software is also a great way to have your teams connect on a weekly basis.

Define How You Work Together

People across the company may have different ideas about what their flexible working situation includes.

Discuss with your team to assess needs, what's reasonable, and expectations.

Studies show that the teams who are more emotionally connected and engaged, work more effectively together. Set a clear process for communication and collaboration.

Acknowledge the differences in the way people work and learn. Consider having everyone on the team take the 16Personalities test and write personal manifestos so that everyone can understand one another.

Provide a method for water-cooler conversation that allows team members to talk about no one work-related topics so they can get to know one another just as they would if they were in an office together.

Get Regular Feedback

Unless you've had experience in running a remote team before, chances are that you won't get everything right the first time all of your remote employees pay close attention to the process and provide feedback about what worked and what didn't.

This will allow you to make continuous improvements to the process for any future hires. Don't stop gathering criticism after employees are fully on-boarded. Set the expectation for regular feedback.

Ask for it often, reflect on your efforts, listen to your team, and make adjustments when and where needed.

Fostering a culture of constructive feedback will help you and make your employees feel like they're safe to speak their mind and be heard.

Establish Mentorship Programs

One of the most important parts of building trust in a sense of belonging. You can do this by building mentorship programs in every department.

Match your experienced employees with your new employees, so that everyone feels like they have a connection with you and others.

In a remote work culture, this could be one-on-one meetings that focus on building camaraderie, while also answering questions or addressing concerns with the job.

This also helps to build a team culture and place emphasis on teamwork.

Keep People Engaged

Keeping your remote employees engaged over time is part of building a positive culture.

Hosted virtual happy hour or breakfast sessions where people in the same Department can discuss their issues.

You can also incorporate some of the team building games into your regular meetings or start a Slack channel to exchange photos of your pets.

This also helps with creating a work-life balance because people don't have to feel like they can only share work stuff with their coworkers.

A strong remote culture doesn't happen overnight. If you don't know where you currently stand in terms of engagement and employee satisfaction, reach out to everyone to collect their feedback.

Look for patterns to determine what the key issues are. Then, create a plan of action to address your team's pain points. Repeat regularly.

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