11 Tactics You Need to Build a Happy and Healthy Remote Team



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Four years ago, the pandemic ushered in a massive shift in the way we work, forcing companies to adapt to remote operations almost overnight. Today, many companies are still grappling with the decision of whether to mandate a return to the office or embrace remote work as the new normal. Firms like Disney, Tesla, JPMorgan Chase and ironically, even Zoom have issued stern mandates for employees to return to the office, citing concerns about collaboration, creativity, and productivity. And Amazon recently made headlines for the dismay their employees feel about the requirement to return to the office five days a week starting in 2025.

A Quantum Workplace survey showed that fully remote workers have a 78% engagement rate, while in-office employees have the least high engagement levels (72%). This finding suggests that remote workers may feel higher levels of job satisfaction.

Remote work can benefit workers' quality of life in other ways, too – for example, by eliminating the daily commute. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2019, the average American worker's commute was 27.6 minutes. How much would your life improve if you had almost one full hour "back" in your day to do something besides driving?

For these reasons and others, we have leaned into remote work at my company, Wildfire Systems. Here are our principles for creating a productive, collaborative and satisfying work environment – that's also fully remote.

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Remote work leads to better employee morale

Despite the conventional wisdom peddled by some corporate giants in favor of in-office work, fully-remote companies can indeed attract, and retain, top talent while fostering a remote-first culture of trust, transparency and work-life balance.

Here are 11 tactics I recommend that can help make remote work, work:

1. **No, *really* eliminate the office:** To level the playing field, ensure everyone is truly remote. I suggest whenever possible that you not maintain a physical office, even for team members in the same city. The aim is for no one to feel left out and prevent cliques from forming or the appearance of "favorites" on your team.

2. **Provide personal infrastructure:** Invest in equipping your team with the tools they need to be productive at home, whether it's high-end computers, monitors, a good headset or specialized software. A small investment in employees' comfort and happiness in the form of high-quality tools that help them do their job, can pay off massively in increased productivity and satisfaction.
3. **Utilize collaboration software:** Platforms like Slack or Microsoft Teams enable immediate communication and create a searchable knowledge base. Establish channels for work, projects and even casual water cooler conversations to foster a sense of community. At your company, consider creating channels dedicated to interests team members have outside of work: for example, music, food and recipes, great online deals and, of course, pets.
4. **Be a "video on" company:** Encourage the use of video during virtual meetings to encourage a more intimate and engaging communication environment. It really helps to see friendly faces every now and then, especially if you're home alone working all day.
5. **Hold frequent internal meetings:** Conduct standups for each functional area to keep everyone informed, clarify priorities and promote accountability. One suggestion that works well is holding 10- or 20-minute meetings with small teams almost every day to keep an ongoing connection among team members and deliver brief status updates or get unblocked on key projects — even among the executive team.
6. **Create virtual meeting rooms:** Establish persistent virtual meeting spaces for impromptu discussions, which can mimic the spontaneity of office interactions. Create a permanent standing meeting room so that people who need to have a quick chat that's too long to explain over Slack or Teams can pop into one of these standing rooms and take five minutes to talk it out. Another tactic I recommend is to create one of those standing

rooms for a recurring “happy hour” for random, non-work-related conversations. Set it up at a time that is not too late for people who work in early time zones, and not too early so that it interrupts the work day for those in later time zones. Be sure to tell everyone that it’s okay for them (but is not required!) to drop in and casually chat with whoever else happens to join in at that time.

7. **Share calendars transparently:** Allow and encourage team members (even executives) to view each other’s calendars, providing context and enabling better decision-making about interruptions or scheduling.
8. **Host regular demo days**: Regularly showcase various teams’ work to the entire company, to foster respect, recognition and a shared sense of progress. Allow both your development- or production-side team, along with any business-side teams, to share notable progress with the whole team, such as new features that were developed, new products that were launched, updates on new partnerships, key metrics or milestones or any other presentation of recent achievements. Demo days show everyone on your team that they are all achieving success together.
9. **Facilitate in-person gatherings:** While remote work is very effective, periodic in-person retreats and team offsites can strengthen bonds and foster collaboration even further. As a few examples from Wildfire, once a year, our entire company meets for an all-expenses-paid retreat to relax and bond with co-workers. And our engineering team gathers annually for an off-site hackathon to build new ideas and proofs-of-concept that may turn into full-fledged features. Finally, smaller teams meet throughout the year as well. The cost for these in-person getaways is roughly equivalent to commercial rent anyway so the investment in team relationships is well worth it.
10. **Encourage work-life balance:** It’s easy for the lines

between work and personal time to blur in a remote setting. Encourage teams to take time off to manage their personal responsibilities with unlimited PTO policies. This demonstrates trust in your team's ability to manage their workload and be accountable.

11. **Celebrate with gestures:** Leverage your expense policy to send team members small gifts or tokens of appreciation to remind them of the human connections behind the virtual workplace. New baby? Kid's graduation? Death in the family? Send it yourself or allot a small annual budget your team members can use at their discretion to show they're thinking of their co-workers.

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By embracing these principles, you can create an environment where team members thrive, leading to increased productivity, collaboration and job satisfaction. Rather than assuming remote work is a "failed experiment," successful leaders should recognize the changing landscape and adapt their strategies and processes to empower their workforce, build trust and drive innovation.

For companies not able to embrace a fully remote work environment, a hybrid approach is better than a 100% in-office requirement. In fact, Gallup's 2023 workplace survey found that 34% of remote-capable employees indicated they prefer a fully remote situation, and 59% prefer a hybrid approach.

At many companies, a fully remote work model has proven to be a resounding success, and I invite fellow entrepreneurs to help build the future of work together.

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