

How Can You Maintain Company Culture When Everyone Is Working from Home?

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“Corporate culture” is difficult to define. Often it’s only implicitly understood and develops organically, rather than being explicitly expressed and planned from the top down. Your company’s culture becomes its personality, and has a major influence on how the public perceives it, as well as how the employees, partners and other providers interact with the public and with each other.

Nowadays, with so many companies forced to keep their offices closed in this time of social distancing, working from home has become the “new normal.” Research from the digital document organization app FYI has found that “improved culture” is one of the top responses when people were asked how companies can help upgrade the experience of remote work during the coronavirus crisis.

So how can you ensure that your culture survives when there’s no physical water cooler to gather around?

I often like to remind the executives I work with that even before the Covid-19 crisis hit, this was a major challenge. Larger companies with multiple locations, for example, have *always* found it difficult to maintain a cohesive corporate culture. It’s made even more challenging as companies extend their ecosystem to partners, third-party providers and

freelancers outside of the immediate corporate structure.

Corporate culture is an essential guiding force, but how does it develop when the majority of a company's workers, providers and freelancers never set foot in the office? Data provided by Global Workplace Analytics suggests that teleworking had become quite common even prior to the Covid-19 lockdown, growing by 140 percent since 2005 – and not just from the self-employed and gig workers; 4.3 million employees now work from home at least half the time.

At the same time, the self-employed population has grown by 2.4 percent, the home-based self-employed population grew by 7.3 percent, and the telecommuter population grew by 1.7 percent.

Corporate culture when face-to-face interactions are obsolete

Collaboration in a remote environment does take some additional work – but a distributed team is really just like any other team, whether they work face-to-face or not. A recent Harvard Business Review podcast noted that successful remote work is based on three principles: Communication, coordination and culture.

Communication and coordination are easily achieved through any number of sophisticated real-time communication and social sharing tools, but the culture is what creates a real sense of trust and engagement.

Corporate culture is more than creating a friendly break room with comfortable chairs and bringing in a box of doughnuts on Friday – developing it means intentionally engaging employees, educating them, and providing venues for interactions, knowledge sharing and training. Traditionally, this has been done live, with on-site in-services or special off-site

events, but this becomes problematic when a company has thousands of remote employees and partners scattered throughout multiple countries.

Those events can still take place virtually. Fortunately, virtual meeting platforms have evolved to the point where they can be highly interactive, visual, and more importantly, effectively replicate the sense of “being there.” And yes, there are plenty of ways to spice up your “virtual happy hours.”

Your culture begins with onboarding – and especially when remote workers are involved, interactive video conferencing sessions can be a highly effective method of engaging those workers from the very beginning.

The key to success is in the level of engagement – and rather than a one-directional webinar session, culture can be developed and maintained by ensuring that teams huddle regularly, although not so often and for so long that “Zoom fatigue” starts to set in. Finding the right balance between live and asynchronous meetings is key, as is investing in giving people easy access to the information they need to do their jobs independently.

Related: [5 Ways to Build Team Culture in a Remote World](#)

Best practices for remote corporate culture

A 2017 study by Deloitte noted that 80 percent of survey respondents see culture and engagement as top priorities. The Deloitte report noted that traditional learning management systems are rapidly being replaced with new tools that better meet the need for interaction and participation.

Best practices in developing that culture include holding managers accountable for training, communications and

collaboration, and arming them with the tools necessary to do so in a manner consistent with the expectations of digitally savvy workers.

More importantly, consistency and frequency become even more important in a remote environment, and regular interactive video meetings should be held to reinforce corporate messaging and culture, as well as to impart specific training information.

Also, because of the efficiency of video conferencing, micro-learning becomes much more possible. Unlike live training sessions that require more coordination, remote training opportunities can be held more frequently, and at the same time, become more customized to meet the specific needs of each different group of employees.

Finally, measure results – look at the social interactions, comments, and social media sharing that takes place as a result of each session; measure user satisfaction and participation, and encourage feedback and input from participants. In so doing, you will be able to create a virtual environment that is not only the “next best thing to being there,” in many ways, it’s *better* than being there.

Related: [A New Way To Work: Developing A Company Culture For A Remote ...](#)

Thriving remotely as a collective

Maintaining a cohesive company culture is a challenge, even when you’re dealing with a relatively small team all working from one location. Multi-branch teams, teams built to operate remotely, and teams forced to suddenly work from home during a health crisis have it even harder. But with the right perspective and approach, your team can remain as cohesive and invested as ever.

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