

How to Support Your Team While WFH

Employees working remotely? Here are four strategies for keeping morale and productivity high.

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Before the current crisis, nearly one-quarter of the US workforce was already working from home at least part-time. Now, that number has skyrocketed, in the US and across the globe, leaving many employers facing new and sudden challenges.

Working from home, or the common acronym, WFH, can provide many benefits, including increased flexibility, time saved by avoiding a commute, and more opportunities for typically introverted individuals to shine. But there are also various pitfalls: difficulty communicating efficiently, lack of access to information, lack of supervision (causing anxiety for both managers and employees), and social isolation.

My company JotForm has always maintained a flexible work policy. We're fortunate to already have some of the infrastructures in place for supporting remote employees. But even if this is uncharted territory for you, it's not a bad idea to implement practices for supporting remote work now. According to predictions from "Upwork's Future Workforce Report," 73 percent of all teams in the US will have remote workers by 2028.

Here, a few expert-backed strategies that have proven effective with my team, for keeping staff productivity and

morale high when most or everyone is WFH.

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1. Check-in regularly

From status meetings and lunchtime walks to unscheduled pop-bys and drop-ins, the office naturally lends itself to facetime with employees. Connecting in-person is empowering for staff, ensuring they are both seen and heard. Without those ordinary prompts for interaction, however, remote workers can easily feel adrift. That's why it's important to establish daily or near-daily check-ins with employees.

Heide Abelli, general manager, leadership and business at Skillsoft, tells *Forbes*:

"Frequent check-ins allow for the recognition and acknowledgement of what each individual is working on and contributing to the team. It is easy to overlook those you don't see or interact with daily. Regular check-ins ensure everyone is included and appreciated."

You can choose the time of day and communication form (video versus phone call) that works for your team. *Harvard Business Review* explains: "The important feature is that the calls are regular and predictable, and that they are a forum in which employees know that they can consult with you, and that their concerns and questions will be heard."

2. Utilize various communication tools – and establish ground rules

Email and telephone calls are just the tipping points for connecting with remote staff. The most successful managers of remote teams also take advantage of various forms of

technology: video applications like Zoom and Google Hangouts, instant messaging apps like Slack and Basecamp, and document sharing tools like Google Drive and Dropbox.

Together, they provide a richer connection with colleagues. Video, for example, is better for communicating about sensitive topics, where visual, emotional cues can get lost in voice-only calls. Video may also enhance our ability to learn new information. In one experiment, after conducting tests on people's ability to recall objects, numerals and other information based on sound versus vision, researchers concluded: "It is clear from these results that auditory recognition memory performance is markedly inferior to visual recognition memory."

On the other side of the spectrum, messaging apps like Slack allow for casual and quick communication, which can be critical for time-sensitive matters.

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3. Encourage employees to set up dedicated workspaces

The great novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald reportedly wrote from the comfort of his bed. That may have worked for him, but most of us are better off with dedicated workspaces outside of the bedroom.

Writing for the *New York Times*, Jen A. Miller explains: "Pick a spot for your office. It doesn't have to have a door, but it should be away from distraction."

It's not easy to replicate the atmosphere of the office, but try to set yourself up so you can work as comfortably and efficiently as possible. At JotForm, we're accustomed to employees working from home, at least occasionally. In light

of the pandemic, more of our employees are working remotely than ever.

In an effort to make the transition as smooth as possible, we're providing them with the tools and equipment they need—from personal tech and software to basic supplies like chairs and tables—using our office supplies request form.

Using a form, we can collect their requests and contact information in one fell swoop—that way, requests stay organized and we can turn them around quickly.

Designating a space will not only facilitate your transition to “work” mode, but it also establishes boundaries with other people at home, like your partner, roommate or kids. Of course, your 4-year old may not fully respect “Mommy’s office time,” but some physical cues may help.

4. Uphold your employees’ work/life boundaries

As *Harvard Business Review* points out, the increased flexibility of WFH doesn’t always translate to a more balanced life.

“Remote workers often experience high work intensity and reduced autonomy due to their ability to communicate with colleagues through their devices at any time.”

Arguably, it’s more important than ever to stress to employees that you value their right to disconnect at the end of the workday. Try to uphold the same office hours as usual, and if you do find yourself firing off a late night email, include in the subject line: No need for immediate reply.

As Dr. Sara Perry, assistant professor of management at Baylor University, tells the *New York Times*, for people who are

accustomed to working in an office, the evening commute provides a natural transition. At home, it's crucial to find new ways to create that same adjustment— even if it's just moving to another spot on the couch.

“You're already being challenged in terms of your personal resources,” says Dr. Perry, “You still have to take that recovery time from work.

As any entrepreneur will tell you, company culture doesn't happen overnight— it's a long-term and ongoing commitment that we work hard to cultivate. It might feel like the current climate is threatening to overturn your hard-earned office culture, but with deliberate effort, there are things you can do to maintain the fabric of your organization, and keep employees feeling productive and connected.

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