The Complete Toolkit for Leading Remote Workers

Use these tactics and tools to keep your remote team unified, productive and engaged.

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Ubiquitous connectivity, mobile technology, shifting generational expectations and life events like the current health crisis have all swiftly contributed to the growing number of people working from home. Leading a remote workforce requires a different set of tools to sustain relationships and maintain productivity across a team.

Below are tactics and tools for leaders to boost engagement, create unity and extend company culture among a remote workforce.

Five ways leaders can extend company culture to remote workers

1. Establish a digital water cooler

On a remote team, water cooler talk (random and non-work-related conversation) is nonexistent. However, there are ways to cultivate the healthy aspects of water-cooler talk with a remote team.

Slack or Basecamp are chat services that are ideal for creating “channels” where water cooler talk can happen. Labeling channels such as “LOL” or “water cooler” can create a

virtual place where the team can connect and build rapport with one another.

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2. Openly share knowledge

Leaders should consider sharing industry news, company updates, financial status, etc. via a recurring virtual town hall meeting.

In addition, encouraging remote employees to share their work or non-work related knowledge is also a great way to cultivate culture. SnagIt or Screencast let users share videos and images and have markup tools like blur, spotlight, magnify and stamps that make it easy to share and teach others. Zoom or Skype are videoconferencing services that also enable users to meet virtual and knowledge share.

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3. Recognize people digitally

High-fives and pat on the backs aren’t possible when remote working. Leaders must consider new ways to recognize their teams digitally. 15Five helps leaders extend digital recognition, feedback and coaching to their remote workforce. Tango Card makes it easy to send digital rewards (e-gift cards) to your team.

Read this to understand how emojis (and other visuals) can help clarify the emotional intent of our communications. This becomes increasingly important when remote working because we are less reliant on facial expressions.

4. Send company swag

It’s easy for remote workers to feel disconnected from the company brand. Sending company swag (mugs, T-shirts, phone chargers, etc.) to your remote team can help to keep them

connected to the company brand. Also, because remote workers are likely working alongside family members or roommates, send additional swag for them.

5. Meet in person (eventually)

As powerful and enabling as technology is, it can't replace human-to-human connections. The secret to cultivating and sustaining culture among a remote workforce is in-person meet-ups. They create opportunities for employees to bond, build trust, relationship build and have fun – all core to building enduring team culture.

Once you establish a healthy culture among your remote team, turn your attention to the below tactics for leading your remote workforce effectively.

Six tactics for effectively leading a remote workforce

1. Set clear expectations

Remote work is usually less structured than non-remote work, therefore clear expectations are critical. Outline them and then offer the necessary autonomy and trust for the team to execute. Here's what you need to tell them:

- Mission and vision
- Yearly, monthly and weekly goals
- Hours of operation
- Available resources and tools
- Preferred communication methods, channels and timing
- Contact information and guidelines for support
- Project or task ownership
- Team availability (when, where and how to be reached)

2. Connect consistently

A lack of consistent connection can leave remote workers feeling isolated and disconnected from the organization's goals and mission. Here are some ways avoid that:

- Schedule routine virtual meetings.
- Designate a specific time (daily, weekly or monthly) where the entire team is online at the same time allowing for quick collaboration or help if needed.
- Consider an "open status policy" (similar to an "open door policy") where your online status (busy, away, available, etc.) is accurate so that remote workers know when they can connect with you.

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3. Choose the right channel

Today's workers have gotten fairly good at blending digital and non-digital communications in non-remote working environments. However, in a fully remote working environment, all communications are digital and a new set of rules, know-how and abilities are needed. When communicating with remote workers, ensure your intended message aligns with the appropriate channel. Here is a quick overview on how to use today's primary communication channels.

- Phone: long, detailed, difficult or emotional conversations
- Email: objective and brief information
- Chat: informal messages, general announcements, news, quick team collaborating and socializing
- Video (Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, etc.): focused, long, feedback-rich, emotional or difficult conversations

4. Communicate transparently

When communicating with a remote team, transparency is paramount. A remote team is able to be more productive and autonomous when they are well-informed. To allow a remote team

to function smoothly as a single unit, make information transparent by using file-sharing services like Google Docs or DropBox.

5. Track proactively

The ability to track and measure progress is empowering to any worker, and it's no different for remote workers. However, the tools used to track progress for remote teams can be different. Consider time tracking, task management or activity tracking tools to review what the team and individuals are accomplishing. Here are some options:

- Hubstaff or When I Work are time tracking tools.
- Asana is a cloud-based task and project management tool.
- Monday.com is a work operating system that powers teams to run processes, workflows and projects in one digital workspace.
- Trello helps to organize and prioritize projects and track progress.
- IDoneThis helps remote workers aggregate their daily activity into a single report.

6. Monitor well-being

Setting boundaries between personal and work life can be challenging for remote workers, and managers often fear remote work will lead to laziness and low performance. But, "the greater danger is for [remote] employees to overwork themselves and burn out. It's the manager's responsibility to guard against this outcome," says David Hansson, author of *Remote: Office Not Required.*

Help employees take the appropriate time for themselves and maintain work-life balance by utilizing tools like OfficeVibe, CultureAmp and TINYpulse which can effectively monitor employee morale and engagement.

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