3 Ways to Make Your Remote Employees Feel Included

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While some organizations are refining their remote work policies, working remotely and flexible workplaces are still expected to grow in the next decade. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects 73 percent of teams will have remote employees by 2028.

While employees who battle rush-hour traffic on their way to the office may consider remote work arrangements to be the ultimate job perk, working remotely can have its challenges.

19% of remote employees **report feeling lonely**.[1]

22% of remote employees report **challenges in unplugging after work**.[1]

43% of remote employees say **more face-time with their team** would allow them to build deeper relationships at work.[2]

80% of remote employees would like their team to **communicate with them more often**.[2]

Creating an inclusive work environment that is also mindful of your organization's remote workforce effectively keeps all employees engaged and connected. Here are three best practices in supporting your remote employees.

Be mindful of remote employees during onboarding

When new employees join your team, you want to make sure they have all of the tools and resources needed to acclimate to their new role. An effective onboarding experience is especially necessary for remote employees. Those who have to connect to meetings virtually need to have reliable technology and easy access to software, dial-in codes and any cloud-based platforms so that they can interact with their team, managers and clients seamlessly. Also make sure that remote employees can easily navigate any intranet portals or servers where necessary documents or projects can be found.

1   Buffer, State of Remote Work, 2019
2   Workplace Trends, The Work Connectivity Study, 2018.

Communication is a key component to any remote arrangement, but when an employee is onboarding or taking on additional responsibilities, it's a necessity. Schedule regular one-on-one meetings with remote employees via a voice over IP (VoIP) tool with a live video messaging feature, such as Skype or Teams, so that the meeting is as close to a face-to-face conversation as possible.

Make it easy to connect with fellow co-workers

It's important that remote employees not only connect with their direct report, but also their team members and fellow co-workers throughout the company. This helps beat the feeling of being removed from the daily interactions within a company and build stronger bonds through communicating on a regular basis.

Consider offering a few communication options for employees as they may prefer different communications channels depending on the situation. For example, some may use email for all communications, whereas others may send emails for project updates but would rather use an instant messaging platform to chat with co-workers or to ask a quick question of their manager.

Allow your team members to establish their own methods of communication with remote employees so that they can share information and develop a rapport at their own pace. Being given the space to find what works best for each team member, whether that be text, email or instant message platforms, allows remote employees to feel truly connected to their fellow co-workers and get to know their work styles. "You can connect and not feel like you're working in a silo," says Lisa Muniz, strategic account management director at Inspirus. "You get into a rhythm and learn how each team member prefers to work and you get into a rhythm as a remote employee."

Leverage technology to make remote employees feel part of the team

Beyond communications channels (or methods), there are many other ways technology makes remote employees feel like they're part of the office even though they are working from afar.

Virtual whiteboard applications, like Mural, allow dispersed teams to brainstorm and update projects together in real-time so that that everyone is working in tandem in the same space.

For remote employees who want to make the rounds and get to see what's happening around the office, Telepresence Robots (a wheeled device that holds an iPad) can make its way around each department, allowing the employee to converse "face-to-face" with co-workers throughout the office.

Include remote employees in corporate events

Allow remote employees the option to participate in your organization's social and team building events in order to fully integrate remote employees into your culture. Doing so sends the message that they are valued members of your organization and further connects remote employees to their co-workers outside of the realm of their daily work.

This can include allowing remote employees to dial-in and live stream any corporate-wide meetings and company-wide events especially those with Q&A components, as well as recognition ceremonies. For remote managers and employees, video recognition can be a great way to not only give recognition to their team and fellow co-workers but also receive recognition as well. A video from a manager that includes a personalized message to an employee that quantifies their contributions, showcases the value a remote employee (or any employee) brings to the organization.

Remote employees should be included in the light-hearted social events, such as Employee Appreciation Day, Halloween costume contests or other celebrations. Giving remote employees the opportunity to participate in events like this creates a cohesive culture and truly makes them feel part of the team both personally and professionally. Simple gestures such as live streaming a trivia contest so that remote employees can participate in real-time or encouraging remote employees to dress up on Halloween and send a photo or video of their costume to be included in a costume contest, can make all the difference in creating an inclusive culture that values the remote workforce.

To go a step further, include remote employees in team-building challenges, such as constructing a tower out of plastic cups or a timed puzzle contest, in which they can recruit friends, family and neighbors to participate. This not only gives remote employees a chance to fully participate in team-based events, but also is an opportunity to bring the company brand and culture to those who are closest to the employee. This sets an example of why your company is a great place to work.

As organizations continue to embrace remote work options, it will also become necessary to ensure remote employees not only feel a sense of belonging amongst their team but also are engaged and included in an organization's culture. By providing remote employees with opportunities to connect with their co-workers (both virtually and in-person), your organization will be well on its way to helping remote employees thrive.

About Inspirus

Inspirus believes employees make up the foundation of culture shaped and evolved through every day experiences that are essential to the development of strong, high-performing organizations. Through our technology and integrated solutions, we elevate the employee experience and optimize organizational culture by providing a holistic approach to the entire employee journey. We seek to influence the employee experience through our six Quality of Life dimensions: recognition, health and well-being, personal growth, physical environment, social interaction, and ease and efficiency.

Only Inspirus combines an integrated rewards engine, learning courses, communication tools, and analytics into a single platform spanning recognition, service anniversary, well-being, and diversity and inclusion. Through Sodexo's broader mission of improving the Quality of Life of all we serve, Inspirus aims to bring joy to work, one experience at a time.

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