



YOUR GUIDE TO...

Engaging and Developing a High Performing Remote Team

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If managing remote teams is new to you and your business, it's important to remember that keeping your people engaged is the answer to successfully moving through change.

Engaged employees improve productivity and performance, company culture, and business success. And, just as employee engagement is of critical importance at the office, it's even more so when your team is working remotely.

No-one disagrees with the benefits of employee engagement; they're pretty well established now. However, the exact ways of building and improving employee engagement amongst

remote teams (especially during times of change and uncertainty), is certainly not. It requires a radically different approach to what most office team leaders are used to, which is why you really need a guide - and that's why we're here to help. We have some fantastic employee engagement ideas, and they're practices you can begin implementing immediately which we can guarantee you'll see results from.

'Employee engagement is even more critically important when your team is working remotely'

Establish a regular rhythm of communication

Often the shift to remote working is well-paced so that employees and the business are able to prepare for the change and get used to the new ways of working. But, much like what happened during the Covid-19 outbreak, remote working can sometimes happen rapidly and forcefully. Unfortunately, the two scenarios bring about different



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feelings amongst employees, affecting how they cope with and adjust to the change. For example, a rapid shift from a lively, social office to an isolated home office can be very problematic for some.

Our recent study revealed that 53% of employees are struggling with social interaction and maintaining support networks. Dominant negative emotions, such as fear, stress, anxiety, and isolation, pose a serious risk to employee engagement, but there is a way to manage it: consistent communication between the team, and between manager and employee is crucial. These regular check-ins ensure that your team feels connected and part of a wider community. But remember, your communication style ought to adjust too. Your content and style should vary between serious content and light-hearted conversation, as that's how it would be in the office, and it's what is needed to maintain a positive company culture. Far too often, virtual communication meetings are too serious, which doesn't help engagement at all.

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Establish an equal experience

When team members are working in different locations, it’s important they all feel a sense of equality and parity of experience. To accomplish this, treat and communicate with members of your team impartially. Offer equal support, provide employee feedback consistently, share announcements, schedule meetings, and delegate tasks uniformly. No one should feel they’re getting a different remote working experience to other members of the team, nor should individuals feel they’re excluded or treated differently. You should even encourage your team to work this way with one another because it’s so easy for sub-cliques and

subcultures to develop if this isn’t the learned consensus. As you may have experienced, leaders can sometimes find themselves unconsciously favouring those they tend to get along with better. And although it’s not intentional, it can still affect the level of engagement within the rest of the team because of the way it makes them feel.

Remember, company culture is still present when teams are working remotely, and it can still be damaged, but with communication and the right leadership it can be maintained and even improved.

Put wellbeing at the core of your leadership approach

Rapidly shifting to remote working and doing so fairly 'unprepared', whilst also enduring a host of lifestyle changes is likely to bring about fear amongst your team. Beyond that, feelings of isolation and anxiety are also common. In our recent study, we discovered a 120% increase in the number of employees feeling anxious compared to the same time in 2019.

These feelings are not only problematic for your employees and their wellbeing but are also problematic for your team and the organisation. That's because wellbeing and employee engagement go hand in hand; poor wellbeing provokes poor engagement. It's for this reason we highly recommend putting wellbeing at the core of your leadership approach. Tracking and monitoring wellbeing on a weekly basis will help you to spot issues of fear, stress, anxiety, and isolation before it affects critical areas like productivity.

In a separate study we conducted in the midst of the pandemic, 40% of employees surveyed recognised that their emotions were impacting their performance. We recommend you start by asking your people how they feel (and why), on a regular basis. This reveals invaluable data about what your people really need to be happy, feel motivated, and become engaged. Knowing this, you're able to take the right action that yields positive results. Guessing how your people are feeling and what they need only wastes time and resources – ask them!

Regular feedback sessions could work, but regular employee engagement surveys are, of course, most effective. The reason being, employees are able to anonymously share their feelings and are therefore more inclined to be truthful, allowing for more accurate results from which to take action. You're also able to track their emotions over time and see for yourself whether the decisions you've made are indeed working.

Encourage employees and lead by example

Remote employees often struggle with a work-life balance. Working from home means there's no separation between home/personal life and work-life. Sometimes this can affect an employee's level of performance and productivity as there are many more distractions to keep them away from their work. But in other cases, (which is, in fact, quite common), employees work excessively and unhealthily. They forget to take their usual lunch breaks and often start work much earlier and end much later. Life and work blend into one another, and there is no clear beginning and no clear end to their workdays.

Of course, this scenario is great for productivity in the short term, but it's a quick path to extreme fatigue and eventually burnout. Almost always, this unhealthy way of working causes poor wellbeing, which leads to poor employee engagement in the long term. The key is finding a balance; it's encouraging your team to take necessary breaks, encouraging them to block out their typical lunchtimes in their calendar, and it's showing support and guiding them through the

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journey to finding a healthy work-life balance.

Most importantly, though, you need to lead by example. When your team sees that you, their leader, is implementing the practises you're 'preaching', they're exponentially more inclined to act in the same way.

The health and wellbeing of your remote team is essential for the success of the remote working endeavour and the organisation overall. Proper sleep, good nutrition, exercise, and establishing healthy practises should be encouraged and celebrated by all, including the leader of the team.

Actively provide feedback and support with one-to-one check-ins

One-to-one conversations to check in with how your employees are doing, and to give feedback and provide support, is incredibly important when managing a remote team. One of the most common causes for poor employee engagement, which is so easily avoidable, is lack of feedback and support, and a manager that's distant or unapproachable.

Employees also need to be reminded of the big picture and their part in it more regularly. Why? Because they're not surrounded by visual cues like they would be in the office. And as for the team, they need clarity on how the organisation is performing, to maintain their engagement and motivation, and reinforce their connection with the vision and objectives.

'One of the most common causes for poor employee engagement is lack of feedback and support'

‘The most effective approach is to be vulnerable and willing to talk about how things are going’

Involve the team in developing new ideas

In the beginning weeks and months of remote working, you and your team will come to learn that some things work and others don't. Perhaps some practises and processes need to be reviewed and changed up. You may find that some technologies are unreliable and alternative solutions need to be found, instead.

The natural reaction for some managers may be to ignore the problems for as long as possible until their team adjusts. But really, the most effective approach (which also helps to protect employee

engagement) is to be vulnerable and willing to talk about how things are going.

Address the obstacles, involve the team and encourage new ideas. Of course, encouraging ideas goes further than just overcoming obstacles; it's also necessary to keep your team thinking and innovating so that they feel inspired and influence those around them to feel the same way. In order to grow, and for your team to feel motivated and engaged, encourage the development and sharing of ideas.

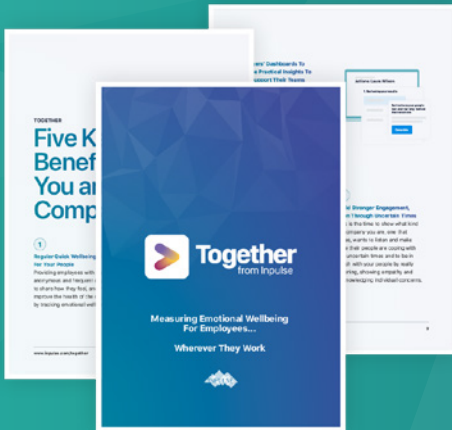
Recognise hard work and your team's efforts

It's always important to recognise hard work and give recognition where it's due, both individually and as a team. Employees want to know they're valued and that their efforts are appreciated. In the case of remote working, it goes beyond the work they produce. It's also about acknowledging their transition to home working (if it's a new arrangement). Recognition is another area that is easily neglected by managers, and it greatly affects employee engagement. But a regular (virtual) pat-on-the-back goes a long way. After all, a team that feels their hard work and efforts have gone unnoticed is a team that'll quickly become despondent and disengaged.

As a leader, you'd know that the key to effective leadership is making decisions with your people in mind. It's understanding their needs and wants, and having this drive your decision-making. Because when your people drive people-related decisions, great results are inevitable!

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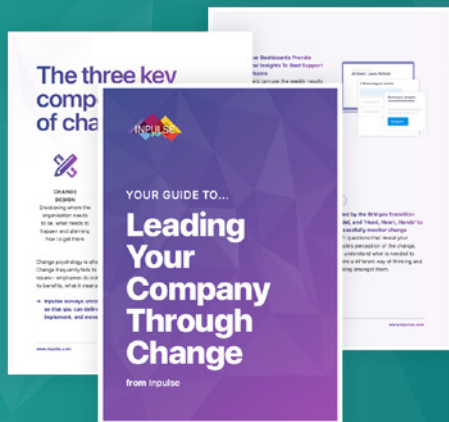
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