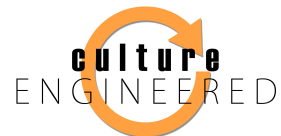




Leadership Tools during COVID-19

Leaders Guide: Transforming Your Workforce to a Remote Team



CultureEngineered.com

A message to leaders....

It seems like our workplaces, our world, has changed in the blink of an eye. I hope this ebook finds you, your family and friends, and your team well and healthy.

It was early March when I first heard the term *social distancing*. An attorney declined my invitation to talk about Culture Engineered's workplace investigation solutions, stating she couldn't meet due to practicing social distancing. Rejection is part of a Founder's life, so I wasn't too upset; however the term social distancing hit me, hard. My initial response in hearing it was negative, but it was after Googling the term that I truly felt alarmed. Social distancing. In the days since, this term surrounds me - and I hate it. Since then curfews have been implemented, businesses forced to temporarily close, and loved ones quarantined for weeks at a time - uncertain of their own fate. It's a time of crisis and as with most crises, came on suddenly. I called all of my clients that day I first heard it - offering help in transitioning office employees to remote environments. And with each call, I also made it clear, as leaders, social distancing is **not** an option. The time calls for **physical** distancing and social **connection**.

It was three years ago former US Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy, wrote an HBR article on the impact loneliness has on our communities and workplaces. As harmful to life expectancy as smoking 15 cigarettes per day, social isolation increases risk to mortality as severely as obesity and high blood pressure. In times of high stress - loneliness and fear take over - and we now, for their own physical safety, force them into working from home - a knowingly stressful and isolating situation. Our employees need leaders to step up now more than ever. This ebook is for those leaders, helping them bring teams closer together. As leaders, let's emphasize the importance of our teams being socially connected, despite physical distance.

Be well and foster connection,

Teresa Marzolph
Culture Engineered

The state of remote leadership

Many employers have already incorporated a work from home model.



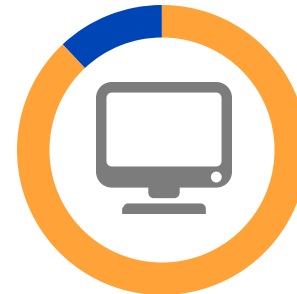
8% of companies allowing all/most employees to work from home

SHRM 2016 National Study of Employers

For years, largely in an effort to attract and retain top talent, leaders have been shifting to a remote work model. In this time, companies have changed the structure of their business to better support remote workers, finding ways to keep them engaged and supported. At the same time, these employers have transformed their workforce, identifying and hiring workers with the drive and desire to work remotely.

Despite years of research and experience, a recent Harvard Business Review study shows remote workers continue to feel "shunned" and "left out".

In response to COVID-19, leaders are scrambling to shift to a remote work model.



88% of companies offering/requiring employees to work from home during COVID-19

Gartner Inc survey

Unlike companies who have adapted their policies, practices and culture over time to incorporate a remote workforce, COVID-19 has abruptly forced many employers to make this same shift, during a time employees are stressed and/or anxious.

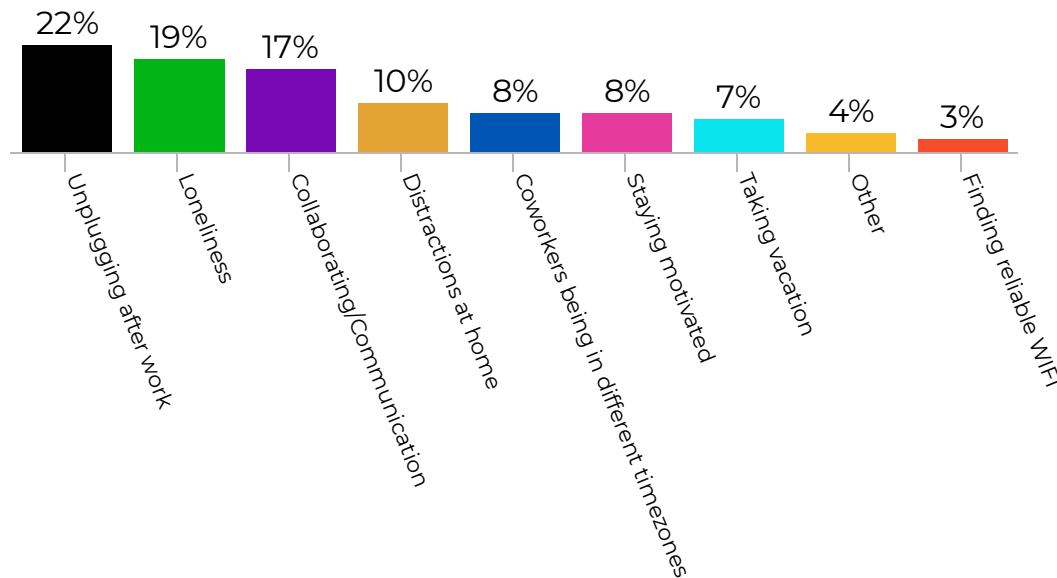
Stress and anxiety have been shown to negatively impact our ability to make decisions, focus, and work productively. When stress becomes chronic, it takes a physical toll on the body - making us more susceptible to sickness and/or injury and even interfere with social well-being, spreading to coworkers, friends, and family.



Challenges to working remotely

State of Remote Work 2019 Survey
Buffer.com

Even **more** significant in an employee's ability to do "good work" than workplace environment is **employee mindset**. Without control of an employee's physical environment, understanding employee mindset becomes critical for leaders and employers.



8 Steps to Convert Your Employees to a Remote Team

1. Onboard EVERY employee as though he/she is a new hire.
2. Establish initial communication structure.
3. Collaborate on solving for major problems.
4. Make a habit of asking for feedback.
5. Celebrate & recognize success
6. Stay alert to dangerous behaviors.
7. Identify critical behaviors for success.
8. Assess & flex.

In times of stress, people are even more apt to feel disconnected, lonely, and fearful. Because remote workers are already more prone to loneliness, inability to unplug from work (leading to burnout), and feeling disconnected from colleagues and distracted at home - each an obstacle to an employee mindset conducive to performing quality work - the priority for leaders shifting to remote work models during COVID-19 is to understand, identify, and improve employee mindset.

Step 1: Onboard EVERY employee as though he/she is a new hire.

A job performed 100% remotely is ENTIRELY different than the same job performed in an office. For this reason the most important step is to help introduce them to this new job. Much like a new Accounts Payable hire is familiar with the basic accounting principles that makeup nearly all AP functions, companies will train them on nuances, unique to the employer's processing that are important for the new hire to understand in order to be successful.

Onboarding tips for employees transitioning to remote work:

- Use a virtual video conferencing platform (Zoom, GoTo Meeting, etc) to conduct your walk-thru.
- Select a platform that allows a participant to access the other's computer (allowing a manager to access the employee's desktop virtually during the call if needed).

Create an equipment/access checklist for each employee. Schedule a day and time to do a virtual walk-thru with each employee making sure they can access everything they need for work. Will employees need to login via a VPN? Do they know how to contact coworkers now that walking over to a coworker's desk isn't an option? Make notes of equipment issues, problems accessing systems, and employee needs (beware of potential [accommodation needs](#)) so that you can research or escalate issues to be resolved, following up with each employee on the solution.

Step 2: Establish (initial) Communication Structure

Remote work can be lonely. In times of stress, leaders should not merely **suspect** employees to feel lonely and disconnected - they should **expect** it. By implementing a communication structure for your team, you help employees feel more at ease, giving them an idea of what to expect, and create opportunities to gauge employee mindset. The #1 communication goal within any remote team is to harness connection. We tend to view communication as having only one purpose - to exchange information. Hopefully, leaders are hiring intelligent capable people. With a baseline of intelligence, communication becomes more of a way to connect with one another and less about the tactical transfer of data. By using communication to listen, express empathy, and work together toward solutions, leaders engage the minds and emotional state of employees conducive to high-performing teams. Stimulating the prefrontal cortex part of the brain, and sparking the release of oxytocin, employees feel more connected have a healthier mindset, and do better work!

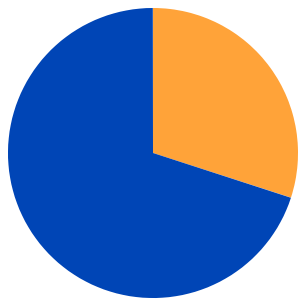
Tips for creating communication structure:

- Describe how different tech options should be used to communicate (ie, IM for something urgent but video conferencing for daily 1:1s)
- Encourage employees to check-in on one another periodically. Create a phone-tree. Make one employee responsible for checking in on another.
- Stress the importance of team communication (fostering connection first, exchanging info second)

Great things in business are never done by one person. They're done by a team of people.

- Steve Jobs

Step 3: Collaborate on solving MAJOR problems.



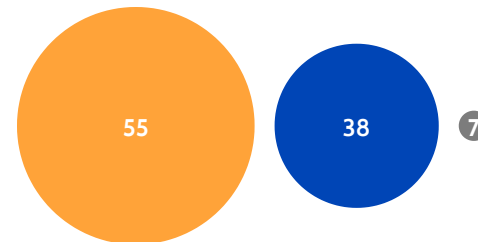
Only 30% of employees feel their opinions count at work

Gallup State of the American Workplace

Micromanagers, typically with the best of intentions, are often viewed as know-it-all managers. According to research by the Wiseman Group, know it all managers tend to diminish employee performance, getting less than 50% of what their employees have to offer whereas leaders who empower employees to collaborate, solve, and own solutions get more than 100%.

Collaboration also plays a large role in how we connect with and trust others. Using the information collected from communications like onboarding sessions, 1:1s, identify major problems and set aside time for the team to discuss and create solutions.

Step 4: Make a habit of asking for feedback.



55% of communication is based on body language

We depend heavily on nonverbal communication - when it's available to us. As a leader of a newly remote team, you will need to learn new habits. Asking for feedback helps create a culture of caring and transparency, providing you with valuable insights on the mindset of your employees.

We share our feelings and thoughts with people we trust. So, for employees sharing their feelings with us, it can spark feelings of trust and confidence. It is also helpful to ask employees to rate their own feelings and capture pros and cons frequently. This practice keeps them in a balanced mindset, preventing the negative effects of a reactive mindset (ie volatile, defensive, negative, unfocused, short-sighted, etc). Allow employees to provide feedback anonymously for the best results.

Step 5: Celebrate & Recognize Success

For our teams who have, with little warning or planning, changed the way they live and work entirely, every achievement and every accomplishment is worth celebrating. Today we are surrounded by uncertainty about our health, economy, the future of work, and our loved ones. Many people are without social networks and rely on relationships with leaders and coworkers to feel connected. Employees need to feel like they have some control over their day, work, and life. Celebrating major wins like clearing

Tips for Celebrating Wins:

- Acknowledge the team's effort. Don't focus on just the results as it can seem that you only care about the company's bottom line.
- Recognize individuals and the team separately. Do not attribute a team "win" to only certain individuals, particularly this time as the transition impacts everyone differently.

a queue for the first time since working as a remote team, or minor wins like everyone getting onto a virtual conference call for the first time without issue or interruption is an important part of how we, as people experience belonging. Because some with struggle more than others initially, focus on team wins; however acknowledge individuals for stellar performance.

Want to learn more about employee recognition?

>>click here<<

Step 6: Stay alert to dangerous behaviors

Employee silence is dangerous, particularly among remote employees. A culture of silence doesn't allow for context and every change is seen by employees as suspect. So, dangerous behaviors for employees changing to a work from home arrangement consist of those associated with cutting off communication. It is important to acknowledge these behaviors **EVEN IF WORK DEADLINES ARE BEING MET**. Staying connected is key to a healthy employee mindset conducive to **QUALITY** work. Not all communication needs to be verbal so it is important, as their leader, to take this into consideration. More introverted employees for example, may prefer texting and IMs versus video conferences. The important part here is to remain aware of behaviors and changes and proactively engage with the person - don't wait until performance or attitude starts to suffer.

Dangerous behaviors leaders must beware of:

- Missing 1:1s or meetings consistently
- Going offline while working to avoid contact with leader/coworkers
- Being online at odd hours (working excessively)
- Being uncharacteristically short-tempered or negative
- Making errors (uncharacteristically)
- Demonstrate a lack of focus or fatigue

A leaders #1 priority is understanding & improving the employee mindset.

A 2014 study showed remote worker productivity

13.5%

higher compared to office workers.

Stanford University Study, CTrip

Step 7: Identify critical behaviors for success

Once businesses return to the new normal, it's fair to assume employees who have taken this time to master working remotely will want to continue working in a partially, if not 100% remote role. Many leaders are already getting the question, "when this is over, will we be able to continue working from home?". Act as if working from home is your team's new normal and use data and analyze behaviors consistent to success. Now that you can no longer look to a person's desk to see if he or she is working - consider behaviors you are seeing that translate to success. Ask your team to share their best practices also..... What tools are they using? How are they solving for problems coworkers are struggling with? How frequently do you need to check-in with the team? Individual employees? Tracking team performance in response to your behaviors, as their leader, is also valuable information to make note of.

Step 8: Assess & Flex

We are in unprecedented times, requiring us and our teams to pave new paths and try new things. Teams must innovate and work collaboratively despite physical distance separating them. For many, this unfamiliarity will be uncomfortable - because we are afraid to fail. Our employees will fear losing their jobs, their insurance, or putting their families in jeopardy. Leaders will fear failing our own families as well as our teams. According to Organizational Behavioral Scientist of Harvard, Dr. Amy Edmonson, it is the fear of failure that causes teams to breakdown. High-performing teams require "psychological safety" - a collective belief held by the group that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. Research by Google confirmed psychological safety to be the most important attribute of high-performing teams. Use this time to reimagine how your team works. Assess what works and what doesn't. Learn from the mistakes made by you and the team. Ask questions and engage the minds of your team in the new world and working conditions you now find yourselves and make work, work for you.

How to Foster Team Psychological Safety

1. Frame the work as a learning problem, not an execution problem.
2. Acknowledge your own mistakes.
3. Model curiosity, ask thoughtful questions.

To assist employers transition to remote work arrangements in response to COVID-19, Culture Engineered is offering leaders complimentary support sessions - assisting with questions/concerns on converting your office workers to virtual spaces.
Click here to request your complimentary session.