HRInsights

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Engaging Remote Employees During the Coronavirus Pandemic

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has caused unprecedented changes for many industries. As social distancing is encouraged, gatherings with over 10 people are banned and stay-at-home or shelter-in-place orders for all nonessential employees are issued, many employers are asking their employees to work from home.

For some employees, working from home is business as usual. For others, this may be the first time they've telecommuted. This working arrangement may seem exciting at first, but it can lose its luster over time, resulting in disengaged employees. And, when employees aren't engaged, their productivity and motivation can suffer.

It's up to managers to keep their telecommuting employees engaged during these times. Listed below are five ways you can keep employees engaged while they work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prioritize Communication

Remote employees can often feel like they're left out of the loop. As such, it's important for managers to communicate on a daily basis. Consider scheduling a daily check-in to see how employees are doing during this new working arrangement and if you can do anything to help them. Be sure to communicate any important company news as it presents itself, too.

Remember that communication is a two-way street, and be sure to listen to any concerns that employees may have. The COVID-19 pandemic is a rapidly evolving situation and many employees may be feeling overwhelmed or anxious. Listen to their concerns and evaluate whether there's anything that you can do to help mitigate those feelings. Remote employees may start to feel isolated, so it's important to remind them that they're not alone, especially during these uncertain times. Since burnout is the result of prolonged and chronic workplace stress, it's important to know how to recognize the signs of workplace stress.

Set Clear Expectations

Be sure to communicate your expectations of your employees while they work from home. Employees who are aware of what your expectations are will be more motivated to meet those expectations. If you want employees to be online for specific hours of the day, communicate that. If you want a daily report of what they are working on, be sure to ask.

With that being said, you should be mindful that not all employees may have the ideal telecommuting setup as daycares and schools are closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, be patient and understanding with your employees. Encourage them to take paid time off if they need it during these times to tend to their other responsibilities.

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Recognize Good Work

Recognizing and rewarding employees for their hard work is a key factor in boosting engagement among your telecommuting employees. Employee recognition can take many different forms, but the main goal is to incentivize continued productivity and dedication from your employees.

For example, you could send out a team- or company-wide email detailing what an employee did and why it's exceptional. If you want to offer a reward for their good work, consider sending an electronic gift card for a local restaurant or delivery service.

Sometimes, recognition doesn't need to be formal or grand for it to be effective. For example, a personal thank-you email or message can go a long way in making employees feel valued and engaged while they work from home.

Encourage Work-life Balance

Remote employees may have difficulty establishing a healthy work-life balance. Because there may not be a physical separation between their workspace and their personal space, employees may feel like they need to be available for work 24/7, which can lead to unnecessary stress and, eventually, burnout.

As such, you should communicate the importance of creating boundaries to your employees. Suggest that they work their normal hours and then step away from their computer until it's time to start working the next day.

Demonstrate a Collaborative Culture

Employees tend to be more engaged when they feel like they're part of a team. When they're working from home, it can be hard for them to buy into that mentality. As a manager, it's your responsibility to make sure that employees understand that even though you may not be in the office together, you're all working together toward the same common goal.

Consider sending out regular communications reminding that you're there to help them meet any deadlines or provide any assistance while they work from home.

Summary

Leveraging technology in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic can help keep employees healthy while they do their job from home. By keeping these five tips in mind, your organization can keep your remote employees engaged during the pandemic.