As organizations transition to a new normal with a remote or hybrid workforce, businesses are being challenged to manage their employees differently.

This guide will lead you on the path to an effective transition to digital recruitment and onboarding and provide you with strategies for effective communication and leadership to ensure employee engagement. You’ll finish the guide with the knowledge and best practices required to succeed in a digitally remote workplace.

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Recruitment Amid COVID-19 & Beyond

Like most aspects of the workplace, recruiting norms have changed. While unemployment rates remain high, many employers find themselves struggling to connect with the right candidates. Even as some are receiving a high number of applicants, they encounter new challenges such as meeting the changing needs of qualified candidates who remain in high demand.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), job seekers in today’s employment market are looking for:

- Safety
- Consistency
- Stability
- Longevity

Businesses can boost their recruiting efforts in the current market by ensuring that their employer brand is resonating with those seeking employment and, importantly, meeting the needs of job seekers through updated recruiting methods.

**Employer Brand**

Employer brand is as important as ever. When considering updates to your employer brand, consider the following topics:

- **Safety** – At the forefront of concern for current and future talent is safety. Your organization is likely going above and beyond to ensure the safety of employees, so be sure to ensure that these efforts are highlighted in your employer brand. This can be done by:
  - Prioritizing safety in all company branding, both employment and non-employment related
  - Including safety-related expectations in job descriptions and postings

- **Benefits** – Job seekers care about health-related benefits, such as sick leave and mental health support, now more than ever. As your organization updates benefits packages, ensure these needs are met and that those benefits are promoted in your brand.
Recruitment Amid COVID-19 & Beyond [cont.]

- **Career Focus** – Much of the employment market has recently been laid off or furloughed, and employees are hoping to avoid a repeat with their new employer. Job seekers are looking for stability and the opportunity to build a career. Ensure that the career orientation of your job openings is clearly part of your employer brand.

- **COVID-19 Impact** – Addressing COVID-19 should be a core component of your employer brand. Consider having a specific section of your website dedicated to COVID-19. This pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives of most, and job seekers will appreciate this acknowledgment. Remain transparent, but ensure your brand includes takeaways such as:
  - How did your organization respond to COVID-19?
  - What tough choices has your organization made? Why?
  - How has your organization continued to contribute to society?
  - How is your organization engaging in safe workplace practices?

**Recruiting Methods**

Social distancing measures have changed the way we interact, and recruiting is no exception. However, there are ways that employers can use technology to best engage the job market, including:

- **Use online platforms.** If your organization has not yet established your employment presence on platforms such as LinkedIn, Indeed and Handshake, consider doing so. Not only can you build your employment brand, but you can also make it easy for job seekers to apply for positions directly.

- **Be active and present.** Don’t just create online accounts; be proactive and provide insight that impacts your industry.

- **Align your employment brand and recruiting efforts.** When establishing your employment presence online, ensure your brand is reinforced in all recruiting methods.
Recruitment Amid COVID-19 & Beyond [cont.]

- **Participate in virtual events.** Virtual events, such as career fairs, are a way for employers to engage with job seekers. By taking advantage of new initiatives, your organization can continue to be represented without physically attending events.

- **Prepare for productive dialogue.** When engaging with candidates, prepare to hear their concerns and provide transparent answers about how your organization can address their needs.

**Remote Work Considerations**

Remote work practices extend to the recruiting and hiring process, including:

- **Virtual interviewing** – Often conducted over video, virtual interviewing is not only a safe practice but also allows your organization to connect with a broader pool of talent. This can also ease the interviewing process for candidates when done effectively.

- **Remote onboarding** – Onboarding employees remotely can be a consideration for many employers and, if done correctly, can be effective when welcoming new employees.

Some job seekers may be enticed by the opportunity to work remotely, as remote work offers many benefits. So if this is an option for candidates, make sure this is clearly communicated.

**Ongoing Recruiting Considerations**

Remember that the workplace will continue to change, so employers should consider how their recruitment practices and branding resonate with current employment markets on a regular basis – and adjust accordingly. Further, as laws and guidelines related to COVID-19 update, employers should consult with legal counsel when updating or changing policies.
Onboarding

5 Tips for Onboarding Remotely
The onboarding process, which is designed to cultivate a long-term relationship between the employer and employee, while fostering a feeling of belonging and an affirmation of making the right choice, is extremely important for all involved. As such, employers should still prioritize onboarding new hires even though – in most cases – their training will be conducted virtually.

Why Is Onboarding Important?
A study published in the Academy of Management Journal found that the first 90 days of employment is a pivotal time period for employees to build rapport with a company, its management and their coworkers.

Best Practices
If you have new hires who need to be onboarded remotely, keep the following best practices in mind:

1. Meet with the new hire, following social distancing guidelines, on their first day if possible. If local laws allow for it, meet new hires at the office or another location offsite to welcome them to the company, get them set up with any necessary equipment and deliver any printed training materials. And, while it may seem unnatural, avoid shaking hands to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

2. Set clear expectations. One of the most common mistakes employers make with onboarding plans is not setting clear expectations. Because your onboarding process is now being done remotely and you’re not there in person to monitor a new hire’s progress, setting expectations is even more important. Expectations that should be discussed include abiding by the company’s values, the team’s objectives and, of course, their job responsibilities.
3. Don’t overwhelm new hires with too much training. Training new hires remotely isn’t ideal for managers or the new employee. As such, prioritize the training and only train them on the skills that are absolutely essential. Overwhelming new employees with too much information at once – especially when they’re working from home – can lead to confusion, stress and frustration.

4. Check in with new hires daily. Having employees work from home can help keep them healthy, but it can become isolating, especially for new hires. Schedule a daily call or video chat to help them feel like part of the team and give them the opportunity to ask questions.

5. Match a new hire with a remote mentor. Assigning mentors to new hires can be highly advantageous to both parties. It gives new hires someone to contact for questions and helps mentors develop confidence and pride in their jobs. Encourage mentors to have daily check-ins with new hires to establish a professional relationship and help the new hires feel included.
Employee Engagement & Communication

Establishing Culture in the Remote Workforce

Company culture can be a core competency and a competitive advantage. As employers expand remote work opportunities, organizations may want to consider how their culture can stay intact in a mostly virtual workspace.

What Is Company Culture?

Company culture is the personality and environment of an organization. Defined by more than just a mission statement or values, company culture encompasses the unwritten norms of how employees act with one another. While poor company cultures can be detrimental, a strong company culture and positive employee morale can positively impact recruitment, retention and the organization’s bottom line.

SHRM breaks down company culture into three broad categories:

1. Social – How individuals act, and how authority and influence exist between different roles and teams

2. Material – How people in a group make or achieve something and the ways people work with and collaborate with one another

3. Ideological – How values, beliefs and ideals establish how individuals exist and interact

In the absence of in-person conversations, employers should ensure that the in-office company culture translates to interactions taking place via communication channels such as email, phone, video, instant messaging, employee intranets and more.

A Strong Company Culture

Company culture should align with the mission statement and values of an organization. According to Glassdoor, positive company cultures have common themes that matter in today’s economy. These include:

- Agility
- Collaboration
- Customer Focus
- Diversity
- Execution
- Innovation
- Integrity
- Performance
- Respect
Expanding Your Culture into the Remote Workplace

Effectively expanding your company culture into the remote workplace is about more than just creating policies and adjusting business practices; the actions and behaviors of employees will continue to define a culture, just as in any work location.

There are ways employers can expand the positive attributes of a culture to the remote workforce. Options for employers to consider include encouraging behaviors, implementing practices and rethinking employee engagement, while keeping the following tips in mind:

- **Focus on the why.** An organization’s mission statement, purpose and objectives can be a source of meaning for many employees. Ensure that these topics remain at the forefront of communications.

- **Prioritize collaboration.** Employees are engaged when they’re collaborating. While employees will be spending a significant amount of time alone, be intentional about facilitating teamwork with projects, goals and objectives.

- **Rethink communications.** While in-person interaction can no longer be a primary medium for engagement, be strategic about how different communication channels are used, such as employee intranets, social networking tools and video.

- **Create opportunities for social engagement.** When employees are able to engage with each other virtually, it can build camaraderie. Many effective video platforms exist. Leverage those to facilitate non-work conversations that help build team chemistry, as well as an environment for positive interactions to take place.
6 Strategies to Engage Remote Employees

For some employees, working from home is business as usual. For others, this is new and confusing. In either scenario, this 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, satisfaction and motivation can suffer.

For businesses to survive and thrive amid the pandemic and beyond, managers must work to achieve high engagement among remote employees. The following are six strategies to do so.

1. Prioritize Communication

Remote employees often feel 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 arises, too.

Remember that communication is a two-way street, so be sure to listen to any concerns and input that employees may have. COVID-19 is still a rapidly evolving situation, and many employees may be feeling overwhelmed or anxious. Listen to their concerns and evaluate whether there’s anything you can do to help mitigate those issues.

Remote employees may start to feel isolated, especially during these times of social distancing, so it’s important to remind them that they’re not alone.

2. Set Clear Expectations

Be sure to communicate your expectations of your employees. Employees who are aware of what is expected of them will be more motivated to be productive than if they are left to guessing. For example, 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 and a progress update, be sure to ask.

With that said, be mindful that not all employees may have the ideal telecommuting situation for various reasons, such as children at home due to school closures or living in a home with minimal room to set up a designated workspace. Be patient and understanding with your employees. Encourage them to take paid time off if they need it to tend to their other responsibilities.
3. Recognize Good Work
Recognizing and rewarding employees for their hard work is a key factor in boosting engagement among your remote employees. Employee recognition can take many different forms, but the main goal should be to incentivize continued productivity and dedication.

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 have a positive impact on employee morale. For example, a personal thank-you email or even a handwritten note mailed to their home can go a long way in making employees feel valued and engaged.

4. 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. Suggest that they work their normal hours, take a lunch break and shut down their computer at the end of their workday.

5. Demonstrate a Collaborative Culture
Employees tend to be more engaged when they feel like they’re a contributing part of a team. When working from home, it can be hard for them to buy into that mentality. It is a manager’s responsibility to make sure employees understand that even though you’re not all in the office together, you’re all working together toward the same goals.

Consider sending out regular team communications, reminding them that not only are you there to support them but also that they are part of a team that can be relied on for support.

6. Leverage Technology
48% of employees wish that their workplace technology performed the same way as their personal technology, according to a Coleman Parkes Research survey. Be sure to leverage technology in the wake of the pandemic and beyond. It can greatly help businesses keep their remote employees engaged and, as a result, productive and satisfied.
Preventing Remote Employee Burnout

The shift to telecommuting has made it possible for employees to work while preventing the spread of the COVID-19, but it has also resulted in increased levels of workplace stress and employee burnout.

What Is Burnout?

Burnout is a serious syndrome that may be affecting your employees. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), doctors can diagnose an employee with burnout if they exhibit the following symptoms:

- Exhaustion or energy depletion
- Decreased engagement at work
- Feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job
- Reduced productivity or efficacy

For some employees, the negative effects of burnout extend beyond their work life and into their home and social life. Further, burnout can increase an employee’s risk for getting sick or developing a chronic condition.

How to Prevent Burnout

Since burnout is the result of prolonged and chronic workplace stress, it’s important to know how to recognize the signs. While it may not be possible to eliminate job stress altogether, you can help employees learn how to manage it effectively. Common job stressors include:

- Heavy workloads
- Long work hours
- Lack of work-life balance
- Concerns over job security

Since dealing with stress is a normal part of everyday life, and these uncertain times may be elevating your employees’ overall stress levels, it’s important to watch out for prolonged stress. Here are some early warning signs of burnout:

- Anxiety or depression
- Low morale
- Short temper
- Headache
- Stomach or back problems
- Fatigue

You can implement various strategies to help reduce employee stress, which can improve health and morale as well as productivity, including:

- Make sure workloads are appropriate.
- Have managers regularly check in with employees to facilitate communication.
- Recognize and celebrate employees’ successes.
- Encourage a positive work-life balance.
- Train managers on strategies to keep employees engaged and motivated.
- Educate managers on the signs of employee burnout.
- Set clear expectations for working hours and productivity.
- Communicate with employees recognizing that some are also responsible for caregiving and/or home schooling.
- Be flexible and understand that not all employees will thrive while telecommuting.

While these strategies can help prevent burnout, they’re not right for every organization. Be sure to carefully consider each strategy before implementation.
Leadership

Effectively Leading Remote Teams
As management is increasingly being charged with leading remote teams, organizations should review internal best practices and consider what adjustments would help these teams succeed. By addressing the unique needs of employees in the remote workplace, employers can set the stage for effective and productive teams, as well as help ensure that employees feel engaged and supported.

Challenges & Benefits of Remote Teams
Managers should be prepared to face a set of challenges that are unique to remote teams. According to the Harvard Business Review, the most common challenges that remote employees face include:

- Isolation
- Reduced motivation
- Limited or lack of access to necessary information and resources
- Distractions within the employee’s home
- Lack of in-person interaction

To succeed, managers must acknowledge these challenges, as well as challenges unique to each individual employee, and develop solutions to help employees overcome them, while also taking advantage of the many potential benefits of a remote workforce, which include:

- Boosted productivity
- Increased flexibility
- Increased retention
- Reduced greenhouse emissions
- Broadened talent pool

Strategies for Effective Remote Leadership
Effectively leading remote teams begins with defining objectives and creating clear plans to attain them. By outlining details of roles, responsibilities, timelines and expectations, employees will feel more secure and prepared in their virtual workplace. Consider the following practices:

Schedule daily check-ins. Whether an individual or team check-in, employees will be more comfortable consulting with managers if daily meetings are part of a scheduled routine. Team check-ins will also help ensure that all members are able to share their ideas and stay on the same page.
Utilize multiple communications channels. Video calls can provide benefits when working remotely, such as minimizing isolation. Also leverage instant messaging, project management tools and more to stay on track and build engagement.

Don’t always keep it professional. Creating virtual events for non-work conversations can help build team chemistry and replace water cooler or happy hour conversations.

Managing Employees Who Struggle in a Remote Environment

While numerous studies show that telecommuting can offer benefits for both employers and employees, findings show that not all employees adapt to the virtual environment equally. In fact, there are many who struggle for a variety of reasons.

Identifying Struggling Employees

While leaders can more easily keep an eye out for social or performance struggles in person, there are cues that leaders can look for in a remote environment to determine if an employee’s performance or wellbeing is suffering. Once you know the signs, you can assess your team and respond accordingly.

The following are four key behaviors to look for:

1. General Distractedness
   Have you noticed an employee “spacing out” during a videoconference? Do they seem to be forgetful? While issues like these may seem minor, they’re often early warning signs that they are not adjusting well to working remotely.

2. Making Mistakes or Missing Deadlines
   If an employee is making mistakes and/or missing deadlines more than usual, they are likely struggling. When people are stressed, they simply do not perform as well.

3. Language Is More Negative
   When people are struggling, it’s common for their language to be more negative. For example, if an employee would normally say, “This is going to be a tough but manageable project,” but now they say, “This is impossible,” that’s quite a negative shift. Words such as “impossible” and “never” are absolutes. The more someone engages in black-and-white thinking, the more likely they are to have feelings of despair and hopelessness. Be on the lookout for language such as:

   - There are no options.
   - That will never happen.
   - I can’t do anything about it.
4. Decreased Resilience
Resilience is a good indicator of how well employees are managing the current work environment. Speak with them directly about this on your next one-on-one video or phone call. Ask them if – compared to when they were working onsite – they are experiencing:

- Difficulty concentrating on work tasks
- Feeling hopeless about their career’s future
- Feeling isolated from their team
- Feeling irritable or angry

How to Help Struggling Employees

1. Schedule one-on-one check-ins with each team member. By gauging how each employee is doing, leaders can evaluate how to meet their unique needs. Asking open-ended questions can open the door for employees to speak their minds. Leaders should focus on being good listeners and providing appropriate support.

2. Offer empathy, but avoid lowering expectations. Ensure that each employee knows they are a critical member of the team. Acknowledge their current struggles and create a plan to get back on track.

3. Challenge employees to make an impact. Consider how workload adjustments, including assignments that include problem-solving or experimentation, may reengage an employee who is talented but struggling in the current environment.

4. Meet individual needs, but don’t show favoritism. It can be a fine line between supporting individual needs and avoiding perceived favoritism that may cause others to feel slighted. Consider how establishing team policies and expectations can benefit the whole group.

5. Take responsibility and offer support. A decrease in performance can be a failure of both the employee and leadership. Take accountability in the situation and offer solutions for how the employee can be better supported.

Monitoring Remote Employees
Employers are leveraging various technologies and tools to monitor employee productivity, as well as active and idle time. While these tools can help ensure employees are working at appropriate levels while remote, they come with their own set of drawbacks and legal risks. Moreover, the practice of using such tools to monitor employees may create tension between employees and managers, as employees may feel like they’re not trusted.
Leadership [cont.]

Pros & Cons of Monitoring Remote Employees

Pros
In addition to ensuring employees are remaining productive, there are other benefits to monitoring remote employees, including:

■ **Improved management of employee burnout** – One of the most common issues remote employees face, especially if they’re new to telecommuting, is maintaining work-life balance. By monitoring employees’ active and idle hours, employers can ensure that employees aren’t overworking themselves, which can result in burnout.

■ **Increased employee accountability** – If employees are aware that their work hours are being monitored, they’re more likely to hold themselves accountable.

■ **Improved insight into project timelines** – Employers can use the data gathered from monitoring to better assess project timelines and adjust for the future.

■ **Increased insight into workplace processes** – Monitoring can clue managers into business processes that may or may not be working for employees. For example, this data could give insight into when employees are most productive and how much time is spent in meetings. Leverage this data to improve processes as needed.

■ **Added opportunity for recognition** – Employers may find that it’s easier to recognize employees for doing a good job or meeting a tight deadline because they know what the employee is working on.

Cons
Common disadvantages of remote worker monitoring include:

■ **Added expenses** – Licensing or purchasing monitoring technology costs money.

■ **Increased potential for micromanaging** – Certain managers may be more inclined to micromanage. This can create inefficiencies because a manager is spending time micromanaging instead of working on more important tasks.

■ **Increased risk for legal pitfalls** – Monitoring employees comes with a unique set of legal considerations and risks.
Legal Considerations

Employers need to consider the legal implications of monitoring remote employees. Each organization will need to consider their unique risks and compliance obligations, and take state and local laws into consideration.

Generally, employers face the same legal guidelines for monitoring remote workers’ technology as they would monitoring the same technology in the workplace. However, many states have laws that require advance notice of monitoring to protect employee privacy. And if employees use personal devices for work purposes, employers may face additional legal requirements for advance notice of monitoring and data storage. Finally, employers requiring employees to utilize video conferencing to conduct business may face legal issues surrounding the recording of images and voices of employees if they don’t expressly give their permission.

Because of these inherent legal risks, employers should consult legal counsel before implementing any monitoring strategies and create a formalized written policy, including how employers plan to protect employee privacy and data.

Best Practices

If you’ve decided that monitoring remote employees is right for your organization, there are a few best practices to keep in mind, including:

- **Communicate your plans.** To avoid employee distrust and frustration, transparent communication about your company’s intent to monitor remote employees is key. Inform employees what will be monitored and what your expectations of them are while they’re working from home.

- **Establish formal written guidelines.** To ensure that managers avoid micromanaging employees, set clear guidelines for what will be tracked and how often managers should review the data. All guidelines should be documented in a formal written policy that is readily accessible for employees to review.

- **Be open to changes.** The data you gather may point out inefficiencies in workplace processes. It could also reveal that employees are working more productively at home. On the contrary, if the data reveals that employees are struggling with a procedure or project, you may need to make necessary adjustments. If the data reveals there are changes that could be made to benefit the overall organization, be open to those changes.
Bridging the Gap Between Remote & Onsite Employees

Organizations comprised of both remote and onsite employees may not only be the current reality but also the new normal. These businesses will have challenges pleasing both groups. Employers can implement strategies to meet the needs of all employees, while also standardizing business practices to help bridge any gaps. This will allow the employer to optimize employee experience, productivity and cohesiveness. Strategies for consideration include:

- **Create an open chat.** Chat tools, such as channels within Microsoft Teams and Slack, can facilitate dialogue open to both remote and onsite employees. Channels can be created for efficient work-related communication and as a way to replace water cooler conversations to help build comradery.

- **Plan for remote-friendly meetings.** Remote employees attending a meeting via a conference line or video platform can be just as active as those sitting in the conference room. However, meeting leaders should be deliberate about including all attendees. At the beginning of a meeting, be sure to introduce participants joining remotely and ensure you give each participant a chance to share their thoughts or ideas on topics being discussed.

- **Consider all employees in workplace planning.** As your organization considers changes, always assess how every decision will impact all employees, including onsite and remote talent.

- **Be transparent about expectations and decisions.** There are a variety of reasons why some employees may be expected to work onsite while others will work remotely. By being transparent about the purpose and business need of these decisions, employers can facilitate a friendly and open environment for remote and onsite teams to effectively collaborate, rather than building gaps.

As initiatives are launched and changes are announced, strategically planned communications can help get employee buy-in. Ensure that your ethos for internal communications acknowledges the challenges that employees face daily but also transparently explains the rationale for how the decisions being made best serve the interest of your business' stakeholders, including employees.
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