Strategies to engage and motivate remote working staff

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Overview

- Why engage and motivate employees?
- Strategies and tips for motivating and engaging employees
- What should I look out for?
- What can I do if it's not working?
- Looking out for yourself and your employees
- Q&A

The January blues

Reduced daylight hours, bitter temperatures and a stretch between pay days, can lead to feelings of deflation, low mood, and a lack of motivation.

The continuing coronavirus pandemic and current lockdown with school closures adds considerably more pressure.

You may find even the most optimistic members of your team to be subdued at the moment.

Where are you?

Your role in workplace well-being

Why should you engage and motivate remote working staff?

- Employers have a duty of care to protect employee mental health

- Happy and healthy employees increase the chances of an attractive and prosperous place of work

There's a risk that some employees will not open up about struggles.

To keep your business working well, it's a good idea to familiarise yourself with the signs and symptoms of poor well-being, as well as the solutions.

Spot the signs of an employee in distress

The following should raise a flag to check-in with an employee to see if they need support

- **Repeated mistakes**
- **Lack of focus or poor concentration**
- **Acting out of character**
- **Fatigue / low energy**
- **Increased absences or low productivity**

An inexperienced manager may see these as reasons for a disciplinary. Given the current climate, we would advise an unassuming chat to try to get to the root of the problem first.

Keep in touch

- Keeping in regular contact with employees and maintaining 121s is vital to monitor well-being and be able to offer support when needed.

- Talk to employees and ask them how they are coping.

- You may be able to come up with some ways to help there and then. For example, you may have spare devices that could be loaned to avoid a family struggling with homeschooling trying to work from one laptop.

Effective communication

- Regularly communicate with employees – daily check-ins
- Private check-ins
- Use a range of communication methods
- Avoid overuse of one method to encourage variety and avoid fatigue
- Virtual team offsites/brown bag lunches etc.
- Socialise virtually

Lead from the front

- Exhibit empathy
- Be honest and open
- Resist micro-managing employees working from home
- Keep track of team morale
- Have clear work/life balance
- Consider training for your managers and supervisors

Setting a positive culture

- Set clear expectations and communicate vision
- Give employees autonomy over work
- Offer stretch/different opportunities to upskill
- Provide necessary support and resources
- Involve or delegate decision making
- Give constructive feedback and recognition
- Provide eLearning

Preventing burn out

Not being in the physical presence of colleagues means that many people often feel unable to take a break and step away from their workstations.

Employees feel compelled to respond, and work beyond their normal working hours.

- Encourage staff to take breaks just as they would if they were in the office, as the working time regulations still apply

- You could make sure employees sign off at the end of the day and suggest an end of work day ritual - this can help employees switch off in the absence of their commute home.

Ideas to reduce time spent sitting down

"Sitting is the new smoking", with sickness absence for back pain forecast to rise during lockdown.

Tips to encourage employees to spend less time sitting down:

- Step-counter challenge - reward the employees who consistently complete 10.000 steps per day over a period of time
- Encourage employees to exercise regularly and to take breaks from sitting in front of their computer during the day
- Help employees to stick to their working hours and review the need for meetings. Could your employees effectively spend the meeting time working on the project, rather than talking about it?
- Headsets give your employees the opportunity to stand up and move around while they are on the phone

Stand Up! The Work Break Timer

Home is not a safe space for everyone

Domestic abuse helplines reported a surge in calls over the last few months.

Employees who feel unsafe working from home should be permitted to attend a COVID-secure workplace if this is possible.

We advise keeping a record of anyone doing so and speaking to these employees to find out the root of the problem. You may need to assist further.

Focus on the longer term with employee training and development

Whether your employees are on furlough, working remotely or attending work

It's helpful at the moment to focus on the longer term and use employees' time effectively to improve their skills

Performance reviews

- Traditional performance management processes are being scrapped in many organisations

- They damage employee engagement and take large amounts of time and resources

- They can frequently be demoralising, confrontational or a waste of time

Performance reviews – what's the new approach?

- Frequent, more informal check-ins with the employee, with a focus on the future and a growth mindset.

- Focus on the employee in his or her own role.

- Provide feedback more often, at the end of each major project or every month or quarter, for example.

- Require less time to complete; 'admin-light'

Performance reviews – why change or introduce the new approach now?

Helps to motivate and engage employees

- Provide a focus on the future
- A growth mindset
- Easy to introduce now, with frequent online 121s

Work environment and equipment

You should provide similar furniture and equipment standards for remote workers as you would in an office:

- **A suitable desk**
- **Adjustable chair**
- **IT equipment (DSE)**

Where appropriate, it may be wise to <u>loan staff work equipment</u> for home use.

You may also need to provide accessory equipment, such as task lighting, shredders, storage cabinet etc.

If nothing works - options to consider

Flexible working – a temporary change to employee working hours may be helpful. Focus on work completed rather than hours worked, so employees can work around their home life to meet their obligations. Discuss this with the employees, as they would need to agree to a change in contractual hours, even temporarily.

Flexible furlough – HMRC updated the rules to the furlough scheme to confirm that employees can be furloughed if they are unable to work due to caring responsibilities resulting from coronavirus – ie. school closures.

It is up to you whether to furlough employees and depends on the needs of your business.

5 steps to Positive Mental Health Wellbeing

Because of closer relationships with their employees, small firms (SMEs) are in an ideal position to spot if, and when somebody is struggling with their mental health.

To help your employees, coach them in the following 5 steps:

1. **Divide** – clearly define the working day from home life –(management lead).
2. **Communicate** – share what you're doing *("I'm taking a break")*
3. **Connect** – not just by video call.
4. **Relax** – exercise helps, even just a quick walk/change of scenery.
5. **Log off** – rest, get a good nights sleep (try earlier nights)

(Consider a referral to Occupational Health / Counselling if required)

Impact on mental wellbeing

Fear - (distressing emotion)

Stress - (feeling of emotional strain, pain and or pressure)

Anxiety - (feeling of unease, such as worry or fear)

Depression - (feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed)

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

- An **EAP** is a cost-effective and confidential support option for better worker well-being. EAPs give employees direct access to counselling, resources, and support on a variety of issues, from mental health to financial concerns, family issues, substance abuse and more.

- If you have one in place, a gentle reminder to all employees, including those on furlough, is a good idea. Further mental health resources can be found online.

Wellness policy and Wellbeing Action Plan

You could produce a wellbeing policy for your company or organisation

Employees can produce a wellbeing action plan

MyMindPal™

Potential issues/barriers to motivating remote working employees

- Lack of Community and team-work
- Lack of visibility and trust
- Lack of motivation
- Unmonitored performance and those frequent breaks
- Lack of office equipment and security concerns
- Distractions and lack of a good working environment
- Burnout
- Risk to Productivity
- Family issues getting in the way
- Mental health
- Duty of care - lack of reasonable adjustments
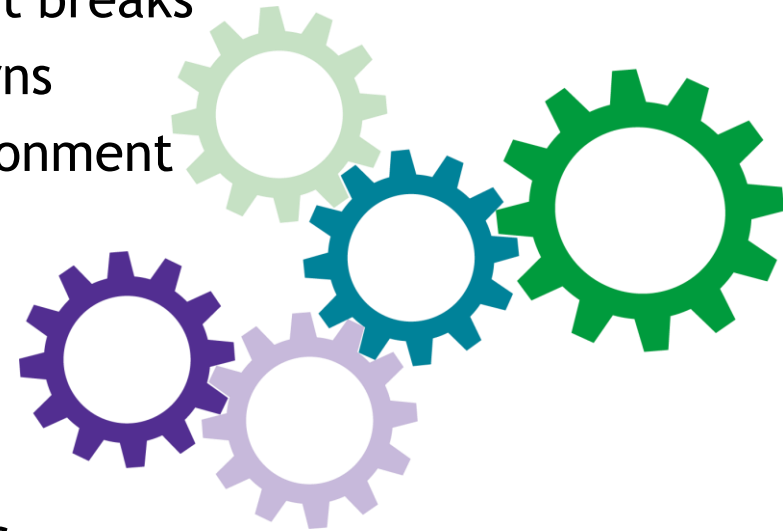
Any questions?

Home working packages available for
HR and health & safety compliance.

<u>3 month Pandemic HR support package:</u>

- Unlimited HR advice
- Draft employment letters in response to government announcements
- Regular Covid-19 HR updates
- Workplace wellbeing resources to support the mental health of your team – a Wellbeing Action Plan template/ My mind pal application access
- Home working policy

Optional access to our eLearning courses, including Mental Health and wellbeing

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