



Tips and Tools to Engage Your Remote Workers

By Roy Maurer

April 23, 2020

Workplace Innovation Manager Ashley Miller, SHRM-SCP, outlined several best practices and offered a few specific technologies to engage your remote workforce during the coronavirus crisis.

Miller manages one of SHRM's newest initiatives, Paragon Labs, launched to discover and invest in startup technologies that empower HR to create better workplaces.

She spoke April 21 at the Society for Human Resource Management's (SHRM's) first virtual Talent conference.

The Current Normal

Many companies are not experienced with remote working or are not comfortable with it, Miller said. "In 2018, only 24 percent of U.S. workers did some or all of their work at home, but things have rapidly changed. SHRM research shows that 83 percent of employers have had to adjust to COVID-19, and over 75 percent of those employers have shifted to remote work."

Added to the massive disruption is the economic devastation. The U.S. economy is on the brink of a recession, and the number of unemployed—although temporary—is primed to eventually be the highest on record.

Miller said that according to SHRM research, 71 percent of employers are struggling to adapt to remote work, especially in the areas of productivity and communication, and 65 percent cited maintaining employee morale as a top challenge.

"Mental health issues in the workplace have been an area of concern for some time, but with COVID-19, the emotional challenges employees are experiencing have spiked," she said. "COVID-19-related stress is having a dramatic impact on employee productivity."

According to a recent report by employee recognition and rewards company O.C. Tanner, employee engagement is down 24 percent compared to before the coronavirus pandemic, perceived organizational support is down 82 percent, and employee sentiment toward employers is down 72 percent, Miller said.



Ashley Miller, SHRM-SCP

Feedback

Meanwhile, feelings of burnout and unproductivity have increased. So what can HR do?

"HR needs to step up for its people," Miller said. "Communication, support, trust and recognition must be priorities in this new normal to maintain high engagement and morale. These are things we should be doing already, but the challenge is to keep focus on these priorities, which can be difficult when the organization is just trying to keep the workforce employed and keep the lights on."

How to Engage Employees

Miller offered the following best practices for helping employees feel valued:

- Check in with your workers. "Research shows that when you show an interest in them as people, not just as employees, they feel a greater sense of psychological safety and have greater trust in their leadership and organization."
- Centralize information so employees can find guidance and resources. Connect them to more health and wellness resources.
- Create opportunities to socialize virtually to mitigate feelings of isolation and build team cohesion.
- Be flexible while maintaining expectations. "Be mindful that what works for some doesn't work for others. Ask employees about what working conditions are best for them, what concerns them about their current workflow and about their emotional response to this stressful situation."
- Recognize your employees for their efforts.
- Be transparent and forthright without exception.

Helpful Tech Tools

Miller said the following products can help employers stay connected with their remote workers, communicate effectively and assess organizational need:

- Beaconforce (<https://beaconforce.com/>) uses science and machine learning to drive organizational performance while creating fulfilling environments where people can thrive, she said. "It provides real-time people data on intrinsic motivation, trust, belonging and stress. The platform continually nudges employees to a more productive, healthier mental state while providing leadership with data to make better workforce decisions. It's unique because it focuses on each individual."
- Humaxa (<https://www.humaxa.com/>) is an artificial intelligence assistant that has anonymous conversations with workers, Miller said. It integrates directly with the messaging platform Slack. The company's digital assistant, Max, is designed specifically for the remote workforce. "It can turn eight weeks of engagement survey work into eight seconds—no need to wait on reports and data anymore. The tool predicts what will work to motivate each individual to perform their best," Miller explained.
- ChartHop (<https://www.charthop.com/>) is a workforce planning tool for employers. Its auto-created organizational charts provide needed clarity and context about every employee. "You can visualize your remote workforce so you can better understand tax and legal implications, work hours and contingency plans," Miller said. "With uncertainty around purchasing decisions in the coming 12 to 18 months, employers need to understand the current state of their organization and create multiple headcount hiring scenarios for the future."

HR DAILY NEWSLETTER

News, trends and analysis, as well as breaking news alerts, to help HR professionals do their jobs better each business day.

Feedback

**CONTACT US (WWW.SHRM.ORG/ABOUT-SHRM/PAGES/CONTACT-US.ASPX) | 800.283.SHRM
(7476)**

© 2020 SHRM. All Rights Reserved

SHRM provides content as a service to its readers and members. It does not offer legal advice, and cannot guarantee the accuracy or suitability of its content for a particular purpose.

Disclaimer (www.shrm.org/about-shrm/Pages/Terms-of-Use.aspx#Disclaimer)