SPECIAL REPORT:

Managing for peak performance in a remote worker world

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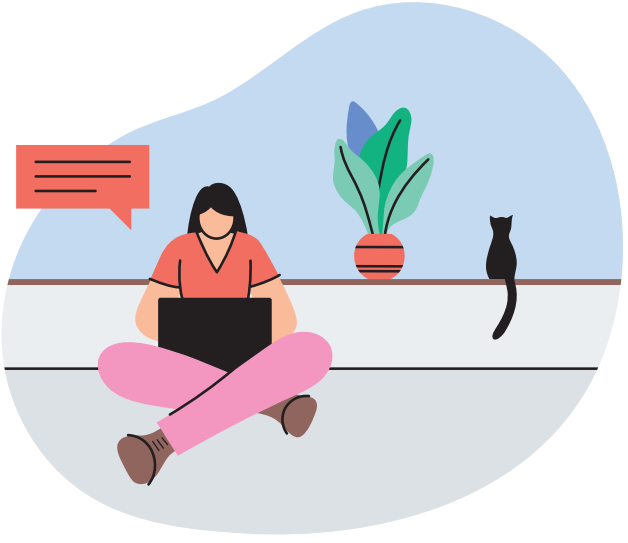


The power of **personal notes** 10

Compensation strategies for keeping salespeople engaged 14

Tap the brakes on long-term **WFH strategizing** 16

FEATURE STORY

Managing for peak performance in a remote worker world

BY PAUL NOLAN

On the first Friday in March this year, Jeb Ory led an employee appreciation celebration at the Arlington, Virginia, headquarters of Phone2Action, a provider of advocacy software that enables organizations to create grassroots marketing campaigns. The following week, the company's 90-plus employees were told they would be working remotely indefinitely, as it became clear the global COVID-19 outbreak made office settings unsafe.

Ory, CEO and founder of the company, says his executive team immediately began forming a strategy to maintain their corporate culture, which promotes collaboration and team spirit. Phone2Action employees were appreciative of office breakfasts and all-hands happy hours that had become a staple of the company's team-building efforts.

"We have people who tell us they joined the company because of our mission and our culture. People really liked the co-workers they met in the interview process. It has been a challenge for our team to not see the people they enjoy working with every day," Ory says.

The shift to WFH

Like Phone2Action, businesses across the U.S. and worldwide have overhauled their processes to cope with the pandemic. A global survey by Gartner found that 88% of organizations made it mandatory or encouraged their employees to work from home once COVID-19 was declared a pandemic.

Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, 3.4% of the U.S. work force worked remotely.

Managers face challenges keeping employees engaged, informed and accomplishing objectives. They are attempting to balance the desire to maintain close contact with remote workers with a consciousness of virtual meeting fatigue.

For their part, employees are reporting mixed emotions about working from home. Some say they are more productive than they were in the office and they appreciate the time savings of not having to commute. Others confess that working from home has been challenging. Many are juggling parental duties that are complicated by a large percentage of children who continue to attend school remotely. And not every home environment is spacious enough to accommodate ample working space.

A survey of more than 3,900 U.S. workers by Digital.com shows that 70% of employees prefer to work onsite once restrictions lift. Nearly 47% of workers cited social interaction with coworkers as their main reason for going back into the workplace. The second popular reason to work in-person is structure and normalcy, which was cited by 44.6% of respondents. Other motivating factors include more productivity, fewer distractions and access to workplace amenities like gyms and restaurants. (See page 16.)

Maintaining productivity is a key concern among managers, and an important element of that is keeping workers engaged

and motivated. Leaders believe their corporate culture goes a long way toward inspiring employees, but building the esprit de corps they rely on has proven to be challenging in an officeless environment.

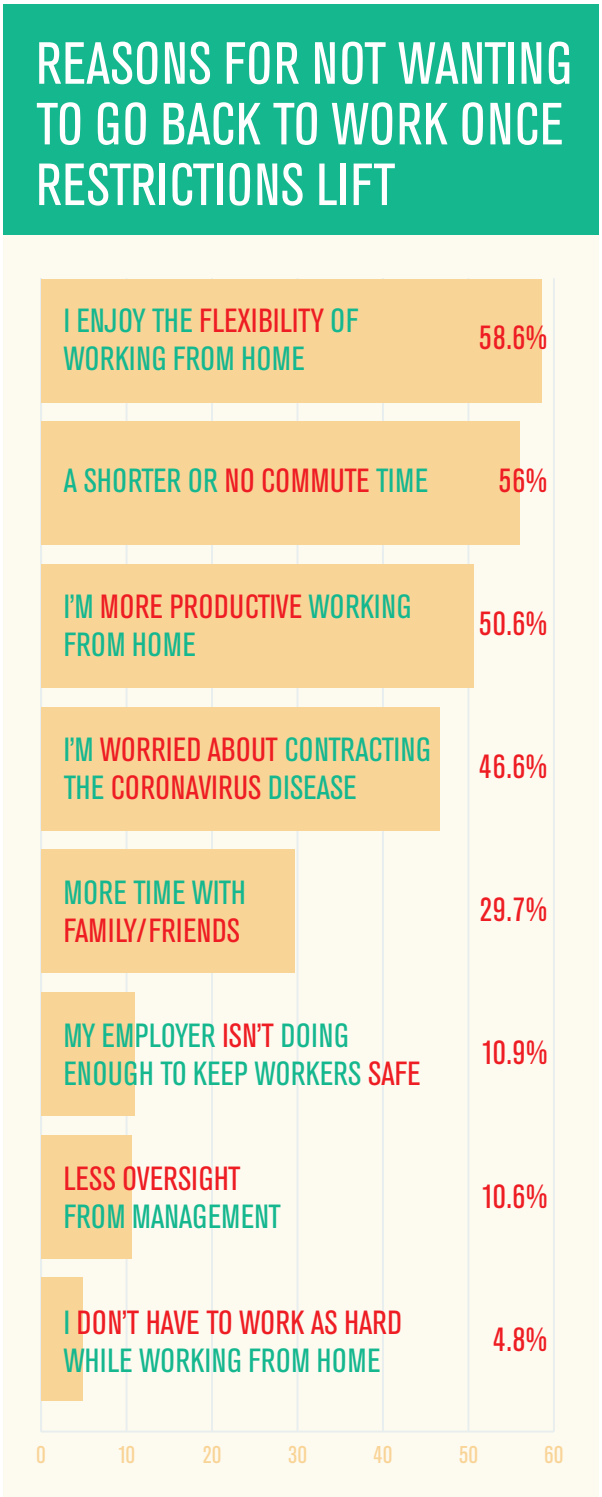


CHART: DIGITAL.COM

Phone2Action hired a new head of human resources just a few weeks before the pandemic hit. Managers at the company remained in close contact with their team members while a companywide approach to the WFH situation was developed.

"Once we hit work from home, we realized it was important to keep connective tissue," Ory says. They created virtual drop-in lunches that workers had the option of joining to simply chat with colleagues. Phone2Action also shifted happy hours and other celebrations that would have occurred in the office to the new virtual world.

"The biggest concern when we sent them home was around employee well-being," Ory says. "There is a whole host of non-work-related challenges that everyone was suddenly faced with. There are things that are much bigger than a job going on right now. We expected it to affect productivity, but this is our team, and the most important thing was to make sure people were going to be OK."

Technology's role in team-building

Companies that increased their reliance on technology to keep operating remotely also turned to tech tools to maintain their corporate culture. Many businesses are deploying technology such as Donut, a program that helps remote co-workers connect serendipitously using Slack or other communication platforms, to replace the chance meetings and water cooler conversations that occur in the office.

Virtual team experiences such as cocktail mixology classes, trivia contests and even a ukulele building class have replaced in-person corporate celebrations. The pandemic has forced managers to make a more intentional effort to keep workers connected with each other.

"One of the unique challenges of a remote work force is maintaining a culture of being part of a team," Monica Eaton-Cardone, co-founder and chief operating officer of Chargebacks911 told *Sales & Marketing Management* via email. The company helps online businesses prevent chargebacks and minimize losses. "It's all too easy for employees to slip through the cracks and feel isolated from their peers, which in turn leads to low morale. It's become increasingly important to recreate community wherever possible, even in small ways."

Like many companies, Chargeback911 has encouraged its managers to make personal check-ins with workers and has created chat spaces where employees can discuss non-work-related topics, such as parenting challenges or personal interests. "Giving staff an outlet like this shows that you value their well-being and happiness, and that you trust them not to abuse the outlet in lieu of getting the job done," Eaton-Cardone says.

The rise in virtual team meals has spurred increased use of food delivery services such as GrubHub, Door Dash and Uber Eats. Lee Burbage, a human resources manager at The Motley Fool, says his HR team has tried to keep the "surprise and delight" aspects of office life at the online financial and investment advice company going in the COVID-19 WFH era.

The Motley Fool, which employs about 500 people, replaced its monthly pizza day with a pizza lottery, sending 40 to 50 pizzas each month to workers' homes for lunch.

A personal touch is critical whenever employers express gratitude and recognize workers. In a company-produced podcast, Burbage said taking the time to know what ingredients each employee likes on their pizza makes the delivery that much more special and reflects well on the company. "We're not just sending out 50 cheese pizzas. We're pretty well-known for getting the people the pizza they want."

Gift cards to the rescue

Another recognition tool that is proving invaluable in the WFH environment is gift cards. Use of digital gift cards in the incentive division of Blackhawk Network, a leading gift card provider, is up 200% in 2020, according to Blackhawk's Vice President of Marketing Theresa McEndree. Restaurant gift cards for virtual team get-togethers and gift cards designated for home office supplies have been among the most popular, she says.

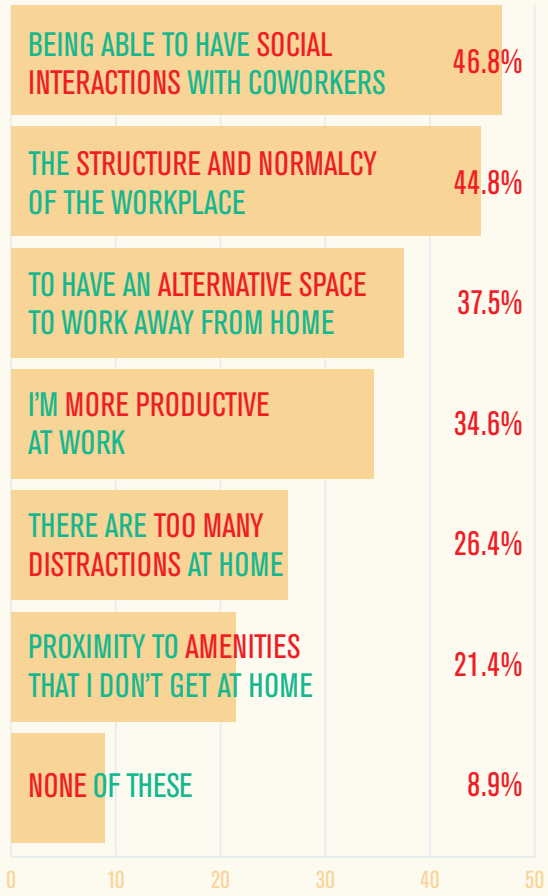
Scotty Greenburg, marketing director of Tango Card, a provider of e-gift cards, says some clients that have pivoted to virtual trade shows and online presentations are using gift cards as a thank-you to prospects that attend—a virtual swag bag of sorts. Companies are also using Tango cards as incentives to complete training. One company awarded cards worth $1,000 to replace an incentive travel program that was canceled due to the pandemic. The money could be used to book travel in the future or put toward home improvements, which many people who are stuck at home are tackling.

A thousand-dollar gift card is memorable, but many we spoke with emphasized that keeping employees engaged in the remote-work world is about continuous and genuine communication, and less about spending large amounts of money on rewards.

"I found that honest praise is one of the most efficient incentives leaders can give," states Chris Kaiser, founder and

continued on page 6

REASONS FOR WANTING TO GO BACK INTO WORK ONCE RESTRICTIONS LIFT



A new job title for the work-from-home era

Darren Murph is among the first to have his job title, but he thinks many more companies will adopt it in the post-pandemic world. Murph has been "head of remote" at the open-source software firm GitLab for more than a year. He works and lives near North Carolina's Outer Banks and serves GitLab's more than 700-employee all-remote team.

Tech giants such as Facebook, Okta and Quora are following GitLab's lead, hiring specialists who can help them transition to having a larger percentage of employees work remotely, according to *The Washington Post*.

Murph says the position is in line with another new job role that many companies are rushing to fill after events from this year—chief diversity officer. The head of remote job entails drafting guidelines for online meetings, planning virtual events, assisting with tax issues resulting from a remote work force, and maintaining corporate culture when employees are spread across the country or even the world.

Prithwiraj Choudhury, a Harvard business professor who has been studying remote work, says to make WFH work, executive leadership must lead the initiative by working remotely themselves. "If the whole company is working remotely but the C-suite is working in an office, then middle managers will just line up to get face time," he says.

Look who favored offices

"There's a temptation in our networked age to think that ideas can be developed by email and iChat. That's crazy. Creativity comes from spontaneous meetings, from random discussions. You run into someone, you ask what they're doing, you say 'wow,' and soon you're cooking up all sorts of ideas."

– Steve Jobs

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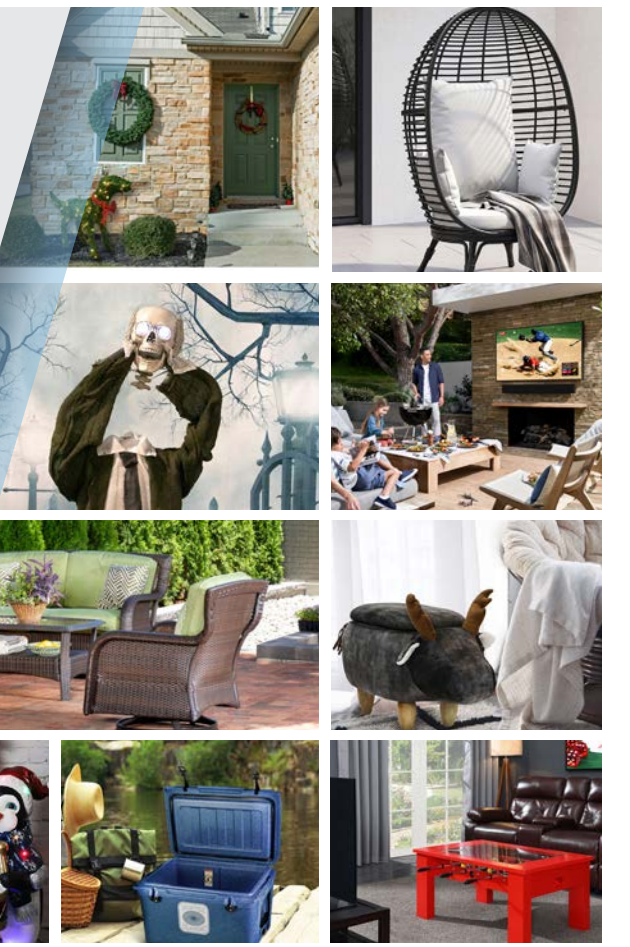

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Remote Workers, *continued from page 4*

Frequency of Feedback Is Key to Engaging Remote Workers

GALLUP PANEL, 2019 (PRE-COVID-19)

CEO of Click A Tree, an organization dedicated to sustainability by planting trees around the world. Kaiser works in Germany. His full-time and freelance workers have always been virtual, and the company works with tree-planting partners in a number of countries.

The struggle to replace personal contact

What Kaiser misses most during the COVID era is the reforestation projects that bring his team together in locations around the world. "Motivating each other is much easier in person. Going out to plant trees together is great fun and results in wonderful memories that tie the team together beyond the work," Kaiser states in an email. He has promised to take the team to a reforestation project in 2021 if they hit their goals.

Jake Rheude is also anxious to get his team of contract content marketers together when it is safe to do so. Rheude is vice president of marketing at Red Stag Fulfillment, an ecommerce order fulfillment provider with warehouses in Tennessee and Utah. In his current position, Rheude has always managed a team of remote content creators, so the pandemic did not change his daily interactions with them. However, it prevented him from bringing the team together this summer for an annual strategy and team-building event.

Rheude says there is a human element that comes even with his company's compact, two-day gathering that cannot be replaced virtually. His content providers are contract workers. Having them visit Knoxville last year to tour Red Stag's warehouse operation, meet with various team members and complete some workshops together was invaluable, Rheude says. He planned to repeat the experience at the Salt Lake City warehouse this year, but the pandemic prevented that.

"When you work remotely, it's easy to stay in your own silo, working away with minimal external input or output. But to collaborate effectively, you need to know where everyone else is in the project," Leigh Smith, people manager for UK-based Anywhere Works, told us via email. "We've ramped up the number of video calls we host each day. We try to recreate the feel of an office as much as possible, and collaboration tools like video-call software play a fundamental role in that. That's been vital to minimizing silos and building a more cohesive team."

Until that time when in-person gatherings can safely occur, it's important for managers to remain connected with each

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worker on their team in an authentic manner. A 2019 survey of more than 3,000 U.S. employees by the performance improvement company One10 shows that 42% of workers are more likely to remain with a current employer when they feel the company tries to meet both their work and personal needs.

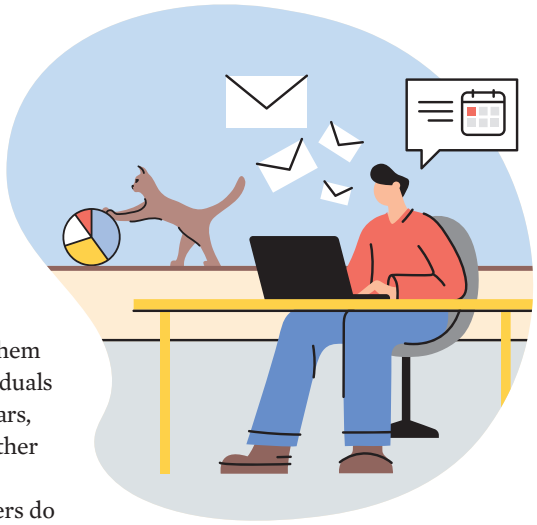
"When you are physically removed from one another, you really want to have that connection with the people that report to you," says Richelle Taylor, vice president of strategic marketing at One10.

Show genuine concern

What we heard more than anything else during our reporting is that showing genuine concern for co-workers is the most important gesture a manager can make. "One key thing we found that helps build a trusting relationship with a supervisor is the notion of well-being. Does the supervisor really understand and care about the employee's well-being, and are they able to effectively communicate that understanding?" says Jeff Weiner, senior director of analytics at One10. "In a global pandemic, where we are working very differently, this takes on even a deeper meaning."

"If this period of remote working has taught us anything, it's that communication has always been key," says Claire Short, chief of staff at upUgo, a digital marketing agency specializing in search engine optimization. "You may not be able to afford lavish gifts, but there are plenty of other cost-effective ways to remind your team you're thinking of them – ones that are far too often overlooked."

Sarah Danzl, head of global communications and client advocacy at Degreed, an education technology company, says recognizing workers one-on-one and publicly is critical. She also stresses the importance of being conscious that people's lives are complex. "Work doesn't exist in a bubble," Danzl says. "It's vital for managers to understand and accept that their team's motivation and engagement is impacted by things happening outside of work, and to support them as holistic individuals with families, fears, ambitions and other commitments."



When managers do check in on team members, it should be done carefully. Employees can be conscious of the supervisor-subordinate dynamic and be nervous about revealing too much or presenting the notion that their performance is negatively impacted.

In some cases, even asking if someone is OK, "depending on how, where and when it's posed, could be seen as an affront or even something where a case is being built to dismiss that person," Phoenix Jackson, a licensed marriage and family counselor told *The New York Times*. Reassuring the individual that your concern is genuine and you want to help in any way possible is important.

Monica Eaton-Cardone at Chargebacks911 advises managers to be forgiving with their team and themselves. "We've never dealt with something on this scale before. Because of that, there's room for the typical rules to bend and for more leniency when measuring performance. I think we need to remember that we all have jobs to do and we should be committed to making the best of a difficult situation." SMM

WFH isn't a fit for everyone

The longer people who are able to work from home do so, the more it becomes likely they will continue to work from home at least some of the time post-COVID. A Gallup report on creating successful work-from-home plans for team members recommends managers evaluate the following criteria for each person on their team:

1. **Readiness and comfort –** Is this person comfortable with the protocols and precautions that the organization is implementing? What are the individual's health and safety concerns — for themselves and their family members?
2. **Life circumstances –** What personal demands is this person experiencing regarding childcare, elder care or responsibilities for tending to sick family members? What type of transportation is required for the person to return to the work site, and is that type available? Does the person have a well-defined space at home that is suitable for productive, engaging long-term remote work?
3. **Performance –** How has this individual performed before and after shifting to at-home work? Tracking and supporting low performers may be more difficult from a distance.
4. **Strengths –** Even if a role aligns well with remote work, it is important to consider that people have different talents and, therefore, different ways of achieving the same outcome. Some people work remotely with a high degree of success despite minimal interventions. Others may be in the same role, but they perform better with the interactions and structure of on-site work.

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A note for strong leadership

The Motley Fool, an online financial and investment advice company, decided quickly in early March to close its Alexandria, Virginia, headquarters and have all employees work remotely. Lee Burbage, a human resources lead, says the company is fortunate to able to operate virtually, so the downside of doing so is minimal.

Still, his HR team was concerned about its hundreds of employees missing the strong company culture that the Motley Fool works hard to infuse at its corporate HQ. To counter that, Burbage's team split up duties to write and mail personal notes to every employee — what he called "a handwritten hug."

"We thought that was a good out-of-the-normal-cycle way to contact employees that really just said, 'We're cheering for you. Thank you for being who you are. We're going to get through this together,'" Burbage said in a company-produced podcast.

Health experts say Burbage's instincts were on target. In a study of a new treatment for those who attempted suicide, the group who received three therapy sessions followed by two years of receiving personalized letters had an approximately 80% reduced risk of a repeat suicide attempt than the group that did not receive letters.

In the COVID-19 era, snail mail has played an important role in keeping the spirits of otherwise isolated individuals upbeat. "[Letters] help provide social support, even if you can't be there with your friend or family member, holding their hand and being by their side," Amanda Spray, clinical associate professor of psychiatry at New York University's Grossman School of Medicine, told *The Washington Post*.

Managers may be uncertain about what to say when writing letters to employees, but health professionals say the act of writing is as important as what's written. Writing a personal note on a carefully chosen card or stationary "requires a kind of deliberation that is so lacking in our time of fast-paced messaging and media," Psychiatrist Jena Lee told the *Post*. "When you receive a handwritten letter, you reflexively start imagining the author sitting down and reflecting, thinking about you. … That's why it's so very effective at showing someone does care about you."

Being personal and sincere will get you a lot further than searching for the perfect thing to say. She advises note writers to focus on what they appreciate about the recipient before they begin writing and to be future-oriented. "Sometimes, we get so distracted trying to find the right things to say, we don't even realize that we sacrifice being absolutely genuine."

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Keeping close to channel partners

As with everything else in 2020, many B2B companies' relationships with channel partners, which are critical to their success, have been disrupted. The "surprise and delight" treatment that is widely used to keep internal employees engaged is equally effective with channel partners.

Often, a company representative visits channel resellers in person or connects with them at trade shows, but that has been taken off the table this year. Lincoln Smith, chief strategy officer at HMI Performance Incentives, says several of their clients are staying in front of VIP channel partners by sending tokens of their appreciation. "It has to do with identifying those VIPs that you normally had a lot of touchpoints with and provided them with a lot of value that you no longer can provide," he says.

One large IT infrastructure client worked with HMI on a campaign to replace the networking they normally accomplish at a trade show that was canceled. Instead, the client sent high-end quarterly gifts to top-performing channel partners to make sure they felt valued. The IT company is happy to have cemented these important relationships and reaped numerous mentions by its partners in social media posts.

Similarly, Peter Goldberger, founder and CEO of Incentive Team, helps manufacturers who are mostly in home building and furnishings connect with key resellers. When the outbreak first struck and all businesses were stuck in neutral, Goldberger's clients encouraged the resellers to use the downtime to learn more about its products through video training. Those who completed the training were awarded points that could be redeemed online for merchandise and other rewards.

PETER GOLDBERGER

"We were incredibly busy with the training part immediately," Goldberger says. "All of our clients' resellers were at home and the salespeople couldn't visit them. What could they be doing so at least they stayed engaged and the brand stayed top-of-mind? Selling is positioning a product so it resonates with that consumer walking through the door. We are huge believers that training plus incentives equals the change in behavior that our clients are looking for."

WFH by the numbers

64% of employees say **employee recognition and appreciation is more important** while working from home, according to a poll of U.S. workers by Snappy Gifts, an online recognition platform, that garnered more than 1,000 responses.

That same poll showed that **43%** of employees believe **stay-at-home orders have had a negative effect** on their workplace culture.

Owl Labs reports that companies that allow remote working have a **25%** **lower employee turnover** rate.

77% of remote workers say they are **more productive when working from home**, according to a poll from CoSo Cloud, a global software and services company.

53% of U.S. remote workers view **flexible scheduling** as the top benefit, according to Statista.

19% of remote employees report **loneliness** as their biggest challenge, according to Buffer, a social media strategy consultant.

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Compensation strategies for keeping salespeople engaged

BY VISMAY GADA

The COVID-19 pandemic has expedited a remote work culture that was already on its way. First came the novelty phase. For those who had never worked from home, they realized the many benefits: no commute time, less money spent on eating lunch out and, for many, heightened productivity without the distractions of the office.

However, more than six months into this unprecedented global pandemic, some workers are getting restless, unmotivated and disengaged. With little warning and an inability to put immediate plans and policies in place to help workers, some employers are having difficulty maintaining the motivation of their workers. In fact, despite a slight rise of overall engagement, nearly half (47%) of American employees currently do not feel engaged.

For sales teams selling in industries where money is already tight due to the pandemic, many have become frustrated and unmotivated with the slow economic recovery and thus low budgets from prospects and clients. How can leaders continue to motivate and retain their remote teams through the remainder of the year while managing budgetary restrictions?

Sales teams should look to data to optimize compensation and retain remote sales teams as the novelty of remote work wears off and employees become more disengaged. Let's explore three ways that sales leaders can utilize data and analytics to stay afloat amid the crisis and keep teams motivated.

Analyze compensation effectiveness

While other programs that may typically take precedence are on hold, this climate serves as a perfect time for sales leaders to take pause and turn their attention to compensation. With the instability of the past few months, most organizations are looking for ways to become more efficient, and employees are looking for compensation benefits that keep them afloat while working from home. Sales leaders should consider consolidating compensation data and standardizing reporting to better understand the impact of their compensation strategies. This process allows teams to analyze compensation effectiveness so they know where there is value for their investment and where the team may be falling short.

For example, are there current benefits and perks that do not

provide significant value to the employee, but are taking up budget that could be best used elsewhere? Perhaps the budget (or a portion of the budget) that is typically reserved for commuter benefits can be used temporarily to subsidize at-home internet costs for employees. This data analytics process will allow leaders to position the organization for future success and ensure top performers are receiving compensation that keeps them motivated.

Set the Right Pay Scales

Employees are motivated when they feel valued by the company, and part of feeling valued in our current climate stems from pay equality. Although companies may be looking to cut budgets where possible, it's equally important to consider employee happiness and engagement when rethinking compensation strategies. When creating new compensation models, use data to leverage market benchmarks and analyze teams' pay scales for internal fairness and competitiveness. To promote trust through transparency, companies can use benchmark data to demonstrate how employees' individual compensation aligns with the market.

For a commission-based job, defined compensation is particularly important as unclear commission structures can cause employees to feel undervalued when they don't understand the basis of their pay. Consider creating a document that outlines commission and bonus structures so employees are clear on how their organization allocates compensation and they have no question they're equally valued.

Identify At-Risk Employees

In this volatile economy, despite fears of being furloughed or laid off, employees are still at risk of becoming disengaged and unmotivated, especially as the pandemic drags on and many continue to feel a lack of connection with their companies. SMM

Vismay Gada is head of North America and Global Financial Services at beqom, a global provider of compensation management software.

Bold predictions about what WFH will beget

FirstBase is a startup company that was founded in 2018 with the mission to help global companies establish a U.S. presence. In the process of creating a completely remote work force, the FirstBase founders realized there is also a business in helping other businesses transition to remote work forces. FirstBase CEO Chris Herd told *The Wall Street Journal* that its waitlist of companies wanting the remote setup assistance ballooned from 600 in early March to more than 4,000 in July.

"Remote work is the biggest workplace revolution in history and nothing will deliver a higher quality of life increase in the next decade than this," the company's website states. Clearly, more people will be working from home, at least part time, post-COVID than before the pandemic hit. A FirstBase blog post entitled "65 Predictions About the Future of Life and Work" offers some bolder predictions about how the WFH shift will permanently impact work life. These include:

Presence – Tools that provide an estimate of when you should expect a response will become big. These will measure the tasks your team are doing and use this to set expectations, allowing teams to escalate more easily when necessary.

Hobby Renaissance – Commuting and city living leave no freedom to do the things we are most passionate about. Working remotely allows us to surf or ski before work, travel more frequently and develop new passions. *(Editor's note: This creates an opportunity for employers to be more creative with non-cash incentives and rewards tailored to each employee's interests.)*

Remote Visas – Small nations will come together to attract remote workers at different stages of the year, [providing a] huge opportunity to synchronize education to enable families to be more fluid in their locations.

Remote Retreats – Purpose-built destinations that allow for entire companies to fly into a campus for a synchronous week. Likely staffed with facilitators and educators who train staff to maximize effectiveness.

Hyper-Turnover – We are about to live through the highest period of turnover between companies in history. Workers will reorganize rapidly, choosing the workplace that suits their working style best.

Meeting Death – Wasting two hours travelling to a meeting will end. The benefits of in-person are eroded by the benefits of not travelling. Conferences and quarterly networking events will become more important for cultivating in-person relationships.

Output Focus – Time will be replaced as the main means of judging performance by productivity and output. Great workers will be the ones who deliver what they promise consistently. Advancement decisions will be decided by capability rather than who you drink beer with after work.

Job Title Death – What your job title is will become more irrelevant as remote work becomes more prominent. What you do, what you're capable of, the tools you can wield will enable you to do jobs that break you free from the shackles of a title. SMM

Tap the brakes on WFH strategizing

EDITOR'S NOTE: We're big fans of NYU marketing professor and podcaster Scott Galloway (profgalloway.com and The Prof G podcast). Recently, in answering a listener question about the future of office culture and increased adoption of remote work, Galloway offered the sort of insightful rant that makes his podcast must listening for business leaders. The questioner had a job opportunity in another state, but was reluctant to move for it. She wondered whether she should take the job hoping to shift it to a remote position through strong performance. Galloway's response:

"Truth has a nice ring to it. I would be very transparent about your in-state goal. What you don't want to do is show up to a job expecting that they'll have a change of mind-set that will flip to your desires. You might find that they are more flexible than their initial complexion.

Work from home is going to be a huge cultural shift. Loosely speaking, you can tell how people feel about it by how old they are. If you're my age [mid-50s], we've kind of arrived in the sense that we have our kids, we have a decent home, we have the primary relationships — a spouse and kids — that we want out of our lives. We've orchestrated, or hopefully architected, a decent base of friends.

But if you're under the age of 35 or 40, and you're looking to develop your interpersonal skills; you're looking to meet a mate — one-third of people who get married are with someone they met at work; you're looking to establish long-term professional friendships; you're looking for that buzz and that intensity and that culture, which is hugely rewarding at a great corporation...

It's just an entirely different gig for a 25-year-old. If you're willing to live in a high-cost area, you're willing to put on a suit or a dress or some reasonable facsimile of both of those things, you're willing to play nice with others, you're willing to figure out a way to develop EQ, those people should receive additional compensation.

It's also fun to go to work at Google and go to the cafeteria. It's fun to go to Friday lunch-and-learns at work. It's fun to grab a coffee with your friend and complain about your boss or get help and establish mentorship roles with people above and below you.

Work can be very rewarding, and it's a fantastic training. It's like training to become a Navy SEAL and then trying to do it remotely — it's just not going to work as well.

Also, there's a dark side to remote work. Do you think Mark Zuckerberg telling people they can work remotely isn't a function of his desire to just cut costs? Because, if your job can be moved to Denver, guess what? It can keep moving east, and at some point your job is going to be moved to Delhi.

I don't think it's as simple as we're all going to work from home and it's going to be a remote culture. There is a certain creativity, there is a certain electricity, there is a certain benefit to "ideas having sex" that only happens when people are bumping into each other. Also, there is just a certain level of Zoom fatigue, a certain inability to read the room, a certain inability to make decisions remotely. We're going to find that office space becomes a feature, not a bug, for the most talented young people in the world.

The reality is the greatest ROI on any asset in the world is a talented person under the age of 30. They typically don't cost much. They typically have low health care costs because they're not having babies or they're not getting sick. They typically are willing to work 18 hours a day because no one is calling them and bothering them to get home for dinner, or they're so stupid they don't recognize that life is short, so they're willing to work 18 hours a day. And they are better-skilled, better-trained and better-educated than my generation.

This is the most productive asset in the world, and what do they want? They want to be in an office."

COVID forces change to performance measurements

COVID-19 has accelerated change in the workplace, as evidenced, most obviously, with a higher corporate acceptance of working remotely. Another area of work life where change has been accelerated is performance reviews.

Many companies abandoned reviews for the rest of this year. In doing so, some are realizing their existing performance review process is ineffective, arbitrary and potentially harmful.

"The new approach to performance management will have to be more collaborative, adaptive and individualized based on conditions on the ground," states a Gallup report on the imperative evolution of performance reviews. It identifies three essential characteristics of modernized performance management:

Agile Goals – Employees should set and own their goals and expect change as business opportunities and needs evolve. Managers should have authority and be expected to tailor goals to the team and the individual as work changes.

Ongoing Reviews – Performance assessment should be an ongoing conversation that is focused on the future. "Great ongoing coaching conversations create a two-way street of communication that makes it easy to discuss needs and challenges and deliver highly individualized recognition," the Gallup report states. This coincides with the increased importance of regular communication as more workers plan to be in the office less or not at all.

Adjusting Incentive Structures – Employees should not be held to metrics that don't make sense in the current business environment. Have open conversations with sales professionals and non-sales personnel about incentive structures. Gallup has found that when people have conversations with their manager about progress and pay, they are more engaged and feel better about the pay they receive, even if they don't get a pay increase.

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Re-energizing sales efforts in a virtual world

BY RICHELLE TAYLOR

Is your sales team disengaged? This year, it's hard not to be. We've quickly adapted everything in our work and personal life to respond to and survive within a COVID-19 environment.

According to Gallup, the U.S. work force experienced the most significant drop in employee engagement in 2020. Notably, the largest decline in employee engagement was among those working in managerial or leadership positions. While not all sales teams may be struggling with demand (in fact some technology companies are experiencing record years), disengagement seems to be prevalent across all organizations and industries regardless of financial success.

Disengagement among your teams is costly and the change must come from the top. You have the power to reengage your teams. How? By recognizing team members' achievements and rewarding them for a job well done.

Recognition strengthens relationships

In late 2019, we surveyed more than 3,000 U.S. employees across various industries to determine the strength of the relationship between employees, their managers and their companies. We took a keen interest on those in sales roles. Using our proprietary technique, called rsX℠, we measured the trust, alignment and commitment within these groups. Our data shows that recognition is an invaluable asset to any sales team.

However, not just any type of recognition will do. Recognition needs to be both authentic and frequent. Our survey shows that employees place a high value on recognition they receive from their colleagues, too. As sales leaders, you can encourage and support this peer-to-peer recognition that's so important to your team.

While service anniversaries are important, it's smart not to wait until an annual milestone to recognize your employees. Consider "surprise and delight" gifts or points for a reward platform. These can be rewarded at any time—and more frequently—thereby increasing workers' engagement levels.

Don't rely on cash alone

The line between rewards and compensation can become blurred. Though cash may seem like an easy solution, research as far back as the 1970s shows that cash rewards are not as meaningful as non-cash rewards on a psychological perspective. The excitement of a cash reward wears off quickly when it is spent on bills and other daily expenses. This doesn't bode well for your long-term reward and recognition strategy, and doesn't do much to excite and motivate your team to help you reach your business sales goals.

Instead of cash, consider an online rewards program that makes giving and receiving easy, like One10's Rewarding You platform. This allows you to reward your team with award points after they reach their sales goals. Recipients can redeem their award points at any time for a multitude of reward options. Since it's all online, it's also a fantastic way to quickly and easily reward your virtual teams.

Hit your 2021 goals

As you plan for next year, consider implementing a sales incentive program or series of "just in time" contests to keep team engagement and interest high. Sales incentive programs can establish, build and deepen relationships with your sales team and your channel partners, which leads to achieving your business sales goals and strengthening your bottom line.

Not all sales incentive programs are the same. They can be creative and fun, or even include gamification techniques. But, keep in mind, the best sales incentive programs are the ones designed with the end in mind. Determine your program goals first by asking important questions like "What are we trying to accomplish?" and "What's the measurable objective?" Ensuring these critical questions are answered in the planning phase is one key to success.

Creating a culture of fairness is important in any sales incentive program. This means you must create a rules structure that clearly explains the participant expectations, what it will take for your team members to succeed within the program, and the rewards they will receive in return. The rules of your sales incentive program should be directly tied to your business objectives. This is how you move the needle, show program ROI and improve your bottom line. SMM

Richelle Taylor is vice president of strategic marketing at One10, which provides sales incentive programs, rewards and recognition, travel and events, and other performance improvement programs for its Fortune 500 clients.

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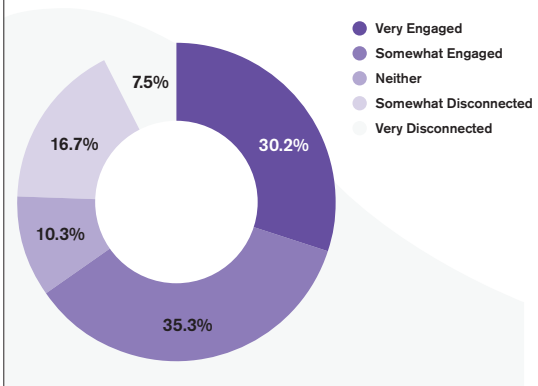
Technology can improve your recognition efforts

BY CINDY MIELKE

An estimated 42% of the work force is currently working from home. How this number will change following the pandemic isn't certain, but the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta predicts the number of days worked from home will triple among full-time employees. As more people permanently transition to home offices, companies will need to change how they motivate and recognize employees.

In April, Echo Market Research and Tango Card asked 500 newly remote employees how engaged they were feeling. Sixty-five percent said they felt "very" or "somewhat" engaged. Video technology tools like Zoom and Slack were reported helpful in fueling connection and engagement. No longer considered nice-to-have resources for a subset of workers, these tools have become vital to all employees and will continue to support formal and informal functions for both remote and in-office workers.

How engaged or disconnected do you now feel during the workday? (% of Respondents)



Base: 504 newly remote, full-time employees in the US. April 6, 2020.
Source: Echo Market Research

Taking a closer look at recognition programs, the Incentive Research Foundation (IRF) reports that 26% of program owners say they're communicating more frequently. This is excellent news, as industry best practices show that programs perform better with clear and frequent communication. It's often an area that companies overlook, however, due to lack of time, money or technology tools. To ensure clarity and frequency, companies should incorporate the proper tools—ones that enable ongoing, easy communication among users. These tools should make it effortless for peers to celebrate achievements.

This desire for increased communication will likely continue post-pandemic if predictions of those who will continue remote work hold true. As the need for technology at a recognition program level continues to grow, it's possible that tools like TinyPulse will become just as popular as Slack and Zoom. TinyPulse, an employee engagement and recognition tool, empowers employees to recognize and reward each other in a meaningful way. More companies are using tools like this to enable employees to send peers an instant public message and gift card reward. It also integrates with Slack and Tango Card, creating a steady feed of recognition, thank-yous, and general positivity in real time.

In an effort to ensure relevancy, recognition program owners have shifted their focus to goals that are critical within their organizations, which has in turn translated to changing rewards. While travel rewards are down, the IRF reports that merchandise use is slightly up, and points programs have increased by 22%. In addition, prepaid and gift cards are up 26%, representing the largest shift in use reported.

42% of IRF survey respondents who postponed their incentive trips are now using alternative means to recognize or celebrate award winners. Among those who decided to cancel their travel programs, 78% indicated they were providing alternative awards such as branded merchandise, individual travel options, points and cash equivalents.

Starting a program for the new normal doesn't need to be complicated. Tango Card highlights five key elements to recognize employees working remotely:

1. **Keep reward programs simple to administer, understand, and use.** That means user-friendly technology for both the awarding party and the awarded.
2. **Put recognition in the hands of the employees, not the managers.** Don't set up a process for approvals fearing misuse. Instead, put trust in your people to do the right thing and remove barriers to recognition.
3. **Budgets don't have to be large.** It's the communication that matters most.
4. **Give rewards that people want.** Don't restrict awards to fit your ideal or someone else's business model.
5. **Establish the purpose of your program at the outset** and be clear about success will look like.

An array of technology providers exist to help companies connect their engagement and reward programs to tools that make them easy for everyone to use. Many of those providers enable robust integrations that make it possible for internal channel communication and rewards to be easily added. The days of handing out rewards in front of the team are gone—for now—but even when it's possible again, there's an entire industry dedicated to making awards easy to send and awesome to receive wherever you are. SMM

Cindy Mielke is the director of channel marketing, incentives at Tango Card.

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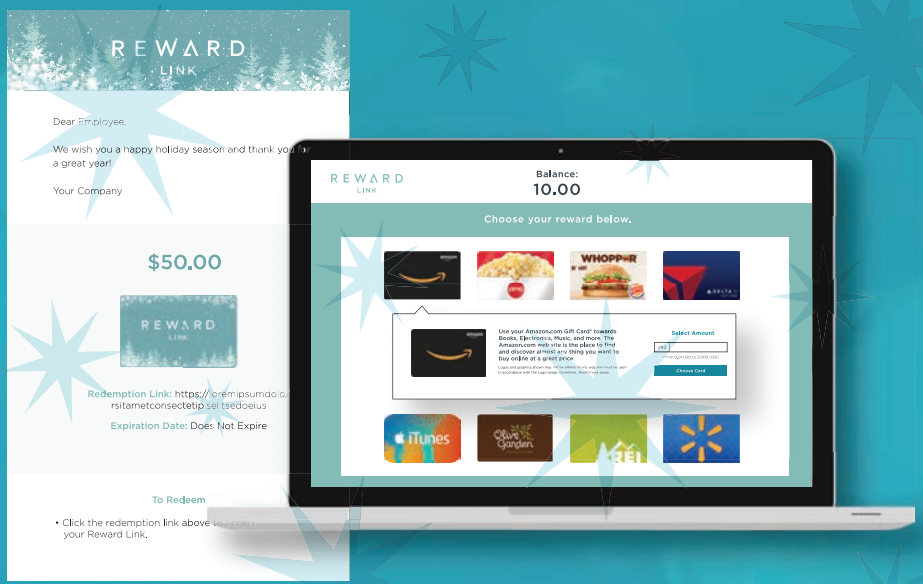

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