



An HR Leader's  
Definitive Guide to

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# Remote Employee Engagement

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# Introduction

As companies around the world transition to a partial or fully remote workforce, leaders are working to find ways to support their employees while keeping them motivated, productive and engaged. With an ever-changing landscape, employers can consider engagement strategies that meet their employees where they are, which might be in an office, in their home, or somewhere in between.

Michelle Wright, the former CHRO of CareFirst Blue Cross Blue Shield had this to say about engaging your employees when [speaking to an audience of HR Leaders](#):

**“I just think we have to be creative. And the best place to do that is tap into your employees. They're so crazy creative. And what I find is that people right now want to make a difference. They want to do something. They don't just want to sit in another meeting. It's the perfect time to engage your employees in those solutions.”**

The Definitive Guide to Remote Employee Engagement is filled with strategies for business leaders and managers to engage their employees, no matter where they are. Before we dive into Remote Employee Engagement, you may be wondering:

## What is Employee Engagement?

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Efforts to increase employee engagement have always been part of workplace and office culture, but in the past those efforts were focused on engaging people who worked in the same physical location. The benefits of employee engagement are

compelling, and a key reason that many companies want to increase engagement levels among their workforce. **Highly engaged employees are:**

- **More likely to stay in their job** – according to SHRM, the average cost to [recruit a new employee](#) is \$4,129 (not including onboarding costs), that can add up quickly if your disengaged employees are on the move.
- **More profitable for your company** – a meta-analysis by Gallup showed that companies whose employees scored highest for engagement were [21% more profitable](#).
- **More likely to show up for work** – studies show that engaged employees have 41% [lower rates of absenteeism](#) at work, keeping productivity levels high.

While most companies understand the importance of these factors, too many companies confuse job satisfaction — something you can measure with a survey and pat yourself on the back as long as employees are generally happy with their pay and benefits — with high levels of engagement.

An annual Gallup survey revealed that [one in three](#) U.S. workers were actually engaged at work; the other 65% are either not engaged or actively *disengaged*. Those employees aren't necessarily low performers either; many are motivated and talented, and could easily find a new job.



**Engaged employees** are passionate about the work they do, have a connection to the company, and feel committed to helping move an organization forward



**Disengaged employees** put in the time at work and get their job done, but they're not going out of their way to do more than what's necessary



**Actively disengaged** employees are on the other end of the spectrum and can be disruptive to a workplace because they go out of their way to undermine productive work

The key for companies has always been to find ways to help more people feel passionate about their work and committed to improvement and innovation. You may have tried one or more common employee engagement tools and techniques in an effort to improve your levels of engagement at work. These have traditionally included a mix of:

- **Annual employee surveys**
- **Employee recognition programs**
- **Extracurricular team-building activities**
- **Incentive programs**
- **Trainings to improve management**
- **Employee wellness programs**

Some of these efforts may have resulted in success depending on the team or culture, while others met mixed results or mild responses while doing little to create an emotional connection between the employees and the organization.

Then in early 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and millions of employees suddenly became remote workers. In this environment engagement is more important than ever, but with employees working from home, it's also harder than ever.

## 5 Ways to Boost Remote Employee Engagement

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Along with many aspects of our lives, the coronavirus has dramatically altered the way we work. Dinner tables became home offices, parents were suddenly juggling the responsibilities of childcare, homeschool, and work, and people were learning to navigate a brand new world without cubicles or offices and only an internet connection to keep them in touch with co-workers.

For the foreseeable future, most workplaces are planning to continue allowing employees that can to work remotely for their own safety. Many large companies have even announced that they will continue to do so even after the pandemic is over. Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey recently announced that his employees will have a work-from-home option forever.

Working from home may have been exciting at first — after all, it does mean skipping a rush-hour commute and having the option to work in yoga pants — but over time it can present some new challenges. It's up to managers and supervisors to keep remote employees excited and involved. Here are **five key ways** you can improve remote engagement and strengthen your company culture.

## Key 1

# Communicate With Your Employees

Internal communications have always been important, but during a global pandemic (or anytime people are not physically in the same office space) it is even more critical that you stay in touch with employees. Good internal communications strategies include:

## REACH EVERY EMPLOYEE

Reach every employee and reinforce how much you value each person at your company. Make sure that everyone from the cleaning staff to the C-suite has access to important company information and is regularly updated with information relevant to their position as well as the broader activities and initiatives the company is doing.



## USE DIVERSE OUTREACH TOOLS



Use diverse outreach tools so everyone receives the communications. It can be easy to fall back on tools like email or an employee intranet, but not everyone uses them regularly (and some tools, like intranets, may be difficult to access from home). Incorporating text messages, online chat tools, phone calls, a public website, social media — even at-home mailers — can help to share your message across your workforce.

## STRIKE A BALANCE

Strike a balance in the overall volume of communication. There is a lot to share right now, and when you can't meet in person you may feel the need to send out more communications, which could make employees feel overwhelmed. Try to understand how your workforce wants to receive messages, and meet them where they are.



## PROVIDE HONEST & FACTUAL INFORMATION



Provide factual, transparent, and honest information. That may include updates on COVID-19 in your area, transparency in how you are making decisions about when it's safe to go back to work, and information about work-from-home policies. The more proactive you are with this information, the more empowered your employees will feel.

## Key 2

# Encourage a Culture of Collaboration

When employees are in close proximity to one another, collaboration will usually happen more naturally. Working remotely means you need to help find ways to make it easier for employees to collaborate, such as:

- Rethink the way you conduct meetings, how many meetings are necessary, and who is invited to each meeting
- Set up virtual coffee breaks to allow for non-work-related socializing
- Provide technology that allows team members to collaborate (such as Zoom, Slack, Microsoft Teams), and the appropriate training so everyone feels comfortable using the tools
- Ask for suggestions from employees on ways they could collaborate better, and try new things based on their recommendations

For managers and supervisors, it's also important to recognize that there is a balance between productive levels of communication and collaboration, and allowing people time to get work done on their own. Managers need to have a high level of trust to avoid micromanaging or trying to establish too much “control” over remote employees because they're worried they are taking advantage of the lack of direct supervision.



### Key 3

## Set Up Virtual Challenges

One great way to stay in touch with each other and continue to foster camaraderie among your staff is through implementing virtual challenges. These challenges can help employees connect in different ways, and over time that can mitigate some of the effects of physical separation.

There are plenty of ways to keep teams engaged even when you're not together, from simple things like daily writing prompts that everyone shares with the team to more involved app-based scavenger hunts or solving online murder mysteries (think escape rooms, but online). Wellness-based challenges — including physical activities, stress relief, and other similar things — are also great ways to boost connections, with the added benefit of [improving the overall health of your workforce](#). Speaking of the importance of benefits...

### Key 4

## Bring On Engaging Benefits

Many people may see working from home as a perk, but not being in a physical workplace can affect other benefits your company provides. Some things that were previously available at work may not be available to your employees at home, such as an on-site gym or healthy snacks, while others may be harder to access. In some cases, companies will need to add new benefits to address emerging challenges in physical and emotional health during a time when world events are increasing stress and anxiety levels.

Gallup and Healthways identified five interrelated areas that contribute to overall well-being:



### **Purpose**

Motivation to achieve your goals



### **Social**

Supportive relationships in your life



### **Financial**

Lower stress & better ability to manage finances



### **Community**

Safety and positive feelings about your community



### **Physical**

Good health that allows you to do what you want each day

The more areas where people report that they are doing well (“thriving”), the more likely they are to have good overall health. Beyond that, they are also more likely to be highly engaged at work.

The key for companies that want employees to thrive while working from home is to offer benefits that address as many of these five areas as possible. Fitness apps are great, but employees also need ways to access help with their finances, find relief from stress and anxiety, and participate in social interactions and community that provide meaning and support.

## Key 5

# Make it Social

Humans are inherently social, and while introverts may be flourishing right now as the world scales back its face-to-face interactions and encourages people to stay at home, the long-term negative impacts of social isolation are very real. For many people a workplace is more than just an office where you complete daily tasks, it's a place where you make social connections and engage in meaningful interactions. Fewer social interactions increase the risk of depression and cognitive decline, and put people at [50% higher risk](#) of premature death. Conversely, a [2008 study](#) found that people who participate in social and community activities were more likely to report better overall health.

As we enter the next phase of the pandemic, companies that have addressed the immediate health and safety needs of employees should be looking for ways to help them stay connected beyond emails, DMs, and the occasional video chat meeting. Promoting other outlets, such as apps that engage employees in physical activity together in a social way, can provide the benefits of socialization without being in the same office.

## Additional Considerations

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With a goal of higher remote engagement in mind, there are also a few other things to consider that will help you succeed.

### Engage the Entire Family

Companies that really want to promote positive change will get their employees' family members engaged. Whether we realize it or not, we are heavily influenced

by the people around us, and our activities and behaviors often mirror those of our immediate family. Studies have shown that married couples or couples who live together [significantly influence](#) health behaviors like smoking, alcohol, physical activity, and diet. If one partner is engaging in healthy behaviors, the other is more likely to as well.

Finding ways to involve the entire family in activities can also help people feel more connected to each other, which boosts overall happiness and well-being, factors that correlate positively to employee engagement and workplace productivity.

### **Address Isolation and Loneliness**

Another important consideration right now is the [impact of isolation](#). Employees who do not have immediate family members or roommates may be experiencing [acute feelings](#) of isolation and loneliness. Helping them find new or [creative ways to connect](#) to others can improve mental health during this challenging time. For example, participating in a virtual support group, signing up for a pen pal to write old-fashioned letters, or joining an online meditation session can help people feel connected while remaining safely apart.

### **Meet People Where They Are Today**

The most successful wellness and engagement programs recognize that everyone is different. The best options will:

- Be available and accessible for people in different living situations, from single-family homes to small apartments and shared spaces
- Offer a wide variety of options that allow people to choose practices that best fit their own lifestyle and preferences
- Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach that may appeal to a small portion of employees that are already engaged, but often leave a large number feeling left out

## Now That's Engaging ... So What's Next?

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At BurnAlong, we're passionate about helping employers find better ways to engage employees and improve physical health and well-being. We've taken what we know works offline — the choice of classes, instructors, and interactions with friends — and make it available online. Since the start of the current health crisis, BurnAlong clients have seen significant increases in virtual engagement.

### **How BurnAlong Works**

We provide 1000's of live-streamed and on-demand classes across 45+ health and wellness categories from 100's of certified instructors all over the country. With so many options to choose from, people can find classes to specifically fit their needs.

Classes go beyond just physical activity to incorporate key categories that address and support overall health and well-being for happier, healthier employees. Companies can also create virtual challenges and other activities that encourage engagement and foster social connections.

Every class is accessible from any internet connected device — smartphone, tablet, computer, or television — and any location. Each corporate account comes with 4 free family sub-accounts, so employees can invite friends and family members who motivate them to participate, keeping them connected when health concerns or geographic distance may keep them apart.

### **Try it Today**

[Schedule a demo](#) to learn more about the BurnAlong platform and discover how companies are boosting employee engagement in today's remote world, while finding new ways for employees to thrive as we move into the “next normal.”