

Remote but not Removed: Curating Cohesion Among At-Home and In-Office Employees

As workplaces slowly begin to phase employees back into the office, many supervisors may find themselves managing a hybrid team comprised of both onsite and remote workers. One of the perceived downsides of a hybrid team is a lack of unity, collaboration, or camaraderie. The truth is that a team isn't a team simply because they all commute to the same office or sit on the other side of a cube wall. The spirit and core of a team lies in how they work together and support one another. As a leader, you set the stage for this by subscribing to and promoting a team-oriented culture. With the right approach, you can help to facilitate and maintain community among your staff no matter where each of them is located.

Connect consistently: Schedule regular check-ins with your employees, both individually and as a group. This might mean that you meet with each employee in-person or by phone every other week to discuss assignments and bring everyone together for a video conference once a month or quarter to discuss bigger picture matters.

Communicate: As with all relationships, communication is key and with a hybrid team, it's important that it's done consistently and thoughtfully. When there's an announcement or you have information about an upcoming change or project, inform your team in a group setting or make a point to call your teleworkers to let them know as soon as possible. Remote workers might feel alienated or overlooked if they don't hear important news directly from leadership or if updates tend to arrive later than the updates provided to onsite colleagues.

Foster collaboration: Encourage your employees to rely on and work with one another regularly. When they come to you for ideas or input, keep your other employees' skills or expertise in mind and suggest they also talk to a particular teammate who has experience with or might have a better idea about the question at hand. When it makes sense, assign projects to a combination of on and offsite staff to increase interactivity and the chance to build relationships.

Make yourself available: Having an open-door policy, figuratively speaking, is still a concept that stands true, and being easily accessible is especially important when it comes to managing remote employees. Make sure that all your employees feel valued and supported by answering or returning calls and responding to emails in a timely manner. Doing this shows them that they can reach out to and (within reason) get a hold of you when needed, just as they would if they could simply walk over to your office.

Retrain your brain: Perhaps the most essential tip for successfully managing a hybrid team is to not let the phrase "out of sight, out of mind" actualize. If you have a large team, consider creating a visual way to remind yourself of all your employees, such as a chart with their names or pictures. Be diligent in your efforts to pull everyone together for team activities and consider everyone when getting input from staff.

While there are many challenging aspects to managing teleworkers and/or a hybrid team, the benefits of having more balanced and happy employees and an expanded talent pool often outweigh the extra effort. If you have questions or if your team isn't coming together the way you hoped, reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Call any time day or night for tips and guidance or to get help with a specific situation.

The EAP is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to eligible federal employees at no cost.

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