

REMOTE WORKERS

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How to Build a Culture Across Your Virtual Workforce

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Just because you have employees all across the globe, doesn't mean you still can't have company culture. Even with a virtual staff, entrepreneurs can still have the warmth, comradery and relationship-building that an office brings – they just have to think outside the box.

As the co-founders of [Greenback Expat Tax Services](#), a global firm which prepares U.S. federal tax returns for American expats living all over the world, we have experience building culture for our remote workforce.

Here is how we did it.

Set up a virtual water cooler. We use two collaboration tools -- [Podio](#) and [Ning](#) -- that the team lives and works in all day. Not only do we use these tools for our day-to-day business communications, but we've also set up workspaces that are more personal in nature.

For example, each Friday we post a “Get to know you” question and everyone chimes in -- talking about everything from their summer plans to what book they are reading and sharing pictures of their kids. It helps build bridges that aren't naturally there if you don't work in the same office.

Related: [5 Tips and Tools to Create a Company Culture When You Run a Virtual Business](#)

Establish operating principles and refer to them frequently. Being virtual means running a business without a walk-in location -- it doesn't mean without ethics, policies or purpose. We have more than 30 operating principles that we developed with feedback from the team. Each principle is both practical and actionable. In our operating principles, we reflect on how we want to grow, how we should treat each other and our customers and our business standards. We work hard to keep those operating principles top of mind.

For example, each month, on our intranet, we focus on a different principle, including practical examples of how it applies. The goal is to help us stay close to what we stand for, which in our case is customer care first and foremost.

Create a way to say thank you. One thing is the same whether people work in-office or virtually: People want to be recognized for good work and feel appreciated.

We recognize people each week in two ways (in addition to a standard, quarterly performance management process): "High Five Fridays" and "Best Practice Mondays." High Five Fridays is our “pat on the back” program when we publicly recognize people for exceeding goals and going above and beyond. The “high five's” are posted in a dedicated workspace on our intranet by everyone. Best Practice Mondays are case studies that are shared on our intranet, in which a member of the team highlights how they have innovated a process or experience. This allows the team to simultaneously recognize the innovations of our team and also helps others learn.

Related: [How to Get The Most Out of Employees Who Work From Home](#)

Encourage collaboration vs. silo. While your virtual team is working in separate locations and distinct time-zones, that doesn't mean they should work alone. It is important that the team 1) understands when they are empowered to make decisions vs. escalate and 2) works collaboratively to improve the business. We use SOPs (standard operating procedures) to manage our business and provide clarity for individuals and teams. These documented procedures cover everything from day-to-day tasks to decision-making criteria. All of our SOPs have an owner and a proxy, ideally not one of the business owners.

For example, if the social media SOP owner wants to improve part of a process, they would first brainstorm ideas with the proxy, then bring that solution to the business owners to sign off. This allows a healthy balance of teamwork and control in our business processes.

Creating a company culture is extraordinarily important, especially in a service-based business. Just because your company has a remote workforce, operating in scattered regions of the world, doesn't mean they don't want to feel appreciated as individuals and as a team. Ultimately, your virtual success will rely on clarity, collaboration and a strong company culture.

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