ENGAGEMENT

3 Ways to Motivate a Remote Workforce

Engaging telecommuters takes particular kinds of incentives

by Carrie McKeegan | April 06, 2018

Working is working, whether your team is in the office or a remote location. But there is a big difference when people are in the same office, building, or city: they can gather. Not so with a virtual workforce, when working together is mostly done through collaborative online platforms or Skype. And, while this may be efficient and serve clients well, employees can feel forgotten and become disengaged when they're not seen or heard by the boss. Working in a world of smartphones, Slack channels, Facebook/Twitter and constant notifications, the challenge of actually motivating your team may seem insurmountable, but it doesn't have to be if you make it fun, have lots of opportunity for rest, and celebrate success.

Here are three ways that are particularly effective at engaging remote workers:

Gamification

Create a game that targets achievement. For example, if your goal is to sign on 100 new customers that month, create teams and a competition around it, including prizes and special recognition for the winners. Keep the momentum going the whole month by sharing best practices to sign on new customers throughout the competition; have a scoreboard that shows current standing; and create a fun theme to keep people excited. You want your workforce to get excited about reaching goals. Gamification will lead to engagement which will lead to higher productivity and achievement. It's a win-win: the team gains from a sense of excitement and common goal; the business gets everyone focused around a singular objective.

Time OFF is as important as time ON

People aren't machines -- they need breaks. Too often remote employees start off as high performers but it turns into burnout. We know that virtual workers don't naturally take time off, which is why it needs to be part of your structure. Have a mandatory vacation policy along with generous company holidays. Expecting your workforce to be constantly motivated and productive is not only foolish, it's irresponsible. Just as important is for you, as the leader, to do the same. It is key that you model the behavior of taking time off to show your team you not only trust them, but are encouraging them because you genuinely believe in this concept to rest and recharge.

Celebrate success

Do you want people to want to come to work each day, perform well, and add real value to your organization? Thank them. Make sure everyone feels valued and appreciated. It sounds simple, but there are two key aspects to keep in mind: (1) It must be genuine and heartfelt. Saying you are grateful for people's work via an automated message or one from your administrative assistant isn't going to cut it. (2) It must be done regularly and outside of the performance review process. Find a way to tell people you see them and the great work they are doing that is habitual. For example, our team has "High five Fridays" where we all take a moment to recognize each other's accomplishments.

A motivated and happy team is a productive one. Taking the time to make your team want to come to work each day, even when you can't see them, carries multiple benefits: employee satisfaction, retention, morale and successful business outcomes.

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