

# Remote Work Culture



## **Managing the Shift to Remote Work Culture: Frequently Asked Questions for Small Business**

Work culture is an important part of every business. Whether intentional or not, a personality and ethic develops when people spend time together. Leaders who work to instill and maintain positive culture receive a wide range of benefits that lead to business longevity and prosperity.

In recent years there has been a trend toward remote work. Often, those individuals physically outside of the core group are also outside of the culture. With the recent acceleration of mobile jobs, work from home and the gig economy, it is imperative to shift to a more holistic view of company culture—from work culture to remote work culture.

### **What is Work Culture? What does Work Culture Mean?**

At its core, work culture is what you make of it. It is the environment you create and cultivate for your employees. It is the tie that binds the organization together. It is something you need to actively promote or it will take on a life of its own.

### **What Influence Does Culture Have on the Workplace?**

Good work culture is more than a slogan or mission statement. It is what inspires employees to work in common purpose. Bad work culture is more than office politics and overwork. It is what makes employees feel left out, disconnected, unappreciated and ready to leave at the first good opportunity.



[SHRM](#) describes three things that happens when a company has a strong culture. Employees:

- Know how top management wants them to respond to any situation
- Believe that the expected response is the proper one
- Know that they will be rewarded for demonstrating the organization's values

Among the most important reasons to build and sustain positive work culture are that it:

- Makes people want to work together
- Increases satisfaction
- Builds relationships
- Promotes your brand
- Helps attract/retain employees
- Improves productivity
- Increases mission focus

These benefits accrue to the company as well as all employees—remote working or gathered in official locations. Indeed, your success increasingly depends on strong remote work culture—the integration of all employees into a cohesive, positive virtual team.

## Why Foster and Nurture Remote Work Culture?

Historically, remote workers were chosen based on their ability to self-direct and work independently. Regional salespeople are a good example. Often called 'lone wolves' or 'alphas' these workers were expected to build their own connections into the organization, motivate themselves and create their own success. They were viewed as having a sufficient financial motive to work hard without supervision. Similarly, business owners and leaders could set their own schedules and manage their time under the belief that they were sufficiently motivated outside of a culture. Successful integration for remote workers was largely dependent on their own efforts.

That view of remote work was never universally successful, nor did it really create a cohesive team with a sense of shared purpose. Now with a wider range of mobile and remote workers, companies of all sizes need to figure out how to connect these workers into the organization. This goes way beyond supplies and technology. It requires a commitment to communication and processes that support every employee and their role as part of a cohesive workforce.

A strong remote work culture:

- Works toward cultural fit for all employees
- Keeps employees engaged
- Promotes openness
- Improves productivity and efficiency

Engagement, communication, mission, and relationships supported by process and technology—these are foundational elements of good work culture that is inclusive for all employees regardless of location.



## How Do I Create Healthy Workplace Culture?

Here are a few tips to building your culture:

- Focus on employee relationships
- Align company and employee values
- Communicate often both formally and informally
- Invest in your employees
- Develop good traits
- Offer career development
- Watch for burnout
- Foster collaboration
- Promote an inclusive work environment
- Set clear goals and rewards
- Solicit and welcome input
- Recognize hard work
- Take responsibility for failure

Get an in-depth look at [how to build corporate culture](#) along with some samples.



## **What Are Key Components of Good Work Culture?**

- Leadership
- Management
- Best practices
- Clear policies and philosophies
- Mission, vision, values
- Employee engagement

## **Why Is It a Struggle to Maintain Good Work Culture?**

- Can't just be slogans
- Can't be broad and general
- Can't just serve the business
- Easily coopted by bad players
- Needs to reflect passions
- Has to be cultivated
- Can't feel empty or convenient
- Must be authentic
- Must include all employees, regardless of location

## How Does Mobility and Work from Home Change Work Culture?

Recent events provide an opportunity to revisit, revitalize and recharge your work culture. Companies are rapidly moving beyond temporary solutions to more permanent work patterns. Work culture must evolve to support these new patterns and ensure that employees feel safe, productive, and purposeful.

- [62% of employed Americans](#) worked at home during the pandemic, and many were surprised at how quickly and effectively videoconferencing and collaboration were adopted.
- [80% of surveyed workers](#) say they enjoy working from home, 41% say they are more productive and 28% say they are as productive.
- [74% of responding chief financial officers](#) will be moving some employees to fully remote status if and when physical distancing measures relax after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- [77% of all employees surveyed](#) (US, UK and Canada) say their workplace culture will never return to what it was before COVID-19. The office landscape has changed, with masks, shields, physical distancing, and reductions in shared facilities, hallways, breakrooms, and elevators.

One exciting result of the shift in work culture is the availability of new talent pools. You can possibly hire people who are located anywhere in the world. You can hire people who work non-traditional schedules. You can potentially increase diversity—which seems to be a high-profile goal for many companies right now. If your company is in an area with lack of diversity, you have a chance to hire from more diverse communities.

## What Processes Do I Need to Change to Instill Remote Work Culture?

Companies adopted temporary measures to ensure employee safety and business continuity. Now it is time to convert those temporary measures into processes that support long-term success. These new processes must work for every employee—remote, mobile, office, factory, and hybrid.

Take the time to rethink and reimagine your processes and workplaces. Identify the underlying appeal of your culture and recreate it virtually. Remember that culture is not the same as a vision statement—it must be a lived experience.

Every process in your organization can support (or subvert) culture. Here are some examples:

- 1. Employee Engagement.** Gallup studies show that there is a well-established connection between [employee engagement and key performance outcomes](#) including profitability, productivity, turnover, safety, absenteeism, shrinkage, quality and customer ratings. Make [employee engagement strategies](#) a high priority in your business. One interesting component of that strategy can be to promote employee engagement through [virtual volunteering](#).
- 2. Communication.** Make sure everyone who contributes work to your company is included in company-wide events, meetings, and announcements. Nothing undermines a remote contributor like hearing about an all-company meeting from a co-worker after the fact. Work hard to make the employee experience consistent for everyone, regardless of location. Check in regularly and share success stories.
- 3. Priorities and expectations.** Revisit job descriptions, reporting chains, standard meetings, and review cycles. Make sure they make sense for roles that may now be physically distant from co-workers and supervisors. Be as clear as possible to avoid misunderstandings that might be easy to spot in-office but undermine good working relationships in a hybrid or virtual environment.

**4. Hiring.** Rethink your hiring criteria. You have access to a larger talent pool as a company with a remote work culture. Leverage your employees and other business relationships to identify potential new candidates and expand your search to include the vast number of job boards focused on industry, occupation, diversity, and other niches. [How to Find Employees: 4 Talent Acquisition Techniques to Embrace](#).

**5. Onboarding.** Take your process online so your new hires can get the paperless paperwork completed early. Use a [learning management system](#) to get them up and going on everything from your processes to your products and industry.

**6. Scheduling.** Traditional shifts had to consider commute times and in-person requirements. With a remote work culture, you can potentially offer flex scheduling that gets the job done while respecting employee time. For example, an accounting clerk could work a split shift that accommodates family needs without negative impact to your business. [Workforce scheduling software](#) makes it easy for you to create schedules that meet both business need and employee preferences.

**7. Oversight.** Your remote work culture can use technology to provide business oversight without a heavy hand. Simply have your employees use their smartphone to clock in/out during their shift. This [workforce timekeeping](#) automatically generates timecards that can be quickly reviewed and approved for payroll processing. You can even [verify employee location](#) whenever they use the clock, and managers can get an alert if the employee is not where expected. Job details including mileage can also be captured. With this kind of oversight, you have supervision without the need to see the employee.

**8. Upskilling.** Your employees should all have the opportunity for job growth. Help them move up by providing talent development through mentorship and structured training programs. Videoconferencing and collaborative tools should be part of every manager's tool kit. Learning management systems also play a big role in adding skills to your employee base.

And of course be sure to update your [employee handbook](#) and make it readily available to everyone.



## How Can I Promote the Sharing of Work Culture Ideas?

Gallup studies show that [employee engagement is on the rise](#). Take the opportunity to put that into overdrive by actively soliciting suggestions from your employees. A modern equivalent of the old-fashioned suggestion box goes a long way in getting 360 feedback on your operation and employee relations. Encourage dialogue, debate, and disagreement.

*“A time of disruption presents an opportunity to remind employees of aspects of an organization’s past—founding ideals, stories, and commitments—that have shaped both its culture (how we get work done and think about our work) and are central to its identity (who we are as a company). Building up these core elements of culture an remind employees of an organization’s strengths and help them navigate tough times.”*

*- MIT Sloan Management Review*

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