TELECOMMUTING ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

The Basics for Keeping Your Remote Workforce Engaged

A remote workforce requires a change in your communications strategy in order to keep employees engaged. Much of what is presented here is intuitive, but it can serve as a reminder of best practices and maybe give you a few new ideas as you maneuver the remote workplace landscape.

Here are some basic practices for keeping employees engaged while they are telecommuting:

Communicate

Your team needs strong leadership right now. This is your chance to show your employees that they are in good hands. Do this by communicating:

• Frequently – reach out daily at a minimum; be aware of communicating too much – employees still need time to focus on their work
• Confidently – provide answers, and if you don't have an answer, say so – then work to get the answer and share it when you have the information
• Transparently – share as much as you can; this will help alleviate fear and undue stress in your employees

Build Trust

Effective communication will build trust with your employees. Here are a few ways to build trust:

• Don't micromanage. Prove to your employees that you trust them to get their work finished. If you aren't getting the deliverables you expect, address your concerns in a one-on-one virtual meeting. Ask if there are issues getting in the way of an employee finishing their work. Do they have the equipment they need? Are they finding it difficult to manage distractions? Is working remotely making it harder for them to get the help they need to complete their tasks? Once you have the answer(s), work to help resolve the issues.

• Be transparent. Share what you know. Answer questions honestly and thoroughly. Admit when you don't know an answer and then make sure you get the answer and close the loop with your team.
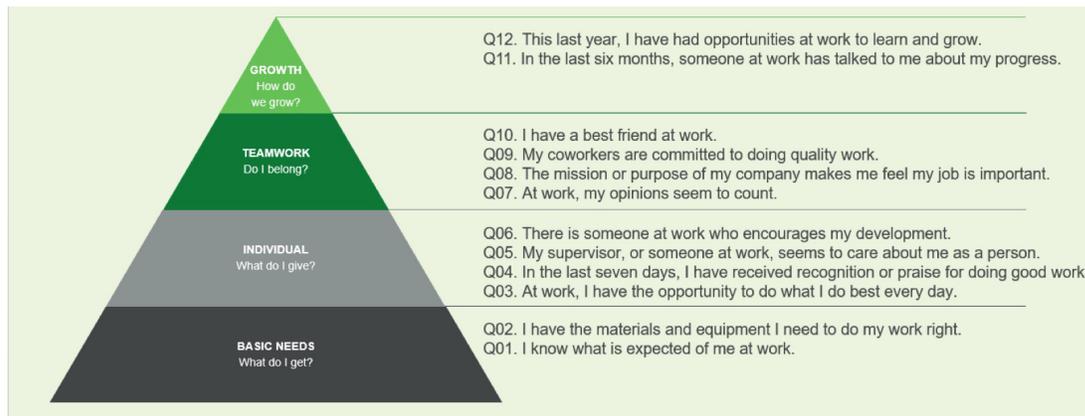
Seek Feedback and Listen

Ask your employees how they are doing both professionally and personally on a regular basis. When they share with you, genuinely listen. It's not necessary – nor is it your role – to solve every problem for them. Help solve what you can, but in some cases, providing employees with information on the right resources might be the best solution:

• Answers to staff questions at hr.uci.edu/coronavirus
• Technical assistance using OIT helpdesk
• Child/elder care resources
• Health and emotional support resources
• Virtual wellness resources

Focus on Engagement Basics

You probably remember the Staff Engagement Survey that was administered in August and September 2017, and then again in August and September 2019. The engagement survey, administered by our third party partner, Gallup, uses a set of questions called the Q12 to help measure employee engagement. This basic set of questions addresses a hierarchy of employee needs:

	Q12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.
GROWTH How do we grow?	Q11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
TEAMWORK Do I belong?	Q10. I have a best friend at work. Q09. My coworkers are committed to doing quality work. Q08. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important. Q07. At work, my opinions seem to count.
INDIVIDUAL What do I give?	Q06. There is someone at work who encourages my development. Q05. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person. Q04. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work. Q03. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
BASIC NEEDS What do I get?	Q02. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right. Q01. I know what is expected of me at work.

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Right now, in this unprecedented time in our world and workforce, keep it simple and focus on engagement basics:

1. **Basic Needs**
   Ask your employees:
   • Do you know what is expected of you?
   • Do you have the materials and equipment to do your work right?
   Of course, asking these questions means you have the responsibility to respond to and help solve issues that arise. Don't leave your employees hanging – this is counterproductive and will cause them to be less engaged. A closed loop is vital to engagement success.

2. **Focus on the Individual**
   Asking questions and listening to your employees helps fulfill the 'Individual' segment of the engagement hierarchy, and contributes to the employee feeling like there is someone at work that cares about them as a person.
   • Provide genuine and frequent recognition for a job well done, for going above and beyond, etc.
   • Encourage your employees to try something new, e.g., become a virtual meeting expert, start a virtual chat with team members, share ideas with the team on how they are coping in these unusual times, share a solution that helped make remote working easier/more productive/more fun, etc.

The information provided in this document is by no means the extent of what you can do as a leader to help strengthen employee engagement while many employees are working remotely. Many of you have successful tactics, programs and skills that you are utilizing right now to boost employee engagement – and we'd love to hear from you. If you have any suggestions or ideas you want to share with UCI's engagement team, please send an email to Joshua Macias, Engagement Coordinator, at jrmacia1@uci.edu.

If you have specific questions about engagement or would like help with an engagement-related issue, please contact your HRBP or local HR professional, or contact Katherine Hills, UCI's engagement lead, at hillsk@uci.edu.