

Cultivating your company culture from home

As working from home now becomes “business as usual” for the foreseeable future, what can you do to keep your company culture thriving across a distributed workforce? We spoke to Samuel McGuirk of Ontruck who shares his advice for keeping a global team connected and productive.

Transitioning your company out of the office and into a home-based work model goes beyond having the best tech tools and gadgets. Company culture, the values, ethics, and personality of your company, is a reminder that work isn't just a paycheck – it's how your employees feel about being a part of your team. As such, there's no better time to show your people that they are part of a supportive company that shows resilience in the face of difficulty and considers each individual as an integral shareholder in rising to the challenge.

I've previously led global operations at Just Eat managing teams across Italy, France, Ireland, Canada, and Spain and now oversee the UK market for Ontruck, managing our London team as we enter our second month of full-time remote work. Being apart from my teams is nothing new, but for those who it is, here are some best practices I've picked up along the way that can help keep your company culture kicking, even from afar.

Communication

Since being in lockdown with all communication moving online, I find myself noticing just how critical it's been for us to structure our communication to avoid distress. We pay close attention to how we designate our channels in Slack, for example, using specific channels for announcements and product updates or having channels for highlights, IT issues, and lessons learned.

Clear communication goes beyond productivity and efficiency, it's the foundation of trust, collaboration, and engagement, so don't be afraid to get creative! A great way of encouraging a culture of transparency is having a direct line of contact with your CEO for regular Q+As. Since confinement, we have started "TGIF" meetings every Friday with different themes, for example, one colleague might give a tour of their house. We also have a bi-weekly "All Hands" meeting to keep every team member updated, which has become fundamental during the outbreak given how quickly things change. We facilitate the transport of goods and saw our daily demand increase by 500% amid panic buying, so you can imagine how critical it was for us to be as cohesive as possible across our team.

We also try to record meetings to share internally, this way nobody feels left out if they can't attend in real-time, a great idea to keep in mind if you have global teams in different time zones.

It's also important to keep communication human, remembering to share good news and stories and celebrate wins, no matter how minor. Sharing recognition and even using emojis and GIFs are all simple ways to show optimism and a sense of humor, which become essential tools to get through a stressful situation.

Wellbeing

At the heart of company culture is employee wellbeing. While of course, it's trickier to practice team sports and do our regular catch-ups while we're each at home, there are ways to work around this. We have colleagues leading online Zumba and Boxing sessions to keep one another moving and to destress for a few minutes during the week, as well as an outlet for sharing our favorite online resources for staying both physically fit and encouraging self-care and creativity, such as meditation, yoga and cooking classes. We even started our own Ontruck band, an opportunity for some of our more musically talented colleagues to get together virtually and play music. Now, we're adding linguistics into the mix with team members volunteering to teach online language classes.

Look out for any team members who may be feeling vulnerable at home alone, even if it's just small daily struggles. Sharing regular surveys to gather feedback is a simple but effective way to see how everyone is coping with the situation and to best understand what we can do as managers to help. We set up a new Slack channel for our London team called #in-touch, to create a safe space where our team can reach out to one another for help, even if it's just to talk. To be sure we can support the wellbeing of our teams from afar, we have also introduced free group therapy sessions led by professional psychologists for anyone who wishes to avail of them.

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Support

Remember, not everyone will be well prepared to work from home and may need extra support. Even as a well seasoned remote worker, nothing could prepare me for working around the clock with my eighteen-month-old daughter in my lap. Make it clear to your colleagues that if anyone needs specific office resources, you can try to help get these to them, for example, desktop monitors, keyboards, and lumbar support chairs. If people need certain items, you can also offer to reimburse employees for some small purchases that they may be able to find online. You can also share some tips and best practices for working from home, below are some helpful starting points that may not seem obvious at first:

Find your space – Designate a specific space in your house to work from, this starting point can help you structure your day into a routine as you have a place to begin and end work.

Time out – Remind colleagues to close their screens during lunch and after work, just because you work from home it's important not to feel like you're always available!

Working with kids – Bear in mind the challenges that come with working

from home with small kids, while your Startup won't be able to provide babysitters, you might consider setting up a channel dedicated to parents for exchanging their go-to tips for helping to look after kids while working.

A company culture that values support, fosters an ethos of employees who likewise wish to support others. In moments of uncertainty, your company culture can quickly become the armor that keeps your team connected, so be sure to invest in yours!

Samuel McGuirk is the UK Country Manager at Ontruck where he joined to build out the operations function and create an unrivaled customer service for its clients. He works closely with Ontruck's engineering department to build innovative market platforms for the last mile logistics industry. Prior to Ontruck, Samuel was the Senior Manager at Just Eat where he led Global Operations, managing teams across Italy, France, Ireland, Canada and Spain.

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