Kendall Square
The Future Lives Here

Future of (how we) Work Task Force Meeting
February 2022 High Level Meeting Takeaways
Topic: Staffing and Retention Amid the Omicron Surge (Solutions)

Dilemma: Revising onboarding processes to increase connectivity when hiring and subsequent work is remote

Due to the pandemic, it is now commonplace for a new hire to start their position without ever seeing or laying foot in their company's physical workspace. While remote work offers employees greater control over their time, it is more isolating, particularly for new hires who do not have an established network within the company.

What are companies doing to ensure new teammates are onboarded in a way that promotes building social connections at work and a sense of belonging?

Suggestions for revising onboarding processes include:

- **Have an onboarding buddy.** Assigning an onboarding buddy for new hires (both on-site and remote) is beneficial because new hires have a lot of questions that they won't always feel comfortable asking their manager. That becomes a problem when that new employee can't turn to a neighboring teammate for the answer and doesn't know who to ask remotely. An onboarding buddy is a peer who is matched with the new hire to educate them about everyday processes, help them build relationships, answer any questions that might arise, and generally make them feel welcome.
- **Create opportunities for "chance" encounters.** Participants also encouraged one-to-one connections during the onboarding process by setting up weekly or monthly water cooler chats or lunches, where employees can invite a team member they'd like to get to know better for a video call or be randomly paired with someone. Other ways to facilitate "chance" encounters include the creation of different (virtual or in-person) social groups and activities, such as virtual happy hours and Slack channels for people with common interests like cooking, music, or sharing pet pictures.

Dilemma: Creating a positive culture in a hybrid or remote environment

Workplace culture is not a single "thing," but is composed of discrete policies, habits and actions that together create a desired environment with its own values and traditions. How a company celebrates employee and team milestones, how staff treat each other, and the extent to which different voices are heard and valued are all part of a workplace culture. More important than ever before (and more challenging to get right in a remote environment), workplace culture can be the difference between effective retention and an employee looking for new jobs elsewhere.

What are some efforts people managers have introduced (and put into practice) that effectively build a positive culture for staff in a remote environment? What have you seen increase employee satisfaction and drive retention?

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Suggestions for building a positive remote culture include:

- **Offer Training to Managers.** Companies provided training materials to managers about how to manage teams in hybrid workspaces. They found that while people "already figured [out how to do this]", it was still an important reminder for managers to discuss with their teams what the new working norms are, and for managers to ensure everyone understands.

- **Provide Work Flexibility.** Participants noted how their companies are providing flexibility by offering "No Work Fridays" or additional paid COVID sick days. The logic being that companies need to accept the different working norms in today's workplace. The company that is offering paid time off on Fridays noted that they are trying to be mindful of resetting expectations to create the necessary flexibility, and acknowledge the importance of "the balance and harmony between work and life."

- **Hold Regular Team Outings.** Companies are increasing employees' in-person face time with each other by holding outings and team-building events. Participants in companies that have done this noted its success and the high number of employees who show up. The cadence of such events varies: some companies do quarterly half-day events while others hold monthly hour-long activities or every Friday afternoon. Regardless of the cadence, these companies have all codified intra-organizational relationship building in some way. Events that companies held included organizing:
  - A kayaking event and hiring Redbones to bring a good truck,
  - An ice skating event for employees,
  - A painting event with Yaymaker
  - A brewery outing at Night Shift Brewing in Everett and getting Naco Taco to cater it,
  - Virtual outings like having a virtual cheese tasting with Mongers' Provisions or doing a virtual escape room by Puzzle Break,

- **Rethink Meeting Structures.** One participant mentioned how their company is starting their 30-minute meetings five minutes late and their 60-minute meetings ten minutes late to create space in a virtual environment where it's easy for people to move from meeting to meeting in a matter of seconds. The participant noted that this has created "quite a bit of difference." Another company does something similar, but instead, they end their meetings five or ten minutes early. Nevertheless, their logic is the same - to prevent the tendency of diving straight into the next meeting without a moment to move our bodies, decompress, and reset before the next meeting.

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- **Find New Ways to Celebrate and Appreciate Employees.** One company is using [WeCelebrate](#) to celebrate staff contributions and achievements. The tool allows users to give awards to employees that amount to points. Employees can then make purchases with the points they accrued. One participant noted that the tool has a lot of depth and you can start to see peoples' influence through it. Another company suggested celebrating employee milestones by using resources like [Send-a-Cake](#).