



CONNECTION, HUMANITY & RESILIENCE

Employee Engagement in the New Normal

Großker

Where Do We Go from Here?

Covid-19 swept into the workplace and changed almost everything. One day employees were huddling around a colleague's desk for an ad-hoc meeting and recapping the ball game around the water cooler, and the next they were suddenly working from home and social distancing from friends and colleagues — unexpectedly disconnected physically and emotionally, feeling helpless when it came to their physical health, safety, and wellbeing.

Employers, caught off guard and uncertain about the future in their own right, scrambled to define some form of a “new normal” so that business could continue in some capacity while keeping employees healthy and safe. Culture and community took a back seat at first, only to reemerge as central to maintaining a new, redefined form of connectedness.

There's no doubt about it: the pandemic and ensuing financial and humanitarian crises were unwelcome agents of change. **But by embracing this time of transformation, employers have the opportunity to take back control and play a larger and much-welcomed role in improving employees' lives, in and out of the workplace.** Your employees' experience and your company's future depend on it.

THE PRE-PANDEMIC WORKPLACE	THE NEW NORMAL	EFFECT ON THE WORKFORCE
Optimism <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 11 year bull market• Record low unemployment	Uncertainty <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Financial insecurity• Facing layoffs or furloughs• The “Pink Collar” recession	As of July 2020, almost 6 in 10 employers had furloughed (29%) or laid off (29%) employees. Gallagher
Stress and Burnout <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Life pressures• Work pressures• Health issues	Stress and Burnout, Supercharged <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pandemic related health concerns• Civil, social, and political unrest• Disrupted daily routines• Lack of child/elder care• Isolation and lack of connection	69% of workers claim this (Covid-19) was the most stressful time of their entire professional career — and 43% have become physically ill as a result of work-related stress. Ginger
Productivity Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Economics of growth dictates pressure to perform• Cultural priority on attraction and retention	Health & Safety Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Economic downturn dictates mitigation of uncertainty• Cultural priority on connection, humanity, and resilience	89% of employers have put measures in place to ensure that employees feel supported during this time. Willis Towers Watson

New Employee Expectations for the New Normal

With the employee experience turned on its head, we need to consider what it takes to keep employees engaged on their terms: to be involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and workplace. We've taken a sharp turn from where we were in early 2020, and employers need to adapt by offering employees digital wellbeing tools that meet them where they are today.

In this guide, we'll explore the importance of helping employees face their new work/life realities with the resources they need to take care of themselves, feel well, and be productive. We'll consider the role of technology in establishing a culture that emphasizes connection, humanity, and resilience. We'll inspire you to make the most of this extraordinary time so that "where you go from here" is a place your entire workforce will want to be.



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No matter what era your employees hail from, they're all adjusting their expectations to the world around them – from the pandemic to the climate crisis to social justice issues – and companies need to meet them where they are.

Mary Lee Sachs

CEO, Brandpie, in Fast Company

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We talk about the future of work as though it were a far-off concept. The reality is that it's already here.

Lars Schmidt

Host of the 21st Century HR podcast, from LinkedIn

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Covid-19 has presented unprecedented challenges, but a silver lining may be the advancement of conversations regarding emotional wellbeing, and a new understanding for how employee wellbeing and organizational wellbeing connect.

Gallagher Insights

COVID-19: Returning to the Workplace in a New Reality

Back to Basics: A Time to Care

How you lead in times of great uncertainty says a lot about the character of your organization. We're in a whole new world. It's a time to think differently about life, work, and leadership — a time HR analyst and thought leader Josh Bersin refers to as The Big Reset. **It's time for HR to lead the imperative to refocus organizational priorities on trust, compassion, and action.**

Employees need and expect support from their employers. They're grappling with realities that are causing disruption across their lives, and without the permission and tools to take care of themselves, they're at risk of burnout or leaving the workforce entirely.

DID YOU KNOW?

70%

7 in 10 employees state the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their daily routine.

MetLife's 18th Annual U.S. Employee Benefit Trends Study 2020

1/3

About one-third of workers are having difficulties working at their typical level of productivity due to their current state of mental health.

Paychex Worx

90%

In July 2020, 90% of leaders reported being concerned about employee burnout.

ExecOnline

2M

As many as two million women are contemplating downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce entirely due to the burdens created by Covid-19.

McKinsey & Company, Lean In

Fortunately, employers are exploring new ways to engage employees in ways that enhance their lives. That's why the new Wellbeing Engagement is all about helping employees communicate and collaborate remotely, while fostering community and culture and supporting employees' whole selves.

Pointing to the human experience in the midst of the pandemic, Willis Towers Watson research indicates that 95% of senior leaders have demonstrated a sincere interest in employee wellbeing and safety. And in fact, Josh Bersin found that employee engagement is going up for organizations who are helping their employees feel safe, supported, and emotionally secure.

In fact, the global crises has seriously impacted and changed all five of the interconnected dimensions of wellbeing:



Fitness: changes in habits, no access to gym, suspension of group sport activities



Mental health: isolation, disconnection, stress, fear, anxiety and depression



Nutrition: food insecurity, accessibility, change to daily routines



Sleep: new schedules, anxiety and depression, increased screen time

Your Once-in-a-Lifetime Opportunity to Connect with Employees by Engaging Them Holistically

This perfect storm of sweeping change has created a "golden moment" to enhance the employee experience and empower them to take more control over the foundational influencers on their wellbeing. This is where engagement is born — by enabling employees to create balance in their sense of wellbeing, and reducing their struggle in one or more areas, they'll be better able to show up to work feeling ready for the day.

Forward-thinking and responsive employers have recognized that their employees are complex and multifaceted, with different, ever-changing needs. In order to meet them where they're at, they need a wide range of mind-body content to help them feel their best.

Employees who are given the tools to cope with the status quo — and encouraged to meet their physical and emotional needs head-on — are less inclined to tune out (or worse) burn out or check out. They feel more prepared and protected for whatever comes their way. The end result is they're able to remain engaged and stay resilient despite the circumstances.

Must-Haves to Engage Employees in the New Normal

Faced with the long-lasting impact of the pandemic, employers are looking through a new lens for solutions that help employees adapt to the new normal — and beyond. Change is constant, but much of what we're collectively adjusting to, including more people working remotely, is here to stay.

As we've discussed, this takes an understanding of how these changes are impacting employees' lives — and therefore, their employee experience and ability to engage — and what they need from employers to feel and perform their best. But it's equally important to understand what hasn't changed: employees still need to feel valued and cared for in order to do their best work. They are expecting more support to combat burnout and manage self-care, and employers should be focusing on implementing programs that emphasize connection, practice humanity, and promote resilience.

Digital Collaboration Tools

Organizations long ago moved traditional communication and productivity tools into the digital realm. While conventional wisdom can easily refute any claims to the contrary, numerous studies show that digital collaboration tools improve efficiency, output, transparency, and quality; drive innovation and growth; and heighten the holy grail of workforce culture, the employee experience.

Covid-19 forced an unprecedented share of employees to work remotely, forcing employers to take their digital transformations full-throttle. According to a TEKSystems survey, organizations are investing in instant messaging (94%), video conferencing (74%) and file-sharing (56%) tools to engage their employees in their work and help maintain company culture.

The link between effective use of technology and company culture, the employee experience, and employee engagement has strengthened — and your organization should take advantage of it. As your company settles into the new normal, consider leveraging digital collaboration tools.

EMPHASIZE CONNECTION

Use video conferencing for face-to-face meetings.

PRACTICE HUMANITY

Encourage employees to start "channels" in your instant messaging app for special interest groups, like mom, techies, sports fans, gardeners, etc.

PROMOTE RESILIENCE

Schedule a weekly video conference to share news and tips on topics impacting your workforce, such as staying healthy and working effectively at home.

A Supported, Supportive Community

Digital resources are a must-have for productivity, but should work in tandem with a social component. This “softer side” of digital connectivity is getting its season in the sun — and it, too, is here to stay as organizations understand their role in supporting employees’ social and (closely related) mental health needs.

Today’s employees crave purpose, belonging, and balance to feel meaningfully connected to their employers and colleagues. Working from home and physical distancing, among other factors, have compromised their sense of closeness and camaraderie with the people they’re used to seeing in person.

Here’s where the concept of community comes into play. Employers are in the unique position to provide employees with the resources and opportunities to share their ideas and successes with one another. This goes beyond work-related collaboration and teamwork. Employees who are enabled to maintain personal connections with their colleagues will feel that sense of belonging and inclusion that they may otherwise be missing. Connecting employees around their pursuit of personal wellbeing is a perfect fit — so look for digital wellbeing tools that offer community elements such as challenges, instant messaging, forums, and familiar social media actions like “liking” and commenting on others’ activities.

Recreating and even redefining workforce social connectivity is vital. To help your employees stay connected in this new world, try instituting virtual activities like these:

EMPHASIZE CONNECTION

Set up weekly virtual happy hours, coffee breaks, “getting to know you” chats, or team trivia games.

PRACTICE HUMANITY

Invite interested employees to meet in an online space for a regular guided meditation or mindfulness session to relax and reduce stress.

PROMOTE RESILIENCE

Start video calls with 5 minutes of chatter and talk about anything other than work.

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Over the last decade, we’ve all been through digital transformations – but somehow they didn’t make work life better. We struggle to commute into the office, then spend the day wrestling with emails, meetings, conference calls, and projects. We were never sure when to stop, so our productivity, health, and wellbeing has suffered. Well now we’re going to make digital work thrive: we have no choice. New tools, rules, and norms will be established, and these will be with us for decades.

Josh Bersin

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People bring the most to work when they feel connected to the mission and the people around them. A company that fosters social connections as a strategic priority and values the positive emotions around compassion, joy and caring is more likely to experience greater productivity and engagement, while protecting against illness, loneliness and burnout.

Gallagher Insights

COVID-19: Returning to the Workplace in a New Reality

Compassion and Permission

An essential tenet of a workforce culture of wellbeing involves normalizing the reality of stress in people’s lives — and removing the stigma of addressing it. This needs to be driven by company leaders, for when their words and actions reflect the current reality, employees can more comfortably negotiate their new normal. “Caring out loud” is one way to demonstrate that having concern and empathy is acceptable and a part of daily work-life, while the practice of “leading by example” sends the explicit message that all employees have permission to take care of themselves.

The idea is to promote psychological safety, something that's more important than ever, as the lines blur between work-life and home-life. Speaking about the keys to leading through Covid-19, research professor Dr. Brene Brown says, "In this culture right now, where everyone is scared and uncertain, we need curious leaders. We need those who check-in and say something seems off, tell me what is going on, what does support look like, and how do I make things better for you."

Examine what you can do to help build employee trust and take them from feeling cautious to confident.

EMPHASIZE CONNECTION

Ask employees to complete a survey about how they're feeling and what they need to perform, and then use their feedback to guide your communications and wellbeing activities.

PRACTICE HUMANITY

Encourage managers to be open with their team about their everyday challenges, such as needing to visit their aging parents or helping their children with school projects.

PROMOTE RESILIENCE

Send out a weekly email to employees sharing a wellbeing resource or tips.

On-demand Wellbeing Resources

Many people no longer have access to the health and fitness resources that they are used to, whether at their gym, workplace, or other group setting. In addition, many are experiencing heightened levels of stress and anxiety resulting from sudden, increased isolation.

Consider these findings from the Institute for Employment Studies' April 2020 Working at Home Wellbeing survey. Respondents reported:

- Loss of sleep due to worry (64%)
- Increased symptoms of fatigue (60%)
- Exercising less (60%)
- New aches and pains in their neck (58%), shoulder (56%), and back (55%)
- Not happy with current work-life balance (50%)
- Working long and irregular hours (48%)
- Eating a less healthy diet (33%)
- Feeling isolated (33%)
- Increased alcohol consumption (20%)

Employees need to be healthy physically, mentally, and emotionally to thrive and fully engage in their everyday lives and while working. And since a holistic approach helps people address various areas of wellbeing simultaneously, solutions that give them access to a range of content are more effective in keeping them balanced and, ultimately, feeling their best.

It's critical to provide them access to consumer-grade resources they can use in real-time, when and where they need it. Regardless of whether they need to move more, eat better, sleep more soundly, stress less, or take control of their personal finances, they need to be able to interact with others as they pursue their wellbeing goals. That connection with a community can take many forms — from friendly competition, accountability, advice or inspiration, to motivation to keep going — and most people find that a sense of belonging to a community makes taking care of themselves more fun and rewarding.

Introduce wellbeing benefits that work for today and tomorrow.

EMPHASIZE CONNECTION

Encourage employees to find an accountability partner at work or home with whom they can share wellbeing goals and cheer each other on.

PRACTICE HUMANITY

Host a weekly sharing session at which employees can tell personal stories and teach something they're passionate about.

PROMOTE RESILIENCE

Set up a daily or weekly virtual wellbeing class where employees can stretch, enjoy a guided meditation, or learn a new recipe — anything that helps to fortify their day.

Digital Wellbeing Benefits for the New Normal

No matter where they are, working from home or at a traditional workplace, employees want to feel empowered by their employer to care for their health and happiness. The right tools make it easy and fun.

Use this checklist to make sure your resources meet your employees where they're at and are able to bridge the physical and emotional distance created by Covid-19.

Ensure that your workforce wellbeing solution:

- ✓ **Delights employees with consumer-grade video.** Expert-led content should be professionally produced to be engaging, entertaining, and effective.
- ✓ **Empowers *all* employees.** It needs to be available to everyone, regardless of where (or when) they work, and no matter their wellbeing needs, interests, and goals.
- ✓ **Accommodates a globally dispersed employee base.** It has to be easily accessible anywhere in the world, with local, regional, and global customization capabilities.
- ✓ **Provides holistic content.** Your solution should support the five interconnected dimensions of wellbeing: fitness, nutrition, mental health, sleep, and financial wellbeing.
- ✓ **Motivates with elements of gamification.** Effective solutions keep employees accountable and on track with reminders, prompts, streaks, and levels.
- ✓ **Integrates into daily life.** Look for simple and convenient solutions that employees can access from anywhere at any time, whenever they want or need a wellbeing boost.
- ✓ **Directly addresses the concerns of the new normal.** Content needs to help employees cope with the realities and stressors of living and working at home during exceptionally challenging times.
- ✓ **Enables camaraderie.** Connect employees through in-app messaging, activity feeds, challenges, group classes, forums, and access to peers and subject matter experts.
- ✓ **Saves time for program managers.** Everyone's busy — including you. Make sure you pick a solution that can be implemented quickly and without internal IT resources, integrating (and maximizing) existing HR technology and providing year-round support.



Send us a question

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<https://www.grokker.com/demo-signup>