

# How To Keep Employees Motivated When Working From Home

None of us could have anticipated the changes this year has brought to our working environment, with many of us switching offices for our homes and kitchen tables - personally, I've been so impressed at how quickly and proactively my colleagues have adapted during this crisis. As lockdown restrictions eased in the summer, businesses were beginning to kick start their return to workplace strategy. However, with many regions and countries during a second wave, many of us are being encouraged to work from home once again.

Now we've had more time to understand what helps and what hinders productivity when working from home, employers have the opportunity to take the learnings from the last seven months and create long-term measures to support their remote workforces. From physical exercise to social-virtual coffee breaks, below are a couple of tried and tested recommendations to help employees stay motivated and achieve a healthy work-life balance in their 'home office'.

## A New Meaning Of Home Working

With more employees, like myself, continuing to work from home, it's time employers reinforce what working from home really means. Although it can never fully replicate the physical office, employees should be encouraged to frame their day as if they were in the office and work within their agreed working hours. Although the traditional 9-5 'clock in clock out' approach has been turned on its head, it's key that employees maintain a balance. With work laptops and desks now set up metres away from the space employees relax in, it can be tempting to dip in and out of emails outside of working hours. Employees shouldn't fall into the trap of always being available and should understand that even though work is now at home, they don't always have to be available.

Alongside this, employees should be taking frequent breaks for their physical and mental wellbeing. This is especially important as the days get shorter and it's harder to get outside in the evening. Employees should also be encouraged to block an hour in their diary each day to ensure they are taking a solid lunch break, which will only serve to benefit their productivity for the remainder of the day.

It's also the responsibility of the employer to ensure that teams are provided with the necessary tools to support working from home long-term. From desk chairs to standing desks, employers should be regularly checking in with their employees to make sure they have everything they need to work effectively. Employers should consider conducting formal ergonomic assessments virtually with their employees every six months to confirm the right measures are in place to keep them comfortable when working from home.

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## Virtual Services

Ensuring access to a suitable Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) should always be a priority for employers. A recent survey showed that 42% of employees think it is very important for employers to provide programmes and services to address mental health. Thankfully, EAPs can be accessed virtually, or by phone, which means workers don't have to rely on face to face interaction to receive the counselling and advice they need.

Undoubtedly, with all of the uncertainty in the world at the moment, anxiety and stress remain present amongst the global workforce. Employers must continue to remind their staff that EAP services exist for them to discuss any issues and are there to support their mental and physical wellbeing. I find a simple phone call to someone outside of your organisation is often enough to help restore employee motivation and bring their mind back to centre, with so much going on around them. Maintaining employee mental health is critical to ensuring a productive and happy workforce.

## Staying Connected

Many people will likely be in the same boat and looking for new ways to drive their productivity levels whilst working from home. It's more important than ever that a sense of community is kept alive, with so much uncertainty. One of the challenges I sometimes find working from home is maintaining the feeling of being part of a team, as it's easy for this to get lost behind a screen and keyboard. Encouraging employees to be open, actively share aspects of their day to day lives with each other and to truly be themselves with their colleagues will help maintain their sense of self whilst working remotely.

A study from Optum (Optum consumer insight survey 2020) recorded that many employees felt their social wellbeing was significantly compromised in the second month of lockdown. Employers need to be creative with technology and use it as a tool to replicate a normal day in the office in a virtual environment. Implementing routines such as virtual coffee breaks are a great way to make employees feel like they're still part of a team and engage with others outside of their household.



## Top tips for working from home



**Stay connected**  
Make time to chat, not only to discuss work



**Embrace technology**  
Take advantage of the tools to make communication simpler



**Take a break with a virtual coffee**  
Keep team bonds strong... an after work version can be fun too!



**Do the basics brilliantly**  
Having frequent and valuable conversations with your teams should be a priority



**Trust**  
Embrace a greater level of responsibility



**Watch out for presenteeism**  
Don't fall into the trap of always being available, make sure you take breaks



**Celebrate each other**  
Acknowledge a job well done



**#BeKind**  
These are difficult times, cut each other some slack

Organising online socials is also an effective way to help prevent employees feeling isolated or disconnected from their colleagues. With Christmas fast approaching, it's important employers get creative and think of ways to bring the whole company together despite obvious obstacles. An online celebratory toast to keep spirits up is essential and occasions as such should not be compromised. Though this should be made optional for staff, so to avoid workers feeling required to engage beyond their normal working hours.

### Keeping Active And Practicing Mindfulness

When lockdown restrictions eased, many employees will have been looking forward to getting parts of their fast-paced routine back and excited to start leaving the house more frequently. Now many have been encouraged to work remotely again, employees should be taking time out of their day to exercise, to help maintain both their mental and physical wellbeing. Although accessing exercise may still feel a little difficult, with some gyms operating at reduced capacity or even closed, employees need to be aware of the vast number of additional resources available to them to keep fit whilst working from home.

There are now fewer restrictions in place for outdoor activity than earlier in the year and employers should be encouraging employees to make the most of that and continue to accommodate for workers exercising within working hours. Additionally, if employers truly want to foster a culture of healthy living and exercise then it's worth encouraging workers to connect with other

colleagues through fitness apps. For example, UnitedHealthcare Global's Optum My Wellbeing app provides users with a space to engage and stay connected with colleagues, friends and family regardless of location. The app encourages users to take part in various

fitness challenges, such as step counts, where they can track their progress against others worldwide. This is a great way to ensure employees feel connected and help build a sense of community. The app also monitors a person's mood to ensure his or her mental wellbeing is being tracked, so the necessary measures can be taken to address any problems that may occur during this time.

Ultimately, the message is simple: employers need to prioritise keeping morale high and communicating regularly with their workforce during this time of significant uncertainty. To achieve this, they need the right schemes available and accessible from home. This will help ensure the whole company ethos is geared towards a positive and healthy outlook when working from home. Supporting individuals not only in the office but also at home will help to ensure your workforce remains strong during this time.

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**DAVID WHITE**  
UnitedHealthcare Global's Sales Director  
E: [group.sales@uhcglobal.com](mailto:group.sales@uhcglobal.com)  
T: +44 (0) 20 3907 4922  
[www.uhcglobal.eu](http://www.uhcglobal.eu)