Distance is no barrier to a strong company culture

Business, Company

\n[toc title="Table of Contents"]\n

\n \t

\n[/toc]\n \n

You know those meetings where you sit down with co-workers to talk about your favorite books or what tattoo you might get next? No?

Let's face it: Not all meetings represent time well spent. Surprisingly, when co-workers don't work in the same central location, meetings where colleagues are allowed talk about whatever they than those with strict agendas -- especially when it comes to creating a strongcultureand more highly engaged remote employees.

For this reason, the Obama administration and the Office of Personnel Management are now encouraging federal workers to hold regular meetings where co-workers " talk about more than just work" and get down to a personal level with each other.

If you're the leader of a remote workforce working with a team dispersed across multiple locations like me, you must find ways to build a strong company culture based on shared characteristics and solid interpersonal connections.

Here are three effective ways to do that:

1. Examine failures to redefine your cultural mission.

One of the most effective ways to set the foundation for your company's culture is to think about criticalfailurepoints in your company's life. Was there some sort of crisis that threatened the company, and if so, what did you do to resolve it?

illuminates your future successes, thus allowing both your in-office employees and remote employees to flourish in your new and improved company culture. (And get this -- there's even a that celebrates innovations spurred by company failures; that alone should tell you how effective tapping into your losses can be.)

Reflecting on the challenges that you and your remote team had to overcome to get where you are today can help you discern your company's true values, as well as the specific attributes that make your culture unique. How did these setbacks help define as the company's founder?

For example, a few years back, someone I had viewed as my right-hand man suddenly left the company. Failing to retain him devastated me, as I believed he was the key to my future success. But it also woke me up. A week later, I hired four new people, hoping that one of them would be capable of replacing him. Two of them ended up exponentially driving our business forward.

Reflecting on this crisis helped me create a strong culture of cooperation within my remote teams because I learned that success does not depend on

any one person, however talented he or she may be. Your culture is a living concept, comprised of your company's core DNA -- its collective values, formed by learning hard lessons. Despite the location of your strands, all of them matter.

Related:

2. Address concerns to promote stronger alliances.

Remote teammates inherently experience less physical interaction with co-workers and may even work solo most days. Because strong collaboration is so essential for a virtual workforce, you need to .

By creating ways for people to interact with each other and talk about outside interests that they really care about (and that aren't directly related to their jobs), you allow special bonds based on those commonalities to form. Nailing this piece of your remote workforce's culture is critical because just having a close friend at work can increase job satisfaction by , which means strong personal connections are a major factor in reducing turnover.

For example, I run a workshop called " DreamGoals" for my employees after they've been at Clevertech for a while. In it, I ask specific questions about their personal lives, such as what their fantasy travel itineraries would be, what kinds of wild activities they'd like to try, or how they envision their families' futures. Asking about their goals in life is not focused enough, but touching on such universal aspects of life humanizes remote workers and creates stronger interpersonal connections.

Related:

3. Use traditions to create a cycle of cultural evolution.

The constant drip of water on stone creates a channel. Similarly, building a strong remote company culture isn't about getting excited one week and creating a bunch of activities intended to boost it. You need to make an ongoing commitment to consistently expand your company culture -- this will allow more people to come in and experience it, and traditions can be the key to keep it evolving, as paradoxical as that may sound.

Traditions are , and they don't have to be elaborate or complicated. You could write up a newsletter every month highlighting a team member or send out cards or gifts at the end of the year for the holidays. Even the most modest traditions can help remind distant staff members that they are part of a larger community and make them feel included. Ultimately, a sense of belonging will lead to remote employees to feel more invested in your company.

At Clevertech, we have a tradition called " Clever Fridays" where we discuss things that may be only tangentially related to work, such as meditation or cooking -- anything our team members are interested in. For example, a few of our teammates who are really into meditation created a virtual " lunch and learn" session to give any other interested co-workers a chance to learn about reducingstress. This not only helped participants feel more connected to their co-workers, but it also helped to reinforce one of our company's core values: " Slow down to speed up."

Related:

Slow and steady wins a great culture.

As mentioned above, if you slow down and think about where you're going, you'll achieve your objectives more quickly. So stop and reflect on how you can create a company culture that makes your remote employees look forward to each day.

Our " Clever Fridays" provide a sense of fluid consistency for our remote workers. If some of them couldn't join in this week, they know there's another one next week. The key to retaining current remote team members and attracting new ones is to strike a balance between tradition and evolution in your culture by creating a sense of togetherness. Those personal bonds will help render the geography that divides you.