

Building Stronger Virtual Connections

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When the COVID-19 pandemic began, remote work was a fringe benefit for some organizations. Now, nearly 40% of employees have transitioned to remote working arrangements, according to a survey from Boston Consulting Group. This signals the new workplace reality: Remote work is here to stay.

Unfortunately, that's not a welcomed change for many people. Employers and employees are concerned about burnout and dwindling employee connections. Considering that impromptu hallway talks and quick chats after meetings are effectively gone, this sentiment is understandable. With staff virtually isolated, it can seem like entire teams have been broken up into individual silos, no longer operating in tandem.

However, remote work doesn't need to come at the cost of human connections. With a little effort, we can help foster virtual connections. And that's important, especially given that 43% of workers consider team building and collaboration as critical workplace aspects, according to a Gensler Research Institute survey.

Here are some ways we can bring teams together and forge stronger connections, no matter how far apart employees may be.

ENCOURAGING WEBCAMS

Social distancing doesn't mean the end of face-to-face interactions. There are plenty of software solutions that are great tools for giving employees face time with one another. Consider using webcams during meetings, instead of only using audio. Not only can this help meeting engagement and attentiveness, but it can also foster deeper interpersonal connections.

BE MINDFUL OF WORD CHOICE

When relying on written communication, words must be chosen carefully, since there are no nonverbal cues to pick up on. You may need additional context in emails to prevent misunderstandings, especially if the topic is critical in nature. For example, an email that says "Do this again" reads a lot differently than "I thought you did a nice job on this, but we need you to redo it for X, Y, Z reasons."

RESPECT EVERYONE'S TIME

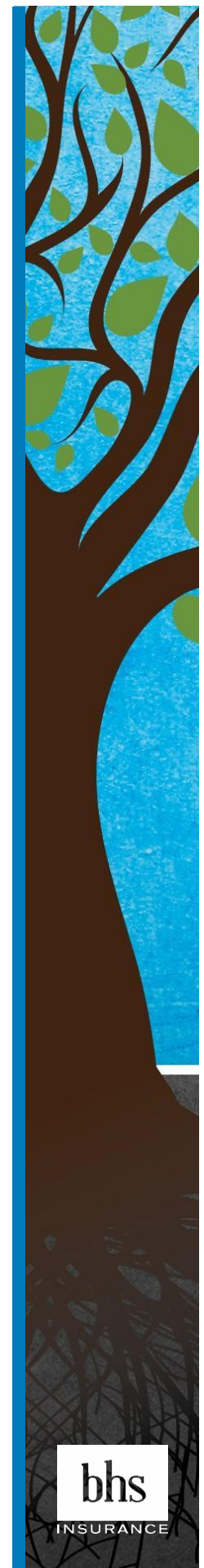
Meeting fatigue is increasingly cited as a top workplace complaint — especially now, since all meetings are conducted on the same laptop screen. Be aware of this and should do your best to reduce unnecessary meetings. Understanding that meeting fatigue can work against efforts to increase connectivity, some organizations have blocked off certain days of the week when no meetings are allowed.

STAY INVOLVED

It's important for employees and leadership to stay connected providing encouragement and transparency on organization news. This can strengthen workplace bonds as well as identify and address concerns. Ideas for engagement include a catch up phone or zoom call, sending a check-in email, participating in social activities.

HOLD VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS

Sometimes employees need to talk to their managers about topics that aren't appropriate for group settings. And since managers are notoriously in and out of meetings all day, it can be hard to find time to bring up these conversations. Managers can get around this by holding virtual office hours. These would be times when employees can virtually connect and discuss what's on their mind. Without



dedicated time slots for these talks, employees may question whether their topic is important enough to warrant a meeting and may never bring it up. By holding office hours, employers are showing that they want to connect with their employees, no matter the subject.

SUMMARY

Working remotely has not eliminated the need for social connectivity during the workday. Thankfully, there are a number of creative and effective opportunities to stay in touch.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, please call a member of the BHS Insurance Public Garden team at (800) 350-7676.

