

HR Insights

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Engaging Remote Employees With Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to challenge many employers and their employees to move their daily work online, while trying to be just as productive and connected as in their normal workplace setting.

With the remote workforce growing, employees can often feel disconnected and not as engaged with co-workers and the overall organization. Learning and development efforts can help reengage employees—especially as the coronavirus abruptly shifted many employees to a remote work setting.

Why It Matters

According to Gallup, 70% of workers in the United States are not engaged. As employees have been sheltering in place, they may start to feel less connected to their work and co-workers. Engaged employees are more than just satisfied with their jobs, they are committed to the organization and its goals. They have passion, pride and energy for their work and their employer, and are willing to go the extra mile on a regular basis. Employees who are truly engaged stay because they enjoy their work and support the company.

With travel restrictions and work-from-home policies in place, consider the following benefits of online learning:

- Develops motivation and ownership
- Encourages collaboration
- Improves productivity
- Increases sense of community and purpose
- Supports flexibility

Additionally, online learning is scalable and can be easily personalized for employees.

Online Training

Training is an essential activity in every organization. Employers should consider online training as an investment—an investment in both their employees and organization. As the threat of COVID-19 shifts, a continued investment should focus on training resources to keep the workforce engaged—whether they are remote or not.

It's important to align training to the company mission and goals. Training could support better understanding of the organization, job responsibilities or industry topics. Consider the following key types of training programs:

- **Orientation**—Initial training for all new employees is a one-time activity to get introduced to the organization.
- **Onboarding**—To ensure employees get adjusted to their department or team, onboarding should take place over a longer duration and may require multiple sessions.
- **Product training**—Whenever new products or capabilities are introduced, training should be done to ensure employees are aware and educated.

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- **Technical skills training**—Instruction focused on the employees' jobs and subject matter expertise will not only help them do their work, but also help boost confidence.
- **Soft skills training**—Guidance on communication, leadership, time management and conflict resolution can help build employees' personalities overall.

Keep in mind any other mandatory training for your organization, like sexual harassment, work safety, first-aid training or other workplace-specific procedures. It's important for all employees to follow local laws and regulations.

Aside from offering training, consider tuition reimbursement for employee development. Employees may be interested in pursuing online courses or programs to advance their technical or industry knowledge. The goal is to make training accessible to all employees.

The great thing about online learning is that it's scalable and customizable for an organization. It could be as sophisticated as investing in online training portal software, or it might be as simple as recording training sessions or meetings—both virtual and in-person—and having them accessible on a company server or intranet.

Upskilling

Another type of employee training that is gaining more traction in a post-coronavirus workplace is upskilling. Upskilling is when employers provide employees the opportunity to learn new skills to better their current work performance, while also prepping them for the projected needs of the company. When you upskill your employees, you are not only investing in your workers, but also in the longevity and development of your company.

Depending on the industry, organizations may shift their focus from hiring new talent to upskilling current employees as they adapt during the pandemic. How companies design upskilling initiatives will vary, but the ultimate goal of closing the skills gap and retaining top talent remains the same. By upskilling your employees, you are providing:

- **Growth opportunities**—You are equipping employees with resources to achieve personal development goals, while also providing workers with new growth opportunities.
- **Greater employability**—With the constant development of new technology, more jobs are being automated or taken over by artificial intelligence (AI). Market experts have predicted that, by 2023, advancements in AI and automation will force 14% of the current workforce to switch careers. The more adaptable and collaborative employees are to the new age of technology, the more likely they are to be successful and engaged at your organization.
- **Increased job security**—By investing in upskilling initiatives, employers can communicate to employees that their job is important and that they're committed to providing training to preserve job security. Employees are looking for that more than ever as the pandemic drastically impacts the employment market.

Upskilling can be beneficial to the growth and longevity of your organization. Other long-lasting benefits for employers include employee retention and remaining competitive within the market.

Other Considerations

Along with online learning, it's important to consider overall learning and development efforts at your organization. Learning and development efforts should not be paused or discontinued during the pandemic. If anything, employers should give special attention to how they are engaging all employees and keeping them motivated—especially in a remote work setting. Employees are more likely to stay with an organization if they know there's room for growth.

Beyond the obvious benefits of having motivated, loyal workers, employee engagement can help increase your return on investment. In fact, studies show that improving engagement correlates with improving performance.

Researchers conducted a global survey (for the U.K. government) and found that companies with high employee engagement increased their operating income by 19.2%,

while companies with low engagement saw revenue drop by nearly 33% over the same 12-month period.

Technology can be your greatest ally when training your workforce. To learn more about how to engage remote employees through learning and development efforts, contact Brooks Insurance Agency today.