

Seven Compass Points for Hybrid Teams

As companies return to the office and accelerate reopening plans, many have had to establish new policies around remote work and flexible or hybrid teams. Formerly a perk, remote work has now become part of company cultures worldwide and has also become an asset to benefits packages, a vital hiring tool, and critical to the daily health of your team. We are now in an era where working full time in centralized workspaces is likely gone for good.

Nonetheless, the return to the office is coming with a mix of emotions on all sides. While some remote workers report better work-life balance, increased productivity, and stress-free commutes, others report isolation, a decrease in inspiration, or a lack of direction from leadership without daily in-person interaction. Businesses say that fewer workers in offices cut overhead costs, make them a more desirable employer, and leads to happier employees.

To embark on the right path to happier and more productive teams, you will need to utilize a GPS. We aren't talking about your standard global positioning system, but a method of grounding your company culture in a Group Performance System.

[Tanya Robertson](#), a Human Resources Manager at PCG, shared, "COVID did not necessarily create issues out of thin air. It tended to exacerbate issues that were already at play. Teams that were high-functioning continued to function well remotely. Teams that were less collaborative in the office struggled with accountability and communication in the remote environment. It was similar with managers. Strong managers with good communication and feedback skills continued to develop high-performing staff who felt connected to their work and their team. Managers who struggle with communicating expectations in the office tended not to know what their remote staff were doing."

Making adjustments to your company culture and policies regarding remote work will help reset your team's GPS and lead to success.

Base Camp

Start with a “remote-first” mindset. Revise or create new policies with a remote-first culture to be inclusive and flexible if another emergency or natural disaster arrives. Keep in mind any national and state HR guidelines and general best practices, then infuse them with your company’s specific guidelines. [Katrina Fehring](#), Partner and HR Senior Advisor at PCG, adds, “From how to set up remote teams, manage workforce layoffs and furloughs, to reopening and safety procedures, COVID has created a volatile and dynamic environment in the HR field. Most employees indeed enjoyed WFH life, but it’s most important that you have a solid policy for return-to-work. You can still manage individual accommodations as you did before. Just know that you will save everyone time and money with the disclaimer that ‘all policies are subject to change at any time.’”

Navigation

Define ways that your employees will stay accountable and connected within and across teams during the workday. Whether it’s email, Slack, Asana, or Zoom, be sure to maintain spaces for sharing ideas and connections. Some companies have instituted a 2-4 hour block of the day for core collaborative time when employees across time zones can connect, set meetings, or participate in brainstorm sessions. Set expectations on work hours and remain flexible within the confines of what’s appropriate for you as a leader and for your team.

Coordinates

As a leader, be clear on how team members can reach you, consider using a moderately visible calendar, and share your preferred methods of communication on a simple internal document. Be sure to protect your time to not fall into micromanaging and veering off course with your larger strategic tasks. Conversely, ask for the same information from your team members. Set reasonable and regular check-ins, and you be less likely to make assumptions on what people are handling and that they can do it on their own.

Communication

Unlike individually connecting, assess how your team(s) communicate most effectively. Is it via email, Microsoft Teams, or web conferencing? To eliminate or reduce time in meetings, set agendas for meetings, keep an eye on topic drift unless it’s part of the flow, and watch for burnout. A routine of weekly check-ins could feel redundant over time, so a break in the pattern can boost autonomy and creativity.

Connection

As mentioned above, it's essential to plan for multiple communications channels, and you can take it a step further. To add some fun, create different themes for chat channels that aren't work-related, such as pets, recipes, streaming, sports, hiking, etc. Host a standing video conference during lunchtime for whoever wants to pop in but be mindful to avoid a remote worker popping in when no one is there for connection.

Guidance

Data indicates when employees feel underappreciated, it hinders good work and getting things done. When in-person, a passing word of praise goes a long way. When remote, those moments all but disappear. Setting a daily intention to [praise a remote or in-person employee](#) builds trust, empathy, and value within your team. Additionally, professional development opportunities can advance an employee's retention, stretch assignments, promotion opportunities. When someone does participate in professional development, encourage them to share what they learned with the team and how they might implement what they learned.

Gathering Points

Now that you have policies and a foundation in place, you can create engaging opportunities to keep your hybrid/remote team balanced and on track. This requires a commitment and passion from a strong leadership team to share the load of planning and implementing ways to encourage social interaction. These gathering points also work well for onboarding new remote hires. For [Adrienne Robertson](#), Partner, Advanced Accountant, and remote team member at PCG, connection is critical. "It feels good to be able to have our weekly staff meetings and still be able to chat with coworkers about our non-work lives. Being somewhat isolated is not easy, and I love the virtual social activities we do, like a murder mystery and cocktail hour," remarked Adrienne.

Burned out on remote cocktails and coffee hours? Check out these other ideas below:

- Pair a remote worker with a different buddy weekly or monthly for work and non-work check-ins
- Get creative with Zoom by using the whiteboard feature for Pictionary or streaming a group workout
- Create a poll where you list a person's name, and everyone has to submit a compliment or comment about their favorite part of working with that team member
- Use web-based quizzes where team members have to match the factoid with the employee
- Enjoy these [57 activities](#) from SnackNation and [15 more](#) from Hive

Finding the right balance between policy and micromanaging isn't always a straight path, but the journey will help create a culture of better relationships. Employees will have more work-related energy and higher engagement in work tasks, and you will have a better business in the long run. Just what a Group Performance System is designed to do!

[Contact PCG](#) to help you navigate your company's HR operations and maximize organizational efficiency in the remote/hybrid work environment.