

# Leader Guide: Connecting Hybrid and Remote Teams



EXPERIENCE  
COUNTS

## Audience

Managers of hybrid and remote employees

## Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to help you support hybrid and fully remote employees in feeling connected, informed and engaged. This guide gives you methods to apply the REAL framework (Respect, Empathy, Accountability and Learning) to create meaningful employee experiences and foster connection with team members who are spread across locations.

## Why Connection Matters

Managers are a critical bridge between shifting employee expectations and leadership priorities. Managing a team spread across locations can present some unique challenges, but with the right approach—and when empowered with the right tools and resources—you can build strong connections and strengthen engagement.

## Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Communicate regularly with your employees, regardless of where they're located, and encourage them to regularly communicate with each other. Use a variety of tools such as email, chat, video conferencing and project management software to stay connected and informed.

- **Keep it transparent.** Unless someone is planning a surprise or there's a privacy issue, use public channels for communication, even about business decisions or strategy. This transparency establishes trust and helps employees feel involved and included.
- **Encourage casual conversation.** With hybrid or remote settings, you can lose that feeling of connectedness you get from watercooler chats and hallway conversations. Encourage your team members to take virtual coffee breaks together, or host virtual lunches that your team can choose to join. Informal conversations about topics outside of work help build strong relationships between employees, which leads to better collaboration and productivity.

## Foster Connection at Every Employee Touchpoint

Provide new employees an onboarding buddy they can meet with in-person or online. Offer ongoing trainings, employee-led lunch and learns, peer coaching, mentorship opportunities. Start meetings with a personal check-in or a question of the week. These can all be done in-person or virtually and help create and maintain role clarity, a sense of belonging and strong bonds among your team.

Use the REAL framework:

**Respect: "I welcome your individuality. I will listen to your ideas and value your perspective."**

# Leader Guide:

## Connecting Hybrid and Remote Teams



EXPERIENCE  
COUNTS

- Foster a sense of teamwork and collaboration among team members, even if they're not physically located in the same place. Use technology to facilitate virtual meetings, strategy sessions and team building activities to help build relationships and strengthen connections. Whether it's an ugly sweater contest, exercise challenge or book club, interactive and lighthearted team building activities get employees involved, entertained and engaged.
- Create or enhance employee resource groups (ERGs). Generally run by volunteers, these social groups bring together people with similar interests or life experiences. This can include anything from military to working parents to LGBTQ+. These groups bring together employees who may not necessarily work together regularly and create an informal way build connections through in-person or online events, meetups, chats or activities while simultaneously supporting diversity and inclusion.

### **Empathy: "I support your well-being. I will recognize your challenges and care about your life."**

- Recognize that your team members have lives outside of work. Just as you wouldn't always expect an immediate response when working in the same office, don't expect one working together virtually. People still have personal priorities to attend to and need to take breaks, just as they do when they're in an office.
- Listen before speaking. Listen with compassion and understanding, without judgment and with empathy. Don't interrupt, repeat what they say back to show you understand what they said, and ask follow-up questions. Silence and don't look at any other devices.
- During video calls or meetings, keep an eye out for any signs that an employee is distracted or disengaged. If you see any, take the opportunity during a one-on-one to ask if everything is okay and how you can help. Then, connect them with resources to support their needs.

### **Accountability: "I champion your success. I will give you clear expectations and share honest feedback."**

- Set clear expectations and hold each other accountable. Ensure all team members understand their roles and responsibilities and that expectations are clearly defined. Hold team members accountable for their work and commitments, regardless of their location.
- Create goals for employees to achieve as a team—not just individual goals. Team goals encourage communication and collaboration among remote, hybrid and on-site employees and more strongly connect employees to the company.

### **Learning: "I encourage your growth. I will maximize your strengths and support your aspirations."**

- Create a continuous feedback loop. Quarterly or annual performance reviews and engagement surveys just aren't enough. Leaders need to consistently take a pulse on how their employees are doing and feeling. Give team members the

# Leader Guide:

## Connecting Hybrid and Remote Teams



EXPERIENCE  
COUNTS

- chance to share their ideas, voice their concerns, and provide feedback on the team's progress. Encourage open and honest communication to ensure that everyone feels heard and valued. Listen, and take action.
- Regularly recognize and celebrate achievements. Don't save recognition for performance reviews. Without the traditional workplace celebrations and face-to-face contact, employees need more frequent and personalized acknowledgment. Meaningful recognition in today's hybrid and remote world of work should be deliberate, innovative and start at the top.
    - Celebrate small wins by recognizing daily accomplishments. Sending an email, chat or calling to say "great job" shows your employees you see how hard they're working even when you can't see them in person.
    - In team meetings, say a few words about some of your employees' recent accomplishments. Because not everyone is comfortable with public praise, use one-on-one meetings for employees who prefer a smaller audience.
    - Send a monthly newsletter or group chat celebrating years of service, birthdays, births, adoptions and other accomplishments.
    - Encourage peer recognition with peer-to-peer recognition programs, gamification or virtual kudos. Dedicate a Slack channel or Teams chat for giving praise and shoutouts.
    - Celebrate personal achievements, too. Whether they earned a degree, had a baby or bought their first home, showing that you care about what's going on in your employees' personal lives builds trust and strengthens relationships.