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7 Ways to keep your corporate culture healthy during COVID-19 - by Diana Perry

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Feeling the quarantine fatigue yet? I'm pretty sure we all are at this point. We miss our friends, family and (most of) our co-workers. It's such a strange time and this crisis is truly putting us and our businesses to the test. We've gone from chats at the watercooler to a new fully digital workplace but being sure we all still feel connected is really important right now. I've put together some ideas on how to keep your corporate culture strong while in quarantine.

Communicate often and make yourself available: By now we're all pretty familiar with Zoom, GoToMeeting, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Google Hangouts, FaceTime, and maybe even HouseParty. Whichever video conference site or app your company prefers—make sure you're meeting frequently. Sometimes one of the best things you can do is simply to listen as some staff have family suffering, are scared, frustrated, or sick of feeling isolated. It's important for the team to feel a connection to the business and its values as a whole in order to keep up motivation and productivity. Because everything is still changing so quickly, plan a weekly video call with the entire staff – even if you don't have much to say. Simply seeing everyone's faces can be extremely uplifting. I'd suggest branding the call so that it's more memorable – some ideas: Town Hall, Fireside Chat, AMA (ask me anything), Friday Findings...you get the picture. From a team perspective, have each manager reach out to their team members with a daily text to check in and see how people and their families are doing. This is a time where it's perfectly acceptable and appreciated to over communicate.

Build on relationships: Some companies recently hired new staff and then COVID-19 hit, how challenging it must be to be new and still learning a company and your role in it and then be forced to stay home. Create some team bonding to help make those newbies feel welcome and learn more about each other. Some ideas include; start your call with what the best part of everyone's day is so far, try show and tell with a story tied to a childhood toy, hold a "ballads and beers" meetup where each person submits a song and others have to guess who choose it – while drinking beer of course, play a silly game like two-truths-one-lie, or have your CEO share their quarantine Spotify playlist.

Show appreciation: If a staff member or even a department is going above and beyond, have the CEO make a personal phone call to say thank you. Send staff a surprise like flowers, Milkbar cookies or something from a tenant. Send a donation to No Kid Hungry or another nonprofit on behalf of an employee that participated on your recent call. Another idea is to reimburse employees up to \$50/month if they get takeout from a tenant and share it on social media.

Encourage education: No matter what's going on in the world, we can all benefit when from education. Make sure your staff is up to date on new happenings within your market, encourage them to attend webinars, start industry calls within their niche, and join the new ICSC virtual community.

Have fun! Just because we're stuck at home doesn't mean we can't have fun. Switch things up every now and again and surprise the staff with a comedian one day on your Zoom call. Try TGIFriday's with virtual happy hour where each member changes their zoom background to a favorite location or where they wish they were. Or, perhaps the best way to have fun is to implement summer Fridays and shut down the digital office early or better yet, four-day workweeks.

Provide a safe environment for when staff returns: Though we continue to push the date on physically returning to work, there is planning you can do now to get ready. Aside from the obvious cleaning and sanitation, add directional signage for walking paths that limit risk, drop a "Welcome back" bag on each desk with a note, antibacterial and maybe even a branded bandanna facial covering.

Fun Fact: Companies that exhibit a winning culture, that have a strong internal compass and inspire their employees, are, we have found, 3.7 times more likely to be business performance leaders. Source: Bain & company blog.

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