

Checking In With Your Employees In A Way That Matters



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We're just over a year into a global pandemic that continues to alter the lives of millions. Essential workers have endured enormous stress, and they, along with the rest of us are now functioning with a new set of safety protocols, changing systems and processes. Globally 88 percent of business organizations mandated or encouraged their employees to work from home since the pandemic took hold. Currently about 60 percent of workers in the U.S. are still working remotely. For many it hasn't been an easy transition. Shared work spaces, cramped living quarters, and a sense of isolation have all taken their toll. To put it simply, employees are struggling to make it all work.

As an employer, you may be wondering if you should be doing something to help. The answer is a resounding yes!

Checking in with your employees can help improve...

- Retention
- Productivity
- Morale

And help reduce...

- Accidents/Injuries
- Healthcare costs
- Staff burn-out

Begin by sharing with them that you understand the current stressors and challenges.

Check-in on them beyond a simple "How's it going?" or "How is your day?" Support them in and out of the "office." Show genuine interest in their efforts, abilities, and well-being. And also show them appreciation for all they continue to do!

Really, truly offering your employees the time and space to be seen and heard will make a huge difference not only in their lives, but in morale and productivity, too. As you read on, you'll be guided through actionable steps you can take as well as conversation tips and guideposts to enact change within your company or organization. I can assure you that these small shifts will lead to big changes for your employees.

Activate Authenticity



When we talk about authenticity, we're extending beyond the surface-level pleasantries that often mask how we're really feeling. This includes speaking openly and honestly about our own mental health in a way that is normalizing. It also includes extending deeper care and compassion to our staff and colleagues.



“How are you?” is the default for many of us when chit-chatting with others. But there are so many more effective ways to authentically check-in with one another and really unearth how people are doing on an emotional level.

A few questions for you to consider asking when you start meetings or conduct 1-on-1 employee check-ins:

- How are you doing really?
- How are you taking care of yourself today?
- How can I best support you?

Can you tell a difference just in the language? Combine that linguistic shift with approaching your employee from a place of authenticity and you'll really make their day.

Even if you're reaching out across a screen, doing so with genuine care and compassion in a time of such chaos and uncertainty will certainly separate you as an employer while making your employee feel valued.

Build Better Boundaries

As an employer, you can play a major role in the company culture. Is there room for improvement in this arena?

Of course, you have a business to look after. I understand that through my experience as a CEO.

But you can put boundaries into place that are beneficial to an employee's well-being without sacrificing work. Sometimes what they need is rest, recovery, and space away from their computers. This recharge time can really go a long way both for morale and performance.

You may wish to consider implementing:

- Mental health days
- Flexible work hours
- Summer Fridays
- A discounted fitness/wellness membership

In addition, allowing employees to create boundaries that work for them while not compromising the integrity of workflow is critical. The typical 9-5 notion has been laid to rest in the work-from-home era. Knowing that people may need to step away to tend to a child or loved one, and meeting them with grace and kindness, is needed.

On the flip side, if you notice that an employee is working all hours or is rarely offline, it might be a good idea to chat with them about the boundaries they've set for themselves. Maybe working from home has blurred the lines between work and play and they need a gentle reminder. There is no harm in touching base about this. In fact, I encourage it!





Cultivate Connection

In a world dominated by Zoom calls and emails, it's important to remember that on the other side of that screen is a real human with real needs. People are starved for connection and after many long months of quarantine and isolation, it's starting to show.

One of the best ways to connect is through personalized attention. Scheduling 1-on-1 calls, even just for 10 minutes each week can help your employees feel more informed and connected to you and the organization. This is a great time to authentically check-in and get a sense for how each of your employees is doing on a very human level. Plus, this can have a ripple effect if you are part of a company or organization with many tiers of employees.

Some questions you may wish to ask, in addition to the authentic check-in questions include:

- What projects or tasks are you working on this week?
- What goals are you currently working towards?
- Where do you feel you need more support right now?
- How can I assist you in meeting your goals and deadlines this week?

Taking the time to reach out, begin a dialogue, and openly converse with your employees not only creates connection, but builds a better work environment for your employees to feel valued and thrive.

The Power of Positivity

Did you know that word choice and presentation play a huge role in how you are perceived by someone and how your message comes across?

That's where the power of positivity comes in. The words you use, your body language, and even your facial expressions can all make a difference in these employee check-ins.

Consider the following:

- Set clear expectations for your employee check-ins. Let them know when you schedule the meeting that this is purely a well-being check, and reassure them that there is nothing to worry about. Doing so will eliminate any anxiety on either end and will have your employee come into the meeting more relaxed.
- Choose your words wisely. Consider all of the previously mentioned information about questions you can ask, and be sure to frame these 1-on-1 calls as an opportunity for connection.
- Especially if you're communicating via Zoom, remember your body language and facial expressions will set the tone. Remember to relax, but know that your gestures and presence can have just as much of an impact as your words.

Some positive phrasing that you may wish to consider using in these meetings and other workplace situations include:

- "One option open to you is ..."
- "I can help you to ..."
- "Let me look into that for you."
- "I am happy to assist ..."

Not only will choosing to harness the power of positivity make your employee feel good, but it'll make you feel good, too!

Offer Opportunities

When was the last time you offered your employees an opportunity to grow their skills?

According to [LinkedIn's 2019 Workforce Learning Report](#), 94% of employees say they would stay at a company longer if it invested in their learning and development.

That number is incredible, and shows a real need for these opportunities! I'd venture to say that even in the COVID-era, that number is still pretty high.

How much you invest in your employees and their growth correlates with productivity and level of interest in completing work wholeheartedly.

Taking an interest in learning more about what your employees are looking to achieve, and implementing a strategy or tools to help them get there, is a great way to support them.

Now support in this instance can look like a handful of different things, including:

- Master Classes with industry professionals
- Cross-trainings within your company or organization to help employees across different departments build related and necessary skills
- Monthly check-ins to review/evaluate employee goals
- Team building/leadership building exercises and activities

The more you can pour into your employees, the better they will perform and the more invested in their work and their company they'll be.

Consider cultivating a Conscious Leadership:

- Create a shared company vision
- Set realistic goals and productivity expectations
- Teach and encourage empathy
- Provide opportunity for employee feedback

Let them know their work is appreciated. Here are a few ways to really show that you care in your employee check-ins:

- Be specific! Give an example of something your employee did and show gratitude for their efforts.
- Celebrate their recent wins and accomplishments.
- Meet them with grace when goals or deadlines haven't been met.
- Verbally extend your respect by saying, "I am grateful for ..." or "I appreciate ..."

Being appreciative and showing respect goes a long way when building better rapport with employees and ensuring they feel cared for, especially during trying times.



Practice Empathy

This is the most important relational tool. One way of showing someone that you hear them and understand their point of view is by sharing a similar experience.

Now the key here is to emphasize that you can relate to what they're going through based on a previous experience you've had — Not that you're trying to diminish what they're going through or feeling.

You can effectively integrate this into your employee check-ins by saying:

- "Your feelings are understandable and a normal response to what you are going through."

- “It makes sense that you are upset and frustrated. I would be too.”
- “I hear you, and I can relate. I had a previous experience ...”
- “A similar thing happened to me, so I understand where you’re coming from.”
- “I know that feeling, so I empathize with what you’re going through.”

And then sharing your story from there.

This is also an effective way to place yourself on the same level playing field as your employee. Having the opportunity to share a personal experience is a great reminder that you’re both humans with real feelings and experiences, regardless of your job titles.

Cultivate a Collaborative Culture

Promote a work/life balance

Foster a community connection

**Revisit compensation, benefits
and perks to be competitive**

**Provide support through
wellness programming**

There are many ways to support your staff including outside resources like an Employee Assistance Program, which provides short term counseling and assessment and brief treatment and referral services to assist with mental health, addiction, relationship issues, stress, and childcare, eldercare, legal and financial resources and referrals.

There are also a number of Apps that are effective and easily accessible including:



Headspace

Mediation & Relaxation



Ginger

Confidential around the clock support & guided self-care



Aaptiv

Fitness classes & training programs



Calm

Mindfulness

Support Where It Matters Most

The biggest takeaway here:

Create a supportive work environment for your employees.

It might sound simple, but connecting and communicating in a meaningful way using these tips can really make a difference during this unsettling time.

Each and every one of us needs to be cared for as we continue to endure the collective trauma of the pandemic. By going the extra mile for your employees and extending kindness and sincerity, you're sending the message that you care about them beyond work hours and that you're invested in them as well-rounded human beings. That is the type of gesture that will surely be remembered during these tough times, and that will shape employees for years to come.

As always, I am available to assist further where necessary. I can be reached via my [website](#) for speaking events, corporate trainings, and coaching sessions.