



Women in A/E/C Networking

Notes from the A/E/C Women's Networking Event: *Engagement and Morale during Challenging Times*

Meeting Date: 07.01.2020

What is the most effective action that your firm has taken to boost engagement and morale over the past few months?

The key to keeping employees motivated is consistent engagement by leadership. Management leading by example creates a culture of positive inspiration and responsibility.

Continuing to recognize employees for their hard work and achievements is particularly important in a remote environment. To express appreciation, many firms are sending regular emails congratulating employees on their work anniversaries, birthdays, and personal anniversaries. Others are hosting weekly virtual meetings to highlight recent achievements provide positive feedback.

Some firms conducted virtual motivation sessions with the assistance of self-improvement and accountability coaches.

Others have expanded Employee Assistance Program (EAP) benefits to provide employees with additional support resources.

Many firms plan to continue with previously scheduled employee engagement events (virtually), or have implemented new activities. Some of the creative ways employers are engaging with employees include:

- Reallocating funds that were previously reserved for travel or other operations that have been put on hold because of the new remote environment and creating "virtual fun" budgets to boost morale through various non-business events (i.e. – cooking classes, tailgate parties, happy hours, trivia contests, etc.).
- Discouraging Friday meetings.
- Most firms plan to continue summer hours (early close on Friday afternoons) or offer all employees one paid Friday off each month.
- Weekly water cooler/ happy hour meetings with a theme. Example themes: family (share family pictures or have them join the call), school spirit, color themes (employees wear attire from their favorite school or alma mater, pick a color for all to wear), nature (describe your favorite thing to do outside).



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Most firms report that employees are working more hours than they were prior to COVID-19. To encourage employees to create or continue healthy habits to counter the additional physical and mental stress of the pandemic, firms have implemented or expanded wellness programs to include additional exercise challenges and wellness activities. Such activities include meditation, regular “brain breaks”, and other forms of relaxation. Many challenges also include rewards such as gift cards.

Employers encourage employees to take PTO days to deal with the “brain drain” of working long hours.

It is critical to ensure employees maintain regular routine while working remote. For some, where allowed, such routine includes getting people back to the office as soon as possible.

What are people doing to sustain connections both personally and professionally?

Leadership engaging with small groups by assignment, with no purpose other than casual, individual chats. Leaders listen to employees and their issues, including working from home, their intentions around wanting to return to the office, etc.

Hosting small group virtual lunches.

How are you developing your firm’s return to office plan?

Most offices have polled employees and the general consensus is that employees feel more comfortable working from home.

Some companies are mapping offices to determine how many people can safely be in each space at any given time, while following social distancing guidelines, face mask requirements, and limitations on shared spaces, such as kitchen areas, conference rooms, etc.

For those that have re-opened offices or plan to in the near future, additional precautionary measures have been implemented, such as revamping office spaces to improve social distancing. Such measures include plastic shields at reception desks, increasing the height of cubicle walls, and requiring employees to bring their own coffee.

For those offices that are open, daily occupancy is capped at 20% - 30%.

Changes in cases (state by state), statutory social distancing regulations, and CDC guidelines continue to be closely monitored in order to determine when it will be appropriate to re-open offices.



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Following health and safety forums and exchanging return to work ideas with peer firms. Firms (and their clients) are embracing the new virtual meeting world and have adopted virtual meetings as a permanent fixture in how they will conduct business going forward.

How is your firm handling flexibility with childcare responsibilities?

Employees' schedules have been predominantly dictated by the schedule of the schools, causing growing frustration with employers attempting to accommodate. Many employees are visibly distracted and not engaged in meetings due to their at-home responsibilities.

Some firms are struggling with how to handle employees with young kids at home who are reporting significantly fewer hours on timesheets with lower productivity. Firms have tried to maintain flexibility and an understanding regarding the lack of outside childcare.

Lookout for your invitation to the next Networking Event!

*Business Development and Networking
in a Remote Environment*

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