



# Retaining Your Remote Workforce



ACTIVATING TALENT.

# Introduction

Almost 70 percent of U.S. employees started working from home in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. And as of this writing, the situation is still an ongoing concern and affecting office reopening plans for many businesses across the country. However, **82 percent of professionals don't want to spend Monday through Friday in the office again even after normal life resumes.**

Most of these employees said they would prefer to go in only two to three days a week. Almost 20 percent said they would rather work from home every day. So tech companies should get used to the idea that remote work likely isn't going away anytime soon.

“It shouldn't come as any surprise that we now have a workforce who understands that many jobs can be done from anywhere, and will expect their employers to offer remote-friendly work environments,” said Matthew Hollingsworth, head of operations at We Work Remotely. “It is fundamentally shifting the way we think about work, likely on a permanent basis, and we will all be better off for it.”

By now, many tech companies have robust remote and hybrid work infrastructures laid out. And if these businesses want to retain their remote and hybrid workforce in today's highly competitive talent market, they have to ensure their culture, onboarding, perks and more are optimized for continued remote work. This guide will give employers insights and tips on how they can retain their distributed employees now and long after the pandemic subsides.

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# About This Guide

This guide is meant to provide recruiters, HR professionals and team leads with actionable takeaways on how to keep a remote workforce engaged, productive and healthy.

Retention in a remote world is a huge concern for many businesses. More than 10 million new job openings were reported in June 2021 across all sectors, the most ever documented. And four million people left their jobs in April 2020, which is the highest rate in two decades. We've entered what many are calling "The Great Resignation" because **professionals have the market freedom to fit their employment around their career goals and life priorities like never before.**

And a priority for much of today's talent is being able to work from home at least some of the time. **Around a third of professionals said they would leave their employer if they no longer permitted remote work** and 62 percent said they would give future preference to employers that allow for working from home.

This guide will help businesses set up remote infrastructures that position them as employers of choice and prevent turnover in their distributed workforce.



# Defining “Remote”

There can be many variations in what a remote or hybrid workforce looks like and how companies define those two ideas. A “hybrid” employee could be one that works outside the office roughly two days a week while a “remote” employee could be someone that works from home three or more days. Obviously, the distinctions there are slight and a single professional can switch between the two categories many times during any given month.

It’s up to each business to create the distinctions that work best for them. For the purposes of this guide, we’ll use the term “remote” to refer to any instance of an employee working outside the office — no matter how (in)frequently it occurs. In other words, if an employee works remotely for any amount of time (one day or one year), then they’re a remote employee for that time period.



## SECTION I

# Creating Equitable Experiences for Remote Employees

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Working from home benefits everyone. It gives employees far more flexibility in dictating their schedule, all while being more productive and enjoying a greater work-life balance. Businesses reap the benefits of this productivity and balance as well. **If employees could work from home around three days a week, their employers could save \$11,000 annually per employee.** These savings come from increased productivity and reductions in real estate costs, absenteeism and turnover.

But in order for full- and part-time remote professionals and their employers to take advantage of these benefits, businesses have to first create equitable experiences for their distributed and in-person team members.

# Operating Remote-First No Matter What

Employers must **clearly define their expectations around a remote versus in-person infrastructure**. Staff should know precisely whether they're expected to come into the office and if so, how often. They should also know the guidelines around what any existing office space is meant for. For instance, can anyone work there at-will or is it now a co-working space meant only for collaboration among teams? If there is no office at all, will there be pop-up office spaces for more sporadic in-person collaboration and team-building?

“Companies can make arrangements with Airbnb or Vrbo to encourage employees to work near colleagues for a few weeks or even months at a time,” said Joe Gaska, CEO of GRAX. “The concept of **pop-up offices or workspaces can improve retention by adding collaboration and immersed time with co-workers** to the employee experience — something they likely would not get at another job.”

Each company's guidelines will be unique to their business but employees should be in-the-know every step of the way. And no matter what route a business takes — even if it allows remote work only one day a week — it should **operate as a remote-first company so employees outside the office don't feel undervalued.**

Hailley Griffis, head of PR at Buffer and a co-host of the MakeWorkWork podcast, said one potential shortcoming of a hybrid office structure is that it could make remote workers feel like they aren't as valuable if remote communication isn't streamlined and they miss out on valuable conversations.

## SECTION I

“As much as possible, **organizations should strive to give remote and in-office employees the same experience by creating guidelines that prioritize communicating online over in-person,**” said Griffis.

“The company should plan meetings and events with remote workers in mind. Rather than gathering most people in a meeting room and having remote workers join from a screen to the side, everyone should have the same experience by joining the meeting remotely from their own laptop. This way, remote workers won’t feel uncomfortable speaking up or contributing.”

### **3 Things Hybrid Businesses Need to Succeed**

**Leaders should make sure video links are added to every meeting invitation and that in-person conference rooms are well-equipped to host virtual attendees.** If lunch is being catered for a large meeting in the office, provide remote employees with a lunch stipend as well.

A huge benefit of remote work is that professionals have more freedom over their working hours rather than sticking to a traditional nine to five, Monday through Friday schedule. **Employers should make flexible working hours part of their culture and prioritize asynchronous work and communication. Companies should then audit their communication and workflow tools to ensure every implementation allows for distributed work.**

Platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams allow employees to chat asynchronously. Collaboration tools like Miro, Google Docs, Monday.com, Asana and Trello let teams work on projects, set deadlines, provide feedback, brainstorm and more in highly accessible ways. Files and feedback should be available with open permissions on shared drives and public platforms as much as possible.





*Asynchronous work and transparency go hand in hand. Employees need to be able to access information and execute their tasks whenever and wherever they choose...Basically, take a hard look at your day and think of everything you're doing that someone at home can't see, then find ways to make those visible."*

**MARC BOSCHER**  
CEO OF UNITO

# Where Do Your Leaders Work?

Another pitfall that could affect remote retention is where company leaders work. In many cases, **in-office employees can have greater opportunities for career advancement than remote staff because of their proximity to leaders**, who can notice in-office work efforts to a greater degree. In fact, 64 percent of managers give in-office employees higher raises than their remote counterparts because they believe office workers are higher performers. However, remote workers are 5 percent more likely to be high performers.

“A big part of successfully running a hybrid model is determined by where the leadership team spends their time,” said Griffis. “If the company leadership works primarily from the office, other people will also likely want to work from the office. This arrangement could unintentionally shift things to an office-first culture if it wasn’t already the case.”

Employers can mitigate this challenge by encouraging managers to lead by example and work remotely. But an even more impactful solution is **training managers to identify biases in their performance reviews of remote workers so that distributed staff are not disadvantaged in their pursuit of promotions and higher wages**.

Additionally, **leaders should set up a variety of touchpoints with virtual employees to discuss blockers and offer mentorship** — conversations that could happen informally in the office. For instance, managers should regularly schedule one-on-ones with remote staff to discuss professional goals, ongoing projects and personal wins. Managers can also establish virtual office hours to offer employees additional opportunities to address these topics.

## SECTION I

**“Managers and leaders should set clear goals with team members on what they need to accomplish each week, month or quarter and consistently measure against those goals,” said Joe Gaska, CEO of GRAX. “They should also schedule frequent check-ins with teams or one-on-ones to ensure projects are completed and there’s accountability within the organization.”**

Overall, remote employees should be assessed on their work and goals rather than the number of hours they log working.



# Pay Equity

Between March 2020 and February 2021, Americans moved to a new place at a rate only 3 percent higher than normal. But of those moves, 84 percent relocated to a smaller suburb adjacent to the major metro they previously belonged to, or a satellite city even further away.

**Top talent is no longer exclusive to huge markets like New York, The Bay Area or Chicago.** According to a recent Built In survey, close to half of all companies said a candidate's location won't matter during post-pandemic hiring. With this context in mind, **companies should make location-agnostic pay a part of their remote retention strategies.**

“Penalizing remote workers with lower wages sends the signal that in-office work is more valuable. It implies that the company prefers to have people in the office,” said Brian Dolan, CEO of WorkReduce. “Therefore, those who choose to work from home risk being seen as second-class citizens.”

## The Post-Pandemic Changes Impacting Hiring & Retaining Tech Talent

**Remote workers shouldn't be paid less just because they relocated away from their company headquarters** in a bustling cityscape to a quiet satellite town where the cost of living is lower. Employers should pay staff equitably based on aspects like their experience, the work they're doing and national salary averages for roles — not their geographic location.

## SECTION II

# Optimizing the Remote Onboarding Journey

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A great onboarding experience can improve new hire retention by 82 percent and productivity by over 70 percent. And in today's talent market, employers can't afford to lose great talent because their remote onboarding journey was laggy and lonely for a new hire.

In this next section, we'll explore how companies can take their virtual onboarding experience to the next level.



## SECTION II

Onboarding has a few key goals but two of the most important ones are familiarizing a new hire with their role and introducing them to the company culture. However, remote onboarding can be a challenge because it can lack some of the cultural elements that usually come with starting a new job, like interacting with coworkers during those pivotal first few weeks.

We've outlined how to overcome that challenge and successfully run a remote new hire program in our [Virtual Onboarding Toolkit](#), which splits the new hire journey into three parts: pre-, during and post-onboarding.

# Pre-Onboarding

**Employers should ensure that all their onboarding technologies are up to date and working properly. Every portal should be tested and every software update should be downloaded.** The new hire's manager should also be well-trained on how to use these technologies and so they can offer support if needed.

From there, the new hire's manager and the company onboarding team can **create and send a communication plan to the team member ahead of their first day**. This plan should include a detailed list of the essential tasks they'll be asked to complete, meetings they will attend and who their points of contact are. New hires should also get a calendar of upcoming culture or company-wide events.

During this phase, it may also be beneficial to send new hires a "welcome box" full of snacks and branded items like a t-shirt, mug, pens and a card.

# During Onboarding

Everyone learns and likes to be communicated with a little differently. So **onboarding teams should get a sense of how a new hire would ideally like to navigate their journey through a quick survey** (included in our [Virtual Onboarding Toolkit](#)). This document asks how often a new hire would like to meet with their manager in their first month and what their learning style is, among other questions. Managers can then set up time to discuss the results with the new hire and adjust the onboarding plan accordingly.

For example, if someone enjoys self-directed learning, it may be possible to pre-record certain training or provide written documentation to a new hire so they learn at their own pace rather than walking them through everything.

**Managers should also discuss their expectations as a leader and cover their management style, feedback preferences and other details. New hires should also have regular touchpoints with their manager to discuss their overall onboarding progress and ask questions.**

However, a remote new hire in the weeds of onboarding shouldn't be greeted solely with training meetings and new documents — they should also have opportunities to engage with the culture. **Employees on the new hire's teams and across the company should reach out to offer support and schedule time to chat about the company culture and their backgrounds.** Teams should set up introductory game nights and happy hours in honor of a new hire as well. Touchpoints like these can go a long way in helping remote employees feel included rather than isolated.

## SECTION II

“We implemented a virtual lunch with the new hire, their manager and some of the teammates,” said Stephanie Lyons, Recruiting Manager at SPR. “In addition, we started **announcing new hires before their first day** and sent out a company-wide email about them personally and professionally, to welcome them to the company. We have focused on creating a sense of belonging.”

Lisa Hennessey, chief people officer at Happy Money, said they **built out workshops focused on their values and DEI pillars to give new hires a more immersive sense of their culture.**

“We want to get talent talking about cultural topics that are important to them and to us as an organization,” said Hennessey. “Creating safe spaces for people to have these conversations is critical — especially in a remote environment where there is less opportunity to simply observe leadership or DEI strategies in action.”

# Post-Onboarding

Feedback plays the most significant role in the final phase of onboarding. Once **new hires are ramped up, managers should ask them to offer honest feedback in a quick post-onboarding survey** (also found in our Virtual Onboarding Toolkit). That feedback should be reviewed and incorporated into the next training session so that each onboarding is slightly better than the last.

By thinking about the onboarding journey in these segments, companies can make a remote new hire’s first few weeks positive, engaging and full of interactions that set the foundation for a fulfilling tenure.

### SECTION III

# Fostering a Strong Remote Culture

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Building and maintaining a strong remote culture is no easy feat. It requires creativity, effort and honest feedback from everyone at the company in order to be successful. And when a remote culture works, it can make employees that rarely see each other in person feel genuinely connected. Keep reading to learn more about what makes a remote culture stand out and how to build one.

# Create A Culture of Trust

For remote employees, having a sense of autonomy in their work can sometimes mean the difference between retention and turnover. No one wants to be micromanaged or spied on with “tattle-ware.” Since remote employees do their work out of view of their managers and colleagues, they risk being the victim of these unfortunate situations if their employer has a remote culture that lacks trust.

**“Healthy remote environments have figured out how to create trust for their team,”** said Hailley Griffis, head of PR at Buffer and a co-host of the MakeWorkWork podcast. “In my experience, giving people more autonomy creates more trust.”

“Trust is crucial in a remote work environment. If your manager doesn’t trust you, they could find ways to monitor exactly how you spend your time or send you regular messages asking what you’re working on. This level of micromanagement would not only affect your productivity and ability to do your job, but would also almost certainly take a toll on your mental health.”

**Employers can build greater trust in their organizations by training managers to set goals upfront then give remote employees the flexibility to hit their targets in a self-directed manner.** During this time, managers should have regular check-ins with employees to address roadblocks, provide guidance when necessary, answer questions and field feedback.





*Trust can come in many forms like giving employees more autonomy, sharing information transparently, or taking employee feedback into consideration. The exact method can change, but the basic principle is the same.*

*Trust is essential for a healthy remote work environment.”*

**HAILLEY GRIFFIS**

— HEAD OF PR AT BUFFER AND COHOST OF THE  
MAKEWORKWORK PODCAST

# Time for Fun and Games

Missing out on impromptu happy hours in the office kitchen and catered game nights can be tough for some remote employees. **Almost a third of remote professionals said that they experienced loneliness working in the last year and that it's one of the biggest hurdles of remote work overall.** It's important that companies work to keep their remote staff engaged and feeling like “part of the group.” These efforts can help employees' mental health and keep them from potentially seeking a more inclusive remote culture elsewhere.

In the last year, teams nationwide have gotten very creative in their approaches to remote culture initiatives.

“Teams are encouraged to host virtual happy hours,” said Amanda Knor, fraud ops senior lead at Enova. “Some departments have played virtual Scattergories, bingo, scavenger hunts, trivia games, Jeopardy and even hosted surprise virtual baby showers. The analytics culture committee is hosting virtual activities like yoga sessions, a book club, a virtual Pictionary night, cross-team online lunches and weekly video challenges. These activities have kept everyone close, even while working remotely.”

**20 Virtual Team-Building Activities for Remote and Hybrid Companies**

### SECTION III

**Companies should work to create as many opportunities as possible for employees (especially remote ones) to connect.** Managers could leave a few minutes open at the beginning of every meeting for attendees to chat about non-work-related subjects. Or they could throw a virtual pizza party and coordinate local pizza delivery to remote attendees.

Creative solutions like these may seem like small gestures but they can go a long way in curbing loneliness and fostering a sense of unity within a distributed workforce.



## SECTION IV

# Perks and Benefits for a Remote World

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Remote work, even once a week, was seen as a nice-to-have perk not long ago. Today, it's evolved into a mandatory requirement for many candidates, and that changing tide is a testament to how perks overall have evolved in the last few years. Candidates are seeking more remote-friendly perks than ever before. Let's look into some of the benefits that can aid remote professionals the most.

# Top 10 Perks

Based on our user search behavior, we discovered the top 10 nationwide perks and benefits of this year to be:

1. Remote work
2. Pet-friendly office
3. Unlimited paid time off (PTO)
4. Tuition reimbursement
5. 401(k) matching
6. Relocation assistance
7. Child care
8. Generous parental leave
9. Daily meals provided
10. Company equity



## SECTION IV

However, there's more to the story than those 10 perks, especially for remote professionals.

The coronavirus pandemic affected how millions of Americans manage their mental health, how they work and how they care for their children. It can be difficult for remote professionals (especially those working remotely for the first time due to the pandemic) to balance all of these important factors. In fact, 15 percent of people who started working remotely because of the pandemic stated they had trouble staying motivated.

In an effort to lessen that statistic, **many companies invested in mental health initiatives for their teams to help them adjust to life at home.** However, those investments shouldn't stop just because many professionals are used to working remotely now.

**“Think about offering ‘mental health days’ as PTO or providing memberships to the Calm mindfulness app; Ginger's behavioral health coaching, therapy, psychiatry and well-being content; Meru Health's digital treatment for depression, anxiety and burnout; or Modern Health, which covers a spectrum of well-being needs,” said Emily Carrión, VP of marketing at Esper. “Measures like these can go a long way.”**



*Employers have no choice but to respond to the Great Resignation/Awakening. In the HR world, we're no longer in a "why well-being" world. We're squarely in a "how" world. And it's clear that the "how" is not going to be about perks like Ping-Pong tables, in-house DJs, and lavish office buffets, but about introducing mental, emotional, and physical well-being policies."*

**ARIANNA HUFFINGTON**

FOUNDER OF THRIVE GLOBAL  
AND THE HUFFINGTON POST

## **SECTION IV**

Similarly, **employers can invest in the physical health of their team members by offering a wellness stipend** they can spend on a gym membership, workout equipment, personal training and more.

At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, many companies gave employees stipends to optimize their remote work setups. And with remote work still unchanged for many, businesses should continue this perk as well.

**“Leaders should consider offering a monthly or annual stipend that employees can use to make their work from home scenarios more ideal — whether that means paying for high-speed internet or a new desk chair or monitor,”** said Joe Gaska, CEO of GRAX. “Leaving stipends like this open-ended empowers employees to get whatever it is they need to be comfortable and efficient.”

Child care assistance is another important topic for employers to address within their remote workforce. **Employers can offer subscriptions to homework-help services like TutorMe or Tutor.com. They can also pay for backup childcare services on platforms like Care.com or Sittercity.**

Heather Shulick, EVP of human resources, said All Campus allows employees to take PTO in short increments so they can educate their children during the day. They also made it easier for parents to get school supplies for their young ones.

“We are allowing parents to use their professional development credit in 2020 on their children’s professional development instead,” said Shulick. “Families can tap into this credit to purchase technology or supplies, pay for a tutor or subsidize additional childcare needs.”

## SECTION IV



**Businesses can also make domestic life easier for the employees by helping with their chores. Stipends for services like laundry and cleaning as well as meal and grocery delivery can give remote employees more time back in their day.**

Lastly, employers should make efforts to learn about the perks team members would like to see most.

**“Every adjusted benefit or new perk was developed completely based on the feedback from employees,”** said Liz Rose, director of HR PerkSpot. “We sent out multiple surveys and conducted one-on-one conversations to understand the wants and needs of PerkSpotters. **Based on the results and qualitative feedback, we responded to those needs appropriately.** We understand those needs continue to evolve, especially as our company and the current situation change. And we will continue to develop and provide benefits that fit with those ever-changing needs.”

## SECTION V

# Log Out to Fight Burnout

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Professionals both in the office and working remotely can experience burnout. However, sensing burnout in remote staff can be particularly difficult since there are fewer opportunities to read body language or see signs of how distracted and disinterested they appear while working. Remote employees also may have more difficulty logging off at the end of the day since “work” and “home” are the same place. Here are some ways companies can curb these challenges for their remote staff.



## SECTION V

The World Health Organization defines burnout as “a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions: feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and reduced professional efficacy.”

Just over half (52 percent) of all employees say they experienced burnout in 2021 — an 11 percent increase from pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, **38 percent of remote workers said burnout worsened during the pandemic compared to 28 percent of in-office employees.**

**Burnout is a key contributor to employee retention. Just over 40 percent of professionals said they’ve left a job because of burnout, a number that rises to almost 50 percent for millennials specifically. What’s more, almost 70 percent of employees feel burnout is a problem that their employers aren’t doing enough to fix.**

“Burnout is a big risk to those who are just working remotely for the first time, and especially to people who are now in more meetings than before,” said Joel Gascoigne, CEO of Buffer. “My advice to company leaders is to be aware of these trends and work to minimize burnout as much as possible by establishing processes that encourage time off of work and away from computers.”

# How to Recognize and Avoid Burnout

## **Reasons for burnout on remote teams**

- Lack of manager support
- Unattainable or unclear goals
- Remote work isolation
- Lack of recognition
- Excessive job demands

## **Tactics to fight remote burnout**

- Make feedback a priority
- Automate manual processes
- Prioritize health and mental wellness
- Offer mental breaks throughout the day
- Acknowledge 'Zoom fatigue' and take steps to counteract it
- Set and maintain realistic expectations
- Prioritize flexibility
- Encourage passion projects
- Make time for fun
- Offer rewards

**10 Tips to Avoid Remote Employee Burnout**



*It's about meeting deadlines and achieving results — not hours logged. When a team member works a considerable number of overtime hours during the week or the team reaches a milestone, I make sure to reward them with additional time off.*

**BOB SIDES**

CTO AT BRAVANT HOLDINGS

## SECTION V

Remote employees also have trouble logging off. **Just under 30 percent said unplugging is their biggest struggle with remote work, a factor that can contribute significantly to burnout.**

“At an organizational level, a company should develop best practices for ending the workday and managing notifications,” said Hailley Griffis. “Companies that have an ‘always on’ culture will have more employees who struggle to disconnect.”

Businesses should work to create a culture where people shouldn’t expect an immediate response to communications, especially outside of a person’s working hours (which every employee should set and adhere to).

**“People who are signing off for the day or weekend should leave loudly by specifically saying they are signing off in their team’s Slack channel,” said Griffis. “This technique is most effective when a manager leads by example.”**

Part of a “no burnout” and “please log off” culture should also include encouraging employees to use their vacation time. A quarter of professionals say they never or rarely use all their vacation days and reversing this statistic internally can help fight burnout in remote workers. Managers can even force vacation time by giving their teams an impromptu free day off if they’ve been working hard.

Overall, retaining remote workers requires careful planning, feedback and evolving company culture to prevent them from feeling like contributors with less value. With these tactics and the rest of the insights in this guide, employers can improve life for their remote team members and keep them onboard for years to come.



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