



DON'T *do business* WITHOUT IT™



[Trends and Insights](#) > [Building Your Team](#)

July 03, 2019

3 Ways to Help Improve Your Remote Team's Collaboration

Team collaboration can be a challenge in a distributed setting when you don't see each other regularly in person. These strategies can help boost collaboration and communication when employees are working from all over the world.

[Rodika Tollefson](#)

Freelance writer and journalist



As more employers embrace [remote work](#), distributed teams are the new normal in the workplace. Yet an environment that mixes remote teams and employees co-located in the same office could make communication and collaboration a challenge. How do you create a strong culture of collaboration?

For many employers, it starts by hiring people who fit the [company culture](#).

"When we talk with HR folks who have experience with remote work for years, one of the main themes we hear is that you need to look at the personality fit and the culture fit," says Iwo Szapar, co-founder of [Remote-how](#), a company that facilitates the transition to remote work for individuals and companies. "If you don't have this fit at the very basic level, then it's very hard to work with each other remotely."

At [Virtual Vocations](#), which connects job seekers with remote job openings, the focus is on hiring people who can work independently, have excellent written communication skills and enjoy a flexible and autonomous environment—yet can still deliver their work on time. The company has a completely remote team of more than 50 employees and contractors.

"Making these skills a priority during the recruiting process allows our managers to lead our remote team in a way conducive with company culture," says Laura Spawn, Virtual Vocations CEO and co-founder.

Hiring the right people is just one step. To improve your team's collaboration, you need to have the right collaboration tools and practices.

ADVERTISEMENT

Product Solution

Keep better tabs on cash flow

We help simplify money management. American Express has the solutions to keep you on top of your spending.

[Learn More](#)

1. Strong and Open Communication

A 2019 [“State of Remote Work”](#) survey by Buffer and seven other remote-friendly companies including Remote-how found that 99 percent of the 2,471 respondents wanted to work remotely at least part of the time for the rest of their career. Yet communication and collaboration was the third-biggest challenge identified.

“Communication is paramount between remote teams,” says Tomas Keenan, co-founder and CEO of [Top Class Installations](#).

The company, which installs GPS tracking and dash camera systems in commercial vehicles, has a 20-person fully remote team. They use both traditional communication like phone calls and new tools like Slack.

“You have to have multiple channels of communication open at all times,” Keenan says.

Virtual Vocations uses a ROWE (Results Only Work Environment) management style (with employees being paid for output, or results, rather than hours worked). The communication channels have evolved from what once was mostly email and phone, to adding remote collaboration tools like Slack, video chatting and project management apps.

“We have had to make it a priority over the years to increase collaboration through integrating various forms of communication,” Spawn says.

2. Strong Personal Bonds and Camaraderie

In the same [“State of Remote Work”](#) survey, loneliness was the No. 2 challenge for remote workers. To help combat loneliness, Szapar says people need to know they can count on each other and have someone they can talk to if they need help.

“In a remote space, it's a lot about self-motivation, and what's helping you is having regular contact with someone,” he says.

In addition to being a remote-work advocate, Szapar runs a team of 19 people who live in 12 different countries. His own home base is in Poland currently, but he travels a fair amount of time around the world. He says that one popular way to help people get to know each other are regular in-person retreats.

“You have [the whole team coming together](#) and it's less about work and more about spending time with each other and having fun,” Szapar says.

Among the activities that help create camaraderie at Top Class Installations are the “employee appreciation” events three or four times a year. These are anything from barbecues to bowling and are typically open to both employees and their friends and family.

“The team loves them,” Keenan says.

Szapar recommends thinking out of the box and not only considering regular opportunities to build camaraderie, but also programs like co-working for employees who are in the same location. Spawn says even simple things help — like posting a “question of the day” or having a holiday photos thread in Slack, as well as activities like recognizing birthdays and work milestones.



When we talk with HR folks who have experience with remote work for years, one of the main themes we hear is that you need to look at the personality fit and the culture fit.

—Iwo Szapar, co-founder, Remote-how

3. Measurable Expectations and a Culture of Trust

When you work in the same office, it's easy to drop by someone's desk to check in, ask a question or simply chat. But when you don't see someone regularly and face to face, it's harder to build trust.

"If we can fight this biggest challenge of not trusting each other, then we are on our way to achieving success," Szapar says. "Without trust, you cannot have things like clear goals, super-crystal-clear communication and a culture of transparency."

He says values like transparency, trust and goal setting are not new, but they're more critical in a distributed team that includes co-located and remote employees.

One way to enhance trust is by creating the same set of rules for everyone, Szapar says. For example, each person should join video meetings from individual workstations instead of having a group in a conference room and remote staff on a screen.

"Have the same set of rules that creates the same environment for everybody," he says. "If you don't have this playbook, then you get chit-chat and watercooler conversation in the room, and others will miss things that are said."

Conduct regular in-person or video meetings to review work and project goals and "to ensure everyone is clear on expectations and work priorities," Spawn recommends.

"One of the areas I have seen the most miscommunication is when there has been a lapse in 'check-ins,' and work that has been completed has not been aligned to company priorities," she says. "Regular communication and review meetings help keep managers and team members working together with the same vision and priorities."

Photo: Getty Images

Want to Dig Deeper?

[Company Culture](#)

[Building Your Team](#)



About the Author

Rodika Tollefson

Freelance writer and journalist

Most Popular

7 Ways To Promote Your Business Online For Free

Kim Bhasin • 3 min read

How 16 Great Companies Picked Their Unique Names

Glen Stansberry • 3 min read