

# How to Maintain a Positive Company Culture During COVID-19

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## Culture eats strategy for breakfast, or so we've been told by Mr. Drucker and others.

Coincidentally, I wholeheartedly agree. So, how does leadership maintain, let alone improve, its company culture in the face of the first pandemic of its size in the last one-hundred-plus years?

Of course, it will not be a one-size-fits-all approach, but the following are three suggestions I have seen work recently for several of our clients.

### **Suggestion 1 – Maintain Visible and Engaged Company Leadership**

*"I always feel like somebody's watching me" – Rockwell 1984*

Admit it, this song is now stuck in your head (you're welcome!). It seems that employees are paying closer attention to company management than ever before. How you communicate, your style of communication, transparency, consistency, accessibility, and responsiveness (even if only remotely) – it all matters. What matters most in my humble opinion, however, is that you deliver all information in a timely and authentic way. Being prompt in sharing good or bad news will be especially appreciated now. And if you have more than one bad piece of news to share, share it all at once, and now. Also, be yourself. By way of example, if you don't normally try to establish witty repartee, now is not the time to try. Your employees should already know who you are if you have done your job. Now is not the time to try and introduce them to someone "new" (even with the best of intentions), but instead is a great time for stability and to remind them why they have hopefully bought into and trusted your leadership style so far.

### **Suggestion 2 – Provide Opportunities to Interact and Contribute as Individuals**

During the pandemic, even those more introverted employees have felt isolated. A feeling of company connection goes a long way towards building loyalty, teamwork, and happy employees. And even though we are all interacting with our customers and clients more virtually now, those folks get it when your employees genuinely enjoy each other's company. So, what are we to do when we have been advised by the CDC to limit our group gatherings, and stand six feet apart, wearing masks - and many of our workforces are still working one hundred percent remotely from home?

Some of our clients have virtual Zoom lunches or happy hours. Some have encouraged employees to start book clubs or movie clubs and discuss the materials via Zoom. But ultimately, it is imperative that the

tenured employees who get the company culture in our various geographic locations are empowered to lead by example, and given the freedom to illustrate the company's culture in the way they believe will be most effective.

### **Suggestion 3 – Fight Against 'Checking the Box'/Staleness**

This one is tricky. Most of our clients spent a fair amount of time earlier this year coming up with ways to effectively address Suggestion 1 and Suggestion 2. But over time, there is definitely a routine, we get comfortable, and inertia sets in. Don't be afraid to shake things up! While we all have some level of Zoom fatigue now, there is no magic number to try and hit per week or month. Likewise, if every company management communication looks identical background and content-wise (it's now 10:15 and time for our HR Director to present x, y, or z) and is so predictable that each communication could have just been batch recorded and sent out, things should be adjusted.

Ultimately, we will get through this, and while mention of the number 2020 may produce a zeitgeist-like gag reflex for most of us for a long time to come, for now, work-wise all we have is your own company's culture and co-workers. Protect it and each other.

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