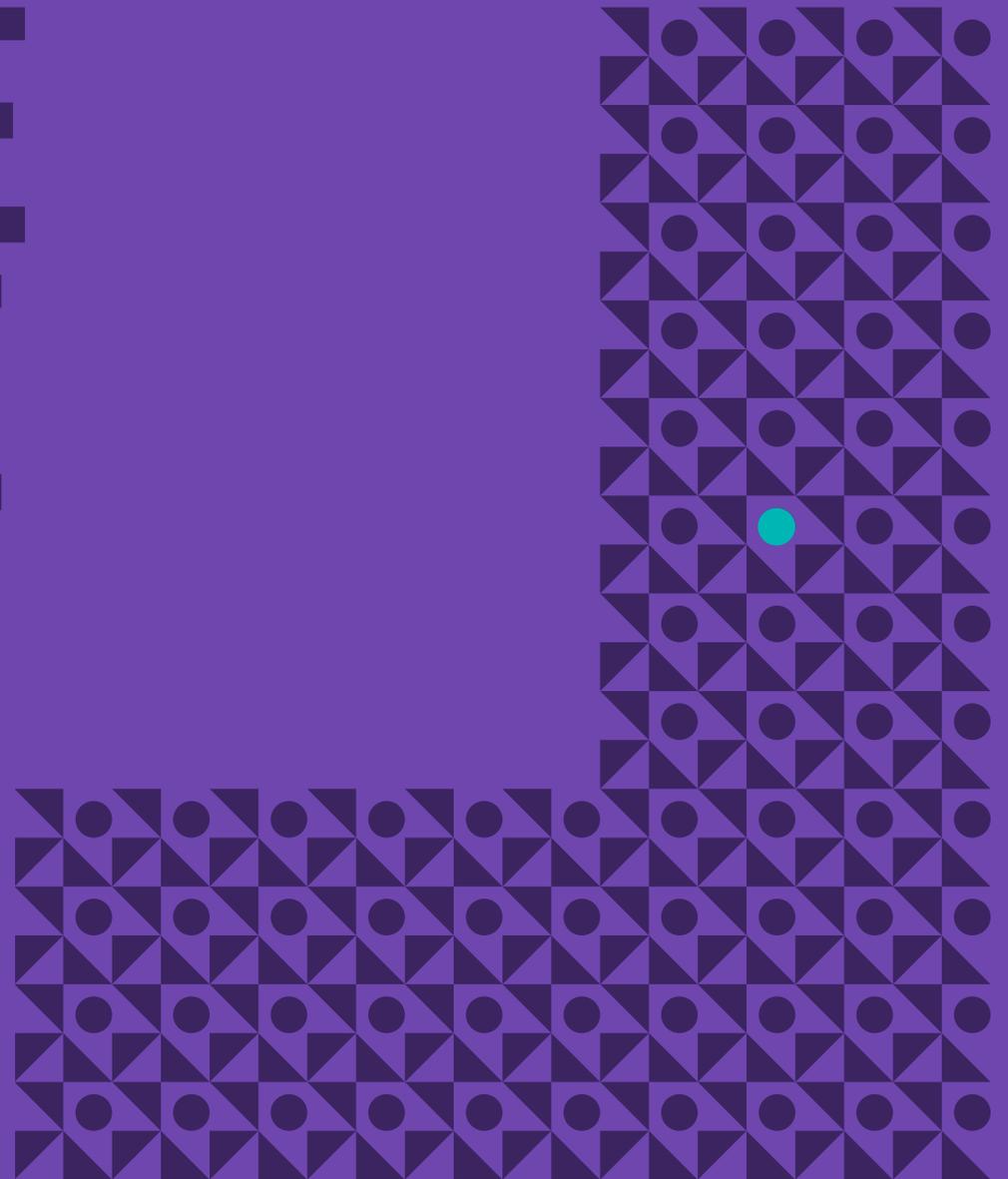


THE REMOTE WORKFORCE

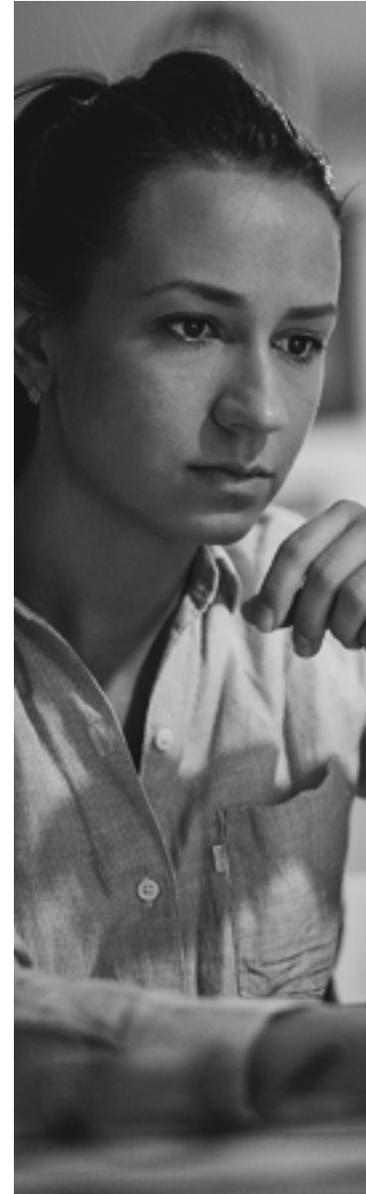
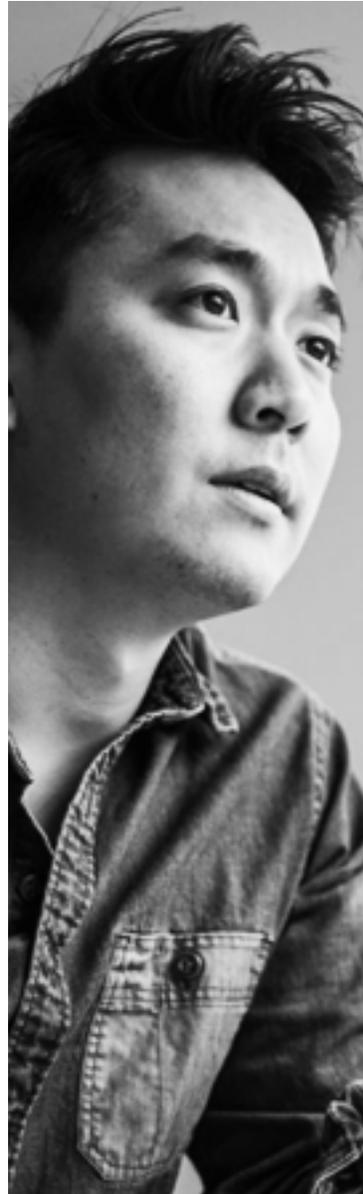
From Recruitment
to Retention



The COVID-19 pandemic has done something to the world of work that no one could have anticipated – it's forced employers to **shift to a completely work-from-home model**. If ever there was a question as to whether or not organizations could stay productive with a majority or all of their staffers working remotely, the pandemic put that theory to the test.

In fact, as the virus lingers on, what was supposed to be a temporary contingency plan **could very well end up becoming the new normal for the foreseeable future**.

Monster decided to take a deep dive into the early challenges of shifting to remote work, the surprising outcomes thus far, and what the future of hiring and managing a remote workforce may look like.



Section 1: The remote ramp-up

Although the concept of work-from-home (WFH) isn't new, it hasn't been universally adopted. "A lot of leaders weren't necessarily raised in a digital world, and weren't comfortable in trusting that work could happen if they send employees home," says Anne Maltese, Quantum Workplace's Director of People Insights.

For many organizations, the option to work remotely was only afforded to certain staff members or on a limited basis. And while there are some organizations that have a significant number or even all of their people off-site, that's hardly the norm. Until March 2020, that is.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began forcing states to lock down, employers that only just dabbled with remote work options in the past had no choice but to make a complete shift – and fast. "Sending employees to work from home during a pandemic is not the same as having employees work from home," says Maltese.

People were not only having to adjust to WFH, but also having to do so alongside their spouses, roommates, and children who were schooling from home.

Many were working at the kitchen tables or setting up makeshift desks in their garages and basements. "Beyond those things, the uncertainty, the anxiety and fear that surrounded the COVID-19 pandemic created even more complications," says Maltese.

To help their employees cope and maintain business operations, organizations really had to step up and figure out how to keep communication flowing, says Maltese. According to the responses in surveys that Quantum prepared for their partners, most did a great job. "We are hearing from respondents that – finally – this is the type of communication we always wanted." She also adds that organizations that were already using a modern approach to performance management fared much better.

Monster polling also found that as the learning curve of remote work decreases, both employers and employees have begun envisioning a lot more of it in the future.

Here's what our poll data found:

Monster Poll Results

- The majority of employers (70%) noted they will be flexible if employees opt to not return to the office.
- In order to maintain social distancing, over a third of employers (39%) will reduce the number of employees in the office at a time, with 18% allowing employees to work from home more/indefinitely.
- An overwhelming majority of employers (85%) anticipate leveraging video conferencing for critical meetings instead of conducting in person, even when the office reopens.

Learning on the fly

Like many businesses, **Dell Technologies** had to do a fast pivot to move 100,000 employees to WFH in a weekend, but the team was well prepared.

“Our early investments in flexible work environments enabled our team members to seamlessly transition to WFH, stay productive and innovate in virtual environments, while feeling supported by the company,” says Brooke Huling, Vice President of Dell Technologies Connected Workplace Program. “It gave all our employees the means to do their best work regardless of where they sit.”

Before March 15, when Dell announced its global work-from-home policy, **65% of team members were already leveraging flexible work policies, with approximately 30% working remotely on any given day.** So, it helped that a sizeable number were already prepped for the big switch.

Still, it was challenging getting everyone on the same page at once with the right information, tools, and protocols to work remotely, says Huling.

“All this had to be done on a massive scale within a small timeframe as shelter in place orders rolled out intermittently around the world.” And, this ramp-up was occurring as many employees started juggling home schooling, daycare, and, for some, remote work for the very first time.





Good short term results

Since Dell's WFH switch, employees are maintaining – and in many instances, increasing – their levels of productivity and collaboration from home, says Huling. “For example, our engineering teams are more innovative than ever – writing code, quality testing and doing agile development in virtual environments.” And, she adds, they are still on schedule for upcoming product releases this year.

This corroborates research by Quantum Workplace, in which 77% of remote employees said they had improved productivity at home. In addition, 52% said they were less likely to take time off, 30% reported accomplishing more in less time, and 23% said they are willing to work for longer hours to get more done.

The New York Times also reports that large [firms like Cisco have reported an increase in productivity](#) since going fully remote.

Long term outlook

According to a recent Monster poll, **72% of job seekers are hesitant to return to the office**, even when allowed. In order to maintain social distancing, over a third of employers (39%) will reduce the number of employees in the office at a time, with 18% requiring employees to wear masks and 18% allowing employees to work from home indefinitely

Because of the uncertainty, many organizations including Facebook and Shopify have proactively announced that they are choosing to keep their employees working remotely for the rest of the year or even indefinitely.

“While the overnight transition to a remote workforce was a feat, we know the transition back to site might be just as difficult,” says Huling. But, she notes, going forward, working from home will be a permanent option for some at Dell.

Not rushing back to the office can actually have some added benefits beyond employee health. For one thing, it’s an easy way to boost work/life balance, says Huling, noting that Dell’s remote work program encourages team members to design their ideal working arrangements with flexible hours and job sharing.

“That level of agency improves employee morale and productivity,” she says. Plus, people who had long commutes before are enjoying the extra time they now have in their days.

The other factor is that employers that might have been slow to embrace remote work before are finding that – yes – it can be done. That could result in more openness to updating WFH policies, or to at least adopt a hybrid work model.

As employers reopen, we have an opportunity to reinvent and redefine the way we work,” says Huling. “What we saw over the last few months has put our technologies and human capital to the test, showing us what works well and how we can improve even more.”

Unexpected WFH benefits

Not only does working from home prioritize employee health, it can also help with an organizations’ green initiatives.

“ From an environmental perspective, employees who work remotely reduce their travel by 136 million miles a year and emit 35,000 less metric tons of greenhouse gases from having fewer commuters on the road. Coming out of this, we expect remote work to help accelerate our sustainability goals,” says Huling.

Of course, a fully remote scenario is simply not sustainable for some organizations in different sectors for which in-person work is necessary, such as manufacturing, healthcare, or hospitality.

In those cases, members of the staff who can continue working remotely probably will, while a phased return to the workplace will be implemented for functions that need to be done in person.

Section 2: What does remote recruitment really look like?

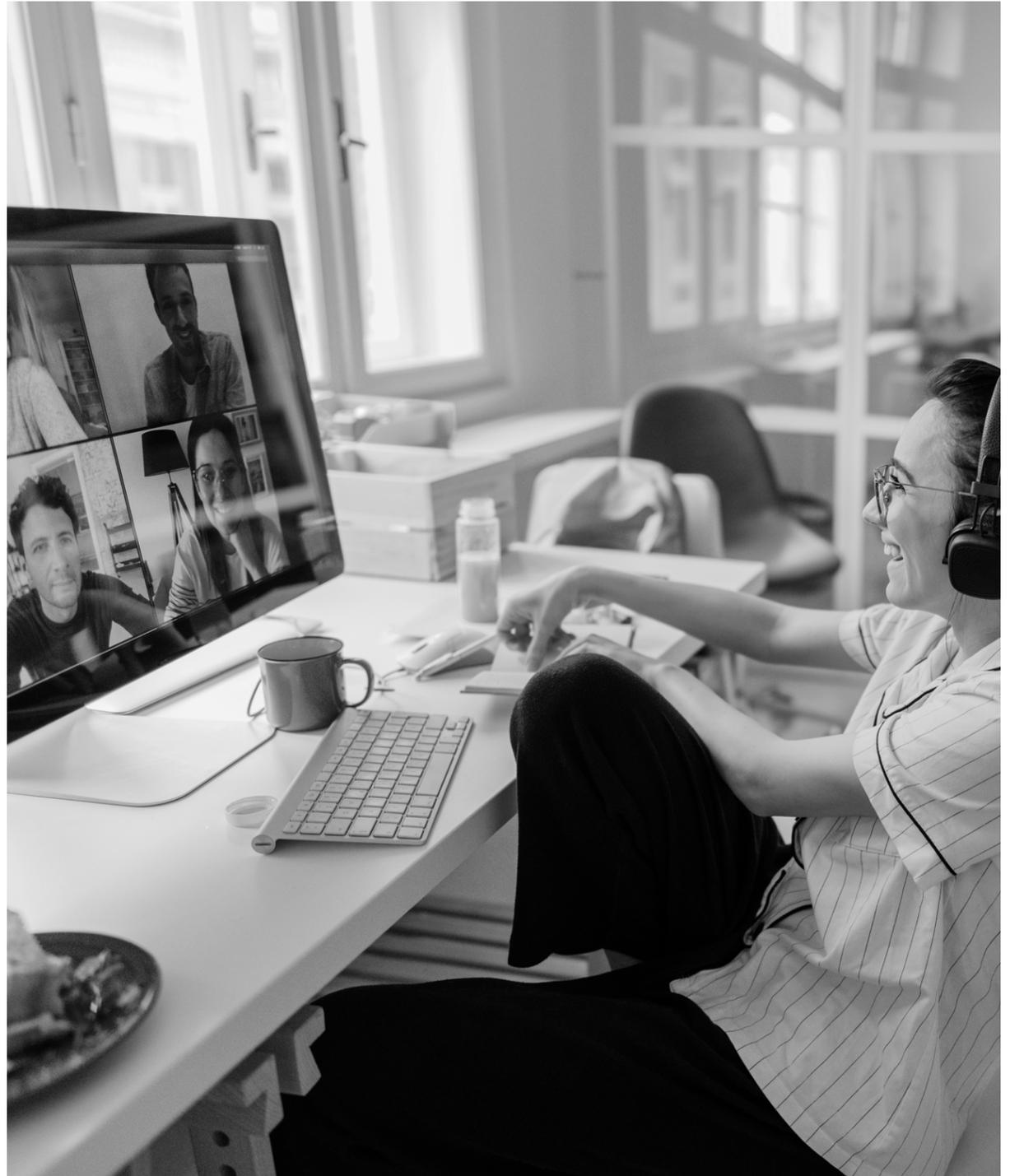
If remote work is to continue on, the ripple effects will be felt when it comes to recruiting and hiring to onboarding and employee engagement efforts.

The very nature of remote work means that it doesn't matter where your candidates live, which can really open up talent pools.

"Company executives, for the first time, realize that remote work releases the geographic constraint on hiring," says Will Bachman, co-founder and managing partner of Umbrex, a management consulting and project placement firm. "That means that an employer can have a pool of talent as broad as all of the United States, rather than just the local metro area."

“ With a remote workforce, you can cast a wider net and find a higher caliber of candidates. That changes the talent profile you are able to choose from.”

Anne Maltese, Quantum Workplace's Director of People Insights.



Case study: U.S. Army recruiting goes viral

For the first time in its history, The U.S. Army recently launched its first all-virtual Army National Hiring Days campaign. Recruits who signed up between June 10th and July 2nd had the chance to receive an extra \$2,000 bonus or a four-year scholarship.

“We had the audacious goal to hire 10,000 soldiers [remotely],” says Brig. Gen. Patrick Michaelis, Deputy Commanding General for U.S. Army Recruiting Command.

“We came into March with recruiting looking pretty good. When COVID-19 hit, we made a deliberate decision that our 1,400 recruiting stations go to full telework.” Over the course of three months, he says, his team has learned a lot about how to create relationships in the virtual space.

“It was a grand experiment to see if the entire Army can line up and drive activity to a single landing page,” says Michaelis.

“ Recruiters used creativity to reach out to their communities, everything from daily fitness challenges to Instagram Q&A sessions to help candidates feel like they’re being supported, even if they don’t work for us yet.”

Brig. Gen. Patrick Michaelis, Deputy Commanding General for U.S. Army Recruiting Command.

Of course, recruitment into the Army wasn’t exactly set up to work this way. “We were hindered a lot by policies that have been in play for a long time,” says Michaelis.



One example is that 17-years-old recruits always needed an in-person signature from their parents in order to join. Given the pandemic, the team was able to get approval for a workaround in which a recruiter can now witness a parent or guardian complete their signature via video teleconferencing.

Another hurdle they had to deal with is how to collect the required documentation in a secure way. “We figured out ways by which we can protect and encrypt documents and share them between the recruiter and candidate,” says Michaelis.

The only element that can’t be done virtually is the physical exam.

“There are some things you can’t escape the physical nature of. At some point, we will have to put the young individual in front of a doctor,” says Michaelis. However, the recruits have already completed 90% of the process in the virtual space, so it’s only that last 10% that needs to take place in person at a military entrance procession station. Once ready for that visit, recruits have to confirm that they have self-quarantined for the 14 days prior, and then they are screened when they arrive.

Having been able to get up to speed quickly and put these new processes in place, Michaelis says the Army doesn’t see itself going backwards.

“We’re taking these lessons and applying them in a much more accelerated rate. We have a pretty robust vision of what we want to look like seven years from now, but that has been accelerated by the policy easements that COVID-19 has forced, and by the pronounced on-the-job learning that we’ve had to do regarding how to connect to the youth market in the virtual space,” he says.

Evaluating candidates

Another necessary digital upgrade to come out of the remote work of the pandemic is with the hiring process itself. “The hiring process will of course capitalize on the same collaboration tools we use for remote work – video conferencing interviews, virtualized events, digital onboarding tools and much more,” says Huling.

Maltese says that hiring managers will have to be mindful about their digital hiring process, however. “It’s important to have multiple interviews with different people so it’s not just one person’s impression. And that may require using more than one format – maybe a video interview, then having them do a task to show their work a bit.”

The other thing top of mind as we talk about diversity, equity and inclusion, is not allowing unconscious bias to play a role when using video interviewing. “Maybe it’s making sure you’re not turning the camera on right away,” says Maltese.

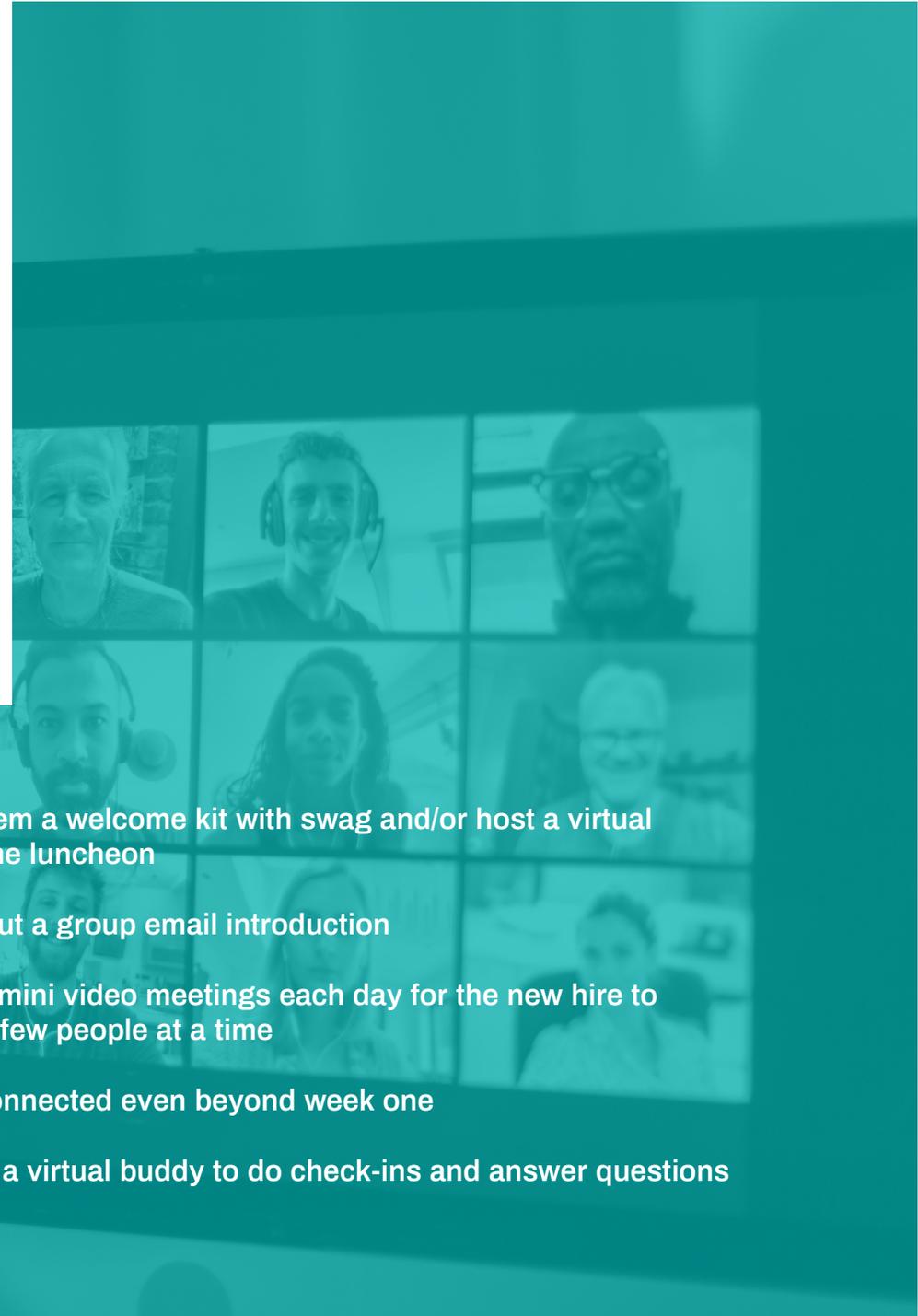
Quick Tips for Virtual Interviewing

- + Perform a video interview test run
- + Provide instructions for using the video conferencing platform
- + Allow for extra time in case of connectivity issues
- + Set up a professional, well-lit space to conduct the video interview
- + Prepare your video interview questions ahead of time
- + Try to control background noise
- + Appear as professional and personable as you would in person
- + Follow up with next steps via email

Onboarding remotely

Once candidates are hired, onboarding certainly needs to look different if their jobs are going to be remote, says Maltese. “How are you giving candidates and your newest hires exposure to your culture quickly and letting them feel a connection and form relationships?” she asks.

To do that successfully, it means being intentional about what life will look like for the newest employees on day one, week one, week two, etc. “In the office, they can show up to the lunchroom and ask questions, but remotely, they are not able to do that,” says Maltese. “Instead, it’s about giving them opportunities to have more digital experiences with their colleagues, whether it’s Zoom happy hour, Friday morning coffee, keeping new hires in a cohort and facilitating a weekly meeting where they can all talk with each other.”



Quick Tips for Virtual Onboarding

- + Mail them a welcome kit with swag and/or host a virtual welcome luncheon
- + Send out a group email introduction
- + Set up mini video meetings each day for the new hire to meet a few people at a time
- + Stay connected even beyond week one
- + Assign a virtual buddy to do check-ins and answer questions

How to keep teams engaged

When teams were sent home initially, there was a mentality in which everyone wanted to do their part to stay productive and keep earning their paychecks. But the question is can this level of motivation be sustained for the long haul – especially for those who don't have ideal WFH set ups? That's where having a strong employee culture will play a huge role.

“When it comes to best practices, it's an easy trap to think that technology alone can make it all happen,” says Huling. While she says technology has never been more important than now, remote work also requires a cultural shift that keeps the need of the end user in sight.

“A lot of times, employees can look around their workplace and see and feel the culture. But now that we're in our homes, how do you give employees that same experience?” says Maltese. “That's going to require a lot more attention and new practices.”

“Keeping employees engaged and productive is a crucial part of a company's culture success but a successful engagement strategy is not a one-size-fits-all approach”, says Dr. Natalie Baumgartner, Chief Workforce Scientist for Achievers, an employee engagement and recognition software company. “Two of the most impactful things employers can do to keep employees engaged from afar include leveraging communication channels to share important company-wide announcements and maintaining flexibility with employees' work schedules,” she says.

While there are benefits to keeping employees remote, it's important to be cognizant of the potential stressors they may be dealing with at home, in addition to managing their workload, says Baumgartner. “Many are juggling homeschooling and caring for their family members while still trying to balance their own work responsibilities. This is why two-way communication is critical.”

Managers should aim to provide constant and transparent feedback to employees who remain working from home. At the same time, employers should look to establish ways for employees to voice feedback and concerns frequently, says Baumgartner. “It's key for employers to continue to recognize their employees for a job well done, as recognition is one of the most powerful mechanism for helping employees stay motivated.”



Avoiding WFH burnout

Despite the early successes of remote work during the pandemic, the daily grind along with other stressors can take its toll on employees.

And even though the majority of respondents **(71%) are making an effort to take time for themselves** during the workday, such as taking a break, going for a walk, spending time with family, over half of respondents **(52%) are not planning to take time off or vacation time to decompress.**

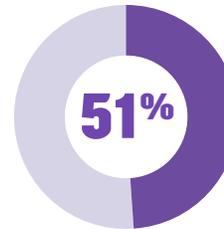
In order to support the wellbeing of their workforces without face-to-face interaction, **many employers are keeping tabs and doing regular check-ins with employees.** This can be done using survey tools within employee engagement software.



Employers are also finding other ways to connect virtually, says Baumgartner, such as offering online organization-wide yoga classes, and “coffee chats,” a designated time to catch up casually without talking about work. “In addition, it’s important for employers to encourage their employees to take their vacation time,” says Baumgartner. “Time off from work is going to be crucial for employees to recharge their batteries and avoid burning out.”

As employees continue to work from home, mental health support and wellness programs are benefits that employees will look for from their employers in the weeks and months to come, says Baumgartner.

Monster polling found:



Just over half of respondents **(51%) say they are experiencing burnout while working from home during the pandemic.**



(71%) are making an effort to take time for themselves during the workday, such as taking a break, going for a walk, spending time with family.



Over half of respondents **(52%) are not planning to take time off or vacation time to decompress.**

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