

The Three Pillars of Remote HR Excellence

Transform your organization into a remote talent powerhouse.

Three years' worth of new graduates have entered the workforce entirely remote due to the changing atmosphere of the work world, and more companies than ever are fully remote. Millions of employees have experienced remote work for the first time and don't plan to go back to brick-and-mortar offices. After Covid hit, it became clear that remote isn't just a trend; it's the future.

Although many of the world's most forward-thinking organizations have adapted to remote, achieving excellence with that format requires more than just a Zoom license and permission to work from home. Remote success requires policies, benefits, leadership, and processes to be effective and inclusive. With or without the existence of Covid, these are transformative shifts that aren't going away. Remote HR needs and development are now an asset to every company. It's no longer enough to address remote effectiveness. In order for companies to thrive and grow, effective remote leadership from human resources departments is a mission-critical element of any competitive business.

We at RemoteRated.com spend a tremendous amount of time speaking with executives about the challenges and opportunities of operating and growing remote teams. We have insights on more than 250 remote and hybrid-remote companies, and have spoken with dozens of CEOs of remote-first and newly remote firms. We also wanted to hear from the employees themselves to truly understand their experiences as remote workers and the aspects of remote working that they found important, inspiring, and complicated. We surveyed more than 200 remote workers to better understand all of these aspects, including their frustrations and pain-points.

While all companies have their unique challenges, we've found that certain challenges seem omnipresent regardless of company size, sector, or the skill set of their employees. Many of these challenges can be addressed, and they should be translated into a strategic advantage by skilled HR leadership.

Here are some of the most commonly identified findings from our research on remote work and some suggestions for making valuable changes to a remote workforce. These changes can be implemented over time to better prepare your company for each of its workforce developments, or they can be implemented as early as today to begin making changes.

Offer savvy remote-employee onboarding

When it comes to effectively on-ramping new hires, remote teams present a constellation of unique challenges that are different from how things would be done in an in-office setting. Unlike in a traditional office environment, there are far fewer opportunities for natural osmosis learning between veteran employees and new hires. There are also far fewer opportunities for an observant, experienced colleague to spot a stuck or overwhelmed newcomer.

We've found that the best remote companies do a few things consistently to effectively onboard their new teammates.

First, they provide them with a remote onboarding buddy. This should be a more experienced member of the team with deep knowledge about the culture, products, and challenges that a newcomer may need information on to be successful. This remote onboarding buddy should also be somebody who is excited to mentor for an extended period of time.

Next, successful remote companies should schedule cross-team introduction meetings. Remote teams can easily fall into operational silos, making cross-team collaboration challenging. Limiting a new hire to being exposed only to their own team will be detrimental to the new hire and the company. By getting them connected, up to speed on all key teams in their orbit, and introducing them to their leaders will only benefit the entire company.

Finally, don't overwhelm new hires with a tsunami of onboarding documents. The best companies put onboarding documents into digestible batches, making it much less daunting for new employees to consume and internalize, especially in a remote setting.

Provide remote-specific employee benefits

The leading remote organizations are accounting for the challenges and opportunities of remote work in their policies and benefits. Successful remote organizations take into consideration benefits like meal allowances, child-care reimbursement, flexible hours, generous paid-time-off, and fitness stipends. These benefits can go a long way in driving employee happiness and satisfaction, while simultaneously making them feel cared for and supported. Recognizing that a healthy and happy employee is an effective and productive one can, and will, set your company apart from many others. The best companies we've seen are encouraging their employees to hire personal trainers, get massages, get gym memberships, and do things that will benefit their physical and mental well-being. Some of the best companies we have seen with these remote-specific policies are GitLab, Airbase, Hawke Media, Twitter, and Zapier.

Companies should also consider offering remote employees more practical benefits like home-desk setups, internet and phone reimbursements, and education stipends. These considerations can make tremendous differences in ensuring teammates have high-quality work environments and operate effectively. For example, great work collaboration requires great connectivity, and the best companies recognize that it's in their best interest to encourage and enable their team members to upgrade to high-performance internet for great conference calls, presentations, and more.

Another great example is workspace setup. Teammates are only as effective as their workspace and the tools they have to complete their jobs. Companies that support their teams by sending equipment, providing a gift card to help set up their effective workspaces, or provide a reimbursement to employees who need special arrangements can be confident that their employees have what they need to be successful.

Manage the career progression of all employees

Top employee talent naturally wants to prioritize the progression and growth of their careers, and many fear that the sometimes-isolated nature of remote work can stifle their aspirations. There is an outdated assumption that in-office employees will become privy to growth opportunities before remote employees, and that will only be detrimental to everyone. Growing a career can mean different things to different people in the talent pool, but offering remote workers opportunities for title upgrades, promotions, raises, increases in responsibility, skill development, and visibility within the company will increase remote team morale and encourage productive and efficient remote work.

We've actually seen some of the more strategic companies making some remote-specific updates to titles and roles to account for the transformation in the workforce. A brilliant example of this type of change is with the company Stripe. It has created remote-specific engineering management roles to accommodate both the company needs and the needs of their talent. Ultimately, it's about demonstrating to top performers that they have a real pathway to step into a leadership role that aligns with the remote lifestyle.

As a company that's focused on researching the best strategies for creating truly effective remote teams and companies, we've experienced the possibilities and opportunities that remote work empowers. We're excited to help more people and organizations discover and succeed with remote work. It has become clear that the best remote companies are meticulous about creating frequent constructive feedback loops, arranging skip-level check-ins for their remote employees, designing mentorship programs that branch out to remote employees, and finding opportunities to promote from within regardless of geographical location.

Furthermore, we've seen many of the best companies setting up cross-team collaborations and virtual socialization opportunities to "engineer serendipity" between teammates. This is beneficial for both innovation and strategic growth of a company, as well as beneficial to the company culture. For example, perhaps a project one team is struggling with can be championed by an unexpected teammate. Or an employee from one team may have insight into how a different team can evolve their productivity. The best companies that are including and integrating a successful remote structure are making sure that these organic opportunities are enabled across their entire company, even if the setup of these opportunities requires a bit of artificial structure.

At the end of the day, the recipe for remote success requires many factors to be managed by many departments and professionals. The truth is, there's no single solution that will make a good remote company great. However, there are some clear commonalities in the operations and strategies of leading companies that can be readily replicated by others as more companies embrace the remote evolution of corporate work. What these strategies boil down to are a remote-centric onboarding, benefits to match and support the work-from-home lifestyle, and proactive management of remote career progression. Finally, remote leadership should be truly transparent about all the available remote opportunities within their organization. Transparency around objectives, decision-making, strategy, and issues are all critical for teams to function with efficiency and trust.

Whether these thoughts are new ideas to you and your organization, or simply reminders of what your teams are capable of achieving, we hope that you'll consider implementing them at scale to transform your organization into a remote talent powerhouse.

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