

# STAYING CONNECTED WHILE WORKING APART

by Beverly Kaye and Beverly Crowell



Engagement has been a hot topic for at least the past twenty years. Surveys galore let organizations and managers know where they are losing and where they are winning the war for talent.

Research that informed the best-selling “Love ‘Em or Lose ‘Em” book has held up for five editions, soon to be six! The common theme to all 26 practices (arranged according to the letters of the alphabet) is the fine art of conversation! The current work environment has added a substantial wrinkle - how do you hold conversations in this new (perhaps here to stay) remote-working environment? Here we offer 26 ideas for conversations that should start immediately.



## TRY THIS!



**Circle the five ideas that you are comfortable with and jot the initials of which employee you will ask.**



**Email this list to your remote employees and ask THEM to pick two or three that they would love YOU to ask.**



**Distribute the list at your next team meeting and discuss the subject of continued communication.**

**ASK** - Just because you can't be in the same room, it doesn't mean you still can't have a conversation with your employee to ask what it takes to keep them engaged, especially now. Schedule regular video/audio conferencing chats with your team, or, even easier, show you care by asking “How is working from home going for you?”

**BUCK** - A manager's relationship with employees is critical to their satisfaction and decision to stay or go. Don't hide behind the pandemic or remote platforms. Neither lets you off the hook. In fact, your connection matters now more than ever. Ask yourself, “Am I doing enough to stay connected to my team?”

**CAREERS** - Learning happens when we experience something new. Ask your employees, “What have you learned about yourself during the COVID-19 quarantine?” Discuss how what they now know may support where they want to head in their careers moving forward.

**DIGNITY** - Consider your remote staff. Since moving to remote work, ask yourself, “Have I treated everyone with the same level of respect? Are there any employees I may have neglected?” If so, connect now.

**ENRICH** - For many, working from home has become the impetus for the development of new skills and even passions. In an upcoming chat, ask, “What have you been pushed to develop during this time that you want to continue to refine in the future?”



**FAMILY** - Working from home means working around family. Have fun with your team by scheduling a family video/audio conferencing call. Encourage everyone to attend and introduce their family to their colleagues. Encourage your team by asking, "How are you doing at balancing working from home with family life? How can I support you?"

**GOALS** - You may have talked about career goals with employees before the pandemic, but what about recently? You don't need a crystal ball to ask, "What were your career goals before the pandemic? Have they changed? If so, how?"

**HIRE** - As a hiring manager, you understand that finding the "right" fit increases the odds of keeping great employees. Create a list of new questions you will ask potential employees as a result of what you've learned about managing work and employees during the pandemic.

**INFORMATION** - Information is a form of currency on the job. It's important for leaders to stay in the loop and keep employees in the loop as well. However, COVID-19, may have some employees saying too much information is too much of a good thing. So, talk with your employees and ask, "What's the best way to keep you informed during this time? How often do you want updates?"

**JERK** - It's sometimes easy to forget that managers are people too - prone to stress and the same challenges of their fellow remote workers. Ask yourself, "What circumstances kick my worst behaviors into overdrive? How can I best manage them before I engage with my team?"

**KICKS** - Research shows that a fun-filled workplace generates enthusiasm and leads to greater productivity. Have some fun with your team by hosting a video/audio conferencing "happy hour" or "coffee break." Don't talk work during these times. Start by asking all to share a funny story about working from home. Chances are, everyone has one.

**LINK** - It's easy to leave a workplace where you feel no connection. Working from home may make this even harder. Ask your employees, "Is there anyone I can connect you with to support your work from home?" Listen and link your team to critical resources to support their professional and personal success.

**MENTOR** - Everyone can use a mentor to help develop a skill or capability. Today, mentoring is more short term and focused around a particular need. Ask your employee what area they might want mentoring around, who you can introduce them to for help in that area, and ask them what mentoring they might offer to someone else!

**NUMBERS** - It's no secret that the cost of disengagement is high. Consider the cost of doing nothing during the pandemic. At some point, work will return to some kind of "normal." Ask yourself, "Am I doing enough to ensure by best and brightest will be there?" Not sure, ask the same question of your employees.

**OPPORTUNITIES** - While career opportunities may be more challenging to find right now, there are still opportunities for everyone to continue growing and developing. Ask your team members, "What would you like to learn? Have any new opportunities bubbled up for you?" Connect them to books, webinars, online courses, mentors and more.

**PASSION** - The "new normal" may be exposing new passions for your employees. The next time you chat, ask, "What's been exciting for you during this time? What might you want to continue doing?"

**QUESTION** - In times of uncertainty, there are likely to be a lot of questions. Encourage your team to send you any questions about work, and do your best to answer even if the only answer you have right now is "I don't know yet but let me see what I can find out." You might also ask "Have you discovered anything about what we do or how we work that may need to be changed in the future? If so, what and why?"



**REWARD** - With employees working from home, managers will have to find creative ways to show their appreciation. Talk with your fellow managers to find out what they are doing in this regard. Also ask your employees, "What is the best way for me to recognize you and show my appreciation?" If money is the first answer, ask "what else?" Money is important, but appreciation is paramount.

**SPACE** - For many remote workers their work "space" takes on a whole new meaning now. Take an interest in this new work space and encourage them to tell you about it. Ask if they need anything to make their work space more productive. As best you can, offer your support and resources.

**TRUTH** - Studies show that employees yearn for straight talk. They want to hear the truth about their performance and the organization. Ask your employees how they like to receive news about what's happening in the company. How do they want performance feedback? Go one step further and ask the truth about how you are doing too.

**UNDERSTAND** - Working from home almost assuredly comes with distractions. Limit your own distractions, especially when on a call with one of your employees. Employees want to know they are being heard, and it's a hard message to communicate when they get a sense that you're not actively listening.

**VALUES** - Values define what we consider to be important. They shift and change over time too. Recent events likely have your employees reassessing their values. Ask everyone on your team (and ask soon), "What's important to you now that may not have been important to you six months ago?"

**WELLNESS** - Stay at home orders and working from home has changed how people take care of themselves physically and mentally. Ask your employees how they are taking care of themselves during this time and link them to organizational information or resources designed to support their overall health and wellness.

**X'ERS** - Different generations are likely adapting to recent changes differently. Invite your employees to share a technique or tool that helps them manage working remotely more effectively. Encourage the different generations to partner and mentor each other on these new ideas.

**YIELD** - Remote work has likely challenged your workers to take on more in some areas while giving up something too. Ask, "What are you most happy you got to let go of from your old routine?" Explore why and see how you can leverage it moving on.

**ZENITH** - Creating an engaged remote workforce won't be easy. It will require a new way of working with your team. Managers likely know this but may not be doing enough to make it happen. Use these 26 strategies over and over to show your remote employees that you're still supporting them.

A crucial strategy for engaging and retaining talent has always been having conversations. These conversations will prove to be even more important as remote work leads to less in-person opportunities to connect. Use these 26 practices to start your conversations now.

***\*Feel free to use this as you wish and distribute widely.  
These times demand that we all do what we can to support others.***



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