7 ways to maximize your remote workforce during COVID-19

As businesses transition traditional workforces to remote workforces, many are finding that some positions are harder to convert than others. Others are encountering coronavirus-related slowdowns that are leaving workers with unproductive time on their hands. Layoffs or furloughs may seem like the only options, but both carry the risk of costly knowledge leak. Employers interested in retaining their workforce can take a page out of seasonal businesses’ playbooks to discover ways to best utilize employees as they wait out COVID-19.

1. Participate in professional development

Employers know professional development is important but often have a hard time pulling staff away from essential job functions to participate. For some employees, now is an ideal time to catch up on those initiatives. Professional development can take different forms, like listening to industry podcasts, reading leadership development books or attending online courses.

Professional development can be specific to an employee’s job function (like brushing up on Microsoft Excel skills) or more generalized (like handling conflict at work). If your training budget is limited, many of the software programs you may already use – Microsoft 365 for example – offer free online tutorials and training videos.

2. Develop process documentation manuals

Process documentation outlines the exact steps required to complete a task from start to finish. It also includes screenshots and links to associated files. Not only does process documentation help preserve company knowledge, but it can also be a useful tool for training.

Employees can be tasked with creating a comprehensive digital manual that documents the process for their key responsibilities. This manual should be reviewed and updated annually, or as new processes are implemented.

3. Cross-train

Like process documentation, cross-training helps protect companies against service disruption and knowledge leak. When employees learn the skills to perform additional job functions, they become incredible assets. In addition to being able to step in and cover their coworkers’ planned and unplanned absences, they can also provide extra support during peak times.

Not only does cross-training benefit the company, it can benefit the employees as well. The employees learn new skills and gain a better understanding of other aspects of the organization.

Cross-training is easier when employees have access to process documentation manuals. Depending on the type of skills being taught, trainers may need the ability to share their computer screen.
4. **Communicate with customers**

If your business has slowed due to COVID-19, it’s possible your customers are running at a slower pace as well. This could be a great opportunity for employees to call clients to let them know how much their business is valued.

5. **Follow up on outstanding invoices**

Contacting customers about unpaid invoices can be tedious, which is why many businesses struggle to keep up with it. Most accounts receivable departments would welcome the help with this. Employees can be given a script to follow and either call or email customers.

6. **Conduct competitor research**

Employees don’t need a Master of Business Administration (MBA) to research the competition. They can be tasked with reviewing websites, reading reviews and monitoring social media. Where are competitors advertising? What is their pricing? What types of positions are they hiring? The goal is to identify what the competition does well, where they have weaknesses and what the customers are saying about their products and service.

7. **Problem-solve**

Front-line employees have a unique perspective that can often be overlooked. Now could be an ideal time to gather valuable input from them on how to improve processes. What problems are they observing? Do they have ideas for cost savings, potential new customers or untapped business opportunities? These same employees can be assigned to teams and tasked with developing potential solutions or action steps based on the shared feedback.

You can also find this information [here](#).