

# It is so important to keep cult

It is extremely challenging to maintain any sort of business culture with staff geographically and socially distanced, but maintaining contact is vital to ensure employees remain motivated and, most importantly, are not demonstrating any mental health issues.

Culture expert Kate Wood helped Chess ICT go from 63rd to 1st in the Sunday Times 'Best Company To Work For' listing and retain their place in the list for 10 years. She now offers Culture as a Service through her Pockets Consultancy. She firmly believes connection, clarity and kindness will get us through Lockdown Three.

"Lockdown Three requires us to re-engage with the individual employee," she says.

"With plans parked, holidays on hold and employees 'zoomed' out, there's risk of burn out. For many there is little to look forward to. Novelty backgrounds, quizzes and online drinks only remind us of 2020, so what now?"

Here is Wood's checklist for directors and managers:

### Mental Wellbeing

People may experience guilt about remaining employed when others aren't. Anxiety around health, inability to juggle home-schooling can lead to feelings of failure. Open up about your challenges and your employees will.

### Connection

Walk and talk. Non-video phone calls change conversations. Ask what the business could do to make things easier? Listen. If you lack language to discuss Mental Health, ensure employees know how to find information, including financial support, benefits and counselling services.

### Clarity

The UK economy in the news causes concern. Deliver clear, regular communication about business change, communicate even if there are no changes and focus on good news. Not forgetting those on maternity or furlough.

### Surprises

Small, kind gestures make a big difference such as an early finish or late start. A wellbeing package in the post or a thank you card can make someone feel less lonely and more valued. Encourage staff to take holiday days and not just save them for when the world opens.



LOUISE ABBEY  
9 GROUP

"We've taken a very careful and proactive approach to communication with our teams and our partners during lockdown. Equipping staff with the right tools allows them to stay connected while working remotely. We've seen an acceleration in the adoption of cloud-based collaboration tools, not only with our own teams but with partners and the demands they are seeing from their customers. Video and collaboration solutions have minimised disruption during lockdown and the right technology has allowed our teams to develop new skills and to adapt to the changing world. The introduction of a weekly staff newsletter has allowed our teams to share their stories from home. Regular initiatives such as a quarterly presentation from Adam Cathcart, our Managing Director, and celebrations which recognise outstanding contributions are a key part of our culture. We now host these digitally."



GAVIN JONES  
BT WHOLESALE

"BT has done more than ever to support colleagues, particularly in a third lockdown. Our online service 'Your Wellbeing' provides 24/7 information for all staff, which makes the difference in a socially distanced world. We have also increased the level of communications on wellbeing through a bespoke series of Wellbeing Webinars and regular Chief Medical Officer updates to keep colleagues informed about Covid-19 and support services available. We also understand how critical it is for teams to take time when they need it, so we've added Mindfulness Calls through the week to help colleagues take a break and carry out self-check outs. We're also encouraging everyone to check in with each other and BT's Peer to Peer network can help people feel more connected. And to kick off the New Year, we have launched 'The Big Stretch' to keep our teams motivated and build healthy habits."



KEITH JACKSON  
8X8

"As remote work continues, there is considerable value in organisations promoting cross-collaboration and knowledge sharing within teams. By making sure that everyone is well informed with regular check-ins and touchpoints, businesses can be on the front foot in the face of disruption. In today's remote working environment, transparency is key. For leaders, this means finding a balance between 'water-cooler' chats and business conversations to ensure employees feel involved and connected. In the absence of in-person interactions, having the right technology in place to enable frequent communication is a crucial step towards empowering employees. Culture is driven by employees that feel empowered. Enabling teams to actively share knowledge, collaborate, and by offering opportunities for input, organisations will drive their virtual culture forward."



CAROLINE BAKER  
CITY FIBRE

"At CityFibre we place huge importance on ensuring our employees are involved, inspired, supported, and feel like a member of a family. In the last 12 months we launched 'The CityFibre Way' which showcases our inclusive and supportive culture and behaviours. In addition to this, we moved our induction online, set up Diversity & Inclusion networks to drive inclusive behaviours, and trained 32 Mental Health First Aiders so that we could spot and support Mental Health issues. Our recent engagement survey showed the success of our efforts; 88% of our employees felt CityFibre takes a genuine interest in employees wellbeing and 86% confirmed our culture resonates with them. The advice we would offer is open communication. Keep the avenues of support open, encourage employees to look after themselves first, talk about culture, networks and the importance of mental health at every opportunity."



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# Culture alive - even at a distance!



MARTIN TAYLOR  
CONTENT GURU

"A scheduled video conference with thirty people on it is great in some circumstances, but it isn't the answer to every situation. Likewise, it is easy for company culture to get lost in translation when colleagues are collaborating via email alone. To maintain a collaborative environment, it is key that you provide the tools to engage through a range of channels, including voice calls, instant messages and group chats, emails, Teams and Zoom. Regular internal communications to the whole company, specific teams, and directly from C-level managers all help keep colleagues 'on-message'. Aligning personal objectives to company values ensures colleagues are engaged with the culture while working towards their own specific goals. Encouraging feedback from staff and increasing 1-1 sessions is essential for uncovering any potential mental health issues and providing extra resources and support can minimize the opportunity for these to get out of control."



VINCENT DISNEUR  
UNION STREET

"Each month we hold a companywide meeting via Teams to review our objectives and company values. These meetings feature presentations by department heads to share details of recent achievements and goals for the coming month. It's not all business though, during these meetings we place equal importance on sharing people's news such as births and charity initiatives. Our people also regularly interact at the department level to keep everyone engaged, motivated, and to ensure they have the support they need for their work and well-being. Mental health issues are notoriously difficult to recognise in people, let alone remotely, but we try and monitor for signs such as changes in behaviour or being withdrawn. We actively encourage our team members to reach out if they are struggling with mental health or any other issues, and we offer an open line of communication so that there is always someone available to listen."



CHERIE HOWLETT  
JOLA

"We started Jola from scratch in 2014 and focussed on attracting and training self-motivated people, who shared our corporate values and ambition. We have hired and trained an additional seven staff during lockdown. We have kept our team involved and inspired, with regular Teams meetings, to share our departmental and individual successes. Staff perks, such as free coffees, film downloads and vouchers, are well received, but not as motivating as knowing we are directly responsible for helping partners to provide the NHS, retailers and the government with 4G for vital services. The phenomenal growth we have achieved is down to the exceptional team we have at Jola and their physical and mental health is a priority. Each employee has access to private healthcare, a 24/7 employee assistance programme and access to free workouts and discounted healthy eating outlets. Regular communication is key to ensuring your staff are happy, healthy and productive."



AYSHEA ROBERTSON  
ZEN INTERNET

"At Zen we are extremely proud of our People First approach. This was never only about the physical office environment – it also covers the importance of a supportive, collaborative, and inclusive culture. When the pandemic emerged, we quickly elevated 'new ways of working' to become a key pillar in our 'People & Culture' strategy while also putting greater emphasis on health and wellbeing and engagement. This is a key step to maintaining your company culture online during these trying times. Where possible provide a suite of communications and collaboration tools as well as guides, links and online training, to help your people stay connected with each other and your business. And be sure to make time to listen to your people – this is critical. Having regular conversations and spending time understanding the different circumstances and needs of your people, will help with mental wellbeing."



PAUL GIBBS  
MYPHONES

"For me, one thing that has become more and more evident is the need to ask 'how are you'? I think we are all guilty of presuming everyone is OK. The importance for us as a business is to not only keep staff involved but to encourage a more open forum for conversation. A simple call with no agenda, colleague-to-colleague is more important than ever. The last lockdown in the summer may have masked how people were really feeling. Being winter, which is documented to only increase people feeling down, we need to go even further with what we do in the workplace. Staff involvement is key as we are all missing the conversations in passing, the office gossip and general human interaction. We encourage social catchups with Friday late afternoon beers or libations of choice, companywide quizzes, and regular catch ups to hear what is going on within all departments."



LAUREN MCMANUS  
GAMMA

"Throughout the pandemic, the physical and mental health of our teams have been key concerns for our business. We believe it's critical to provide an open and welcoming environment for employees to be able to share their issues and concerns. Managers play a vital role in supporting their teams and regularly checking in with them. We encourage 1-2-1 meetings, as well as virtual social events to bring teams together and promote employee engagement. Moreover, we've introduced many initiatives to support our employees during these difficult times: Our Employee Assistance Programme provides free, professional advice and resources on a variety of personal issues, while our trained team of Mental Health First Aiders can give initial support and signpost to additional resources as necessary. These are all underpinned by our Wellbeing Channel on Microsoft Teams, specifically created as a space where staff can connect."

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