



Talent Strategy in the Telecommuting Era: 4 Tips for Cultivating Leadership in Remote Employees

Global climate change has been a predominant topic of conversation in the news recently, and understandably so, as any significant environmental shift certainly has implications worth exploring. Applying that same consideration to the corporate world, it seems important to acknowledge the transformation occurring within today's workplace climate, as the staggering rise in telecommuting continues to impact how organizations must approach their talent strategies to remain successful moving forward.

A survey by Global Workplace Analytics and FlexJobs indicates that remote work has grown 91% over the last 10 years, and a *Forbes* report called remote work "standard operating procedure" for 50% of the U.S. population. This transformation didn't happen overnight—and it didn't happen without ample support from both sides of the desk either. From an employee standpoint, workers who have been able to drop their commutes report being happier, more productive, and less stressed. At the same time, a Stanford University study revealed that organizations are saving as much as \$2,000 per remote employee in overhead costs and experiencing a 50% decrease in attrition among home-based workers.

With the majority of companies now offering telecommuting options, it's the perfect time to reassess your talent strategies to ensure they are optimized for this new corporate culture. To help get you started, below we are sharing 4 tips on how to best develop your organization's future leaders when they are working from a remote location.

Hire the Right Team Members.

The critical first step to developing any strong leader is to hire the candidate with the highest potential to succeed in that specific role and environment. As *Inc. Magazine* observes, "The problem [with remote employees] isn't that the candidate options are *limited*. In fact, it's the opposite issue. There are typically more candidates than there are positions, but fewer *qualified* candidates." And since you can't rely as heavily on traditional in-office resources to onboard and train remote hires, it's especially critical that you find a candidate with as many of the skills required to succeed from the start. To assess whether a candidate's personality and

work style is a strong fit for a virtual position requires that you come prepared to the interview with a very clear set of expectations for the role. This will enable you to ask a series of highly-targeted, behavior-based questions designed to help you accurately assess critical factors including relevant skill set, reliability, passion and motivation, self-discipline, and culture fit.

Communicate Out of Care rather than Necessity.

There's no way around it; communicating with remote employees takes more planning and effort as you can't rely on visual cues for information or take advantage of the impromptu discussions that commonly arise simply from sharing a space. In fact, when a team member isn't part of your everyday environment, it's incredibly easy to slip into the habit of reaching out only when a deliverable is due or a progress check is needed. However, this type of transactional relationship falls far short of what is required to nurture a leader. As *Fast Company* suggests, "Rather than focusing on what your team is doing at every moment, ask yourself how they're likely to feel about accomplishing the goals you've set for them: Will they be challenged? Empowered? Stressed out? Confused? Then self-reflect on your role in bringing about those reactions." Once you've carefully considered the most effective way to approach your team member's role and workload, it's important to build a proactive communication plan that includes time to deliver constructive feedback, discuss current challenges, and share how your employee's efforts are contributing to the overall goals of the business. These types of broader, forward-thinking conversations will not only increase accountability, but also keep remote team members feeling connected, valued, and motivated.

Enable your Remote Talent to Shine.

Because they lack consistent in-office face time, it's incredibly important to make sure virtual employees are still provided ample opportunity to demonstrate their leadership abilities. As *Harvard Business Review* advised, "When you're managing a remote team, it's important to not just give people a list of things to do, but to also give them the opportunity to 'pull' the team ahead. If you're only delegating and not giving team members the chance to show the initiative, it's likely that your team will start to feel like task monkeys." To facilitate development, you must also be willing to provide virtual employees with the necessary tools for growth. According to TalentLMS, 67% of remote workers say they need more work-related training—a good reminder that valuable development tools such as training and mentorship cannot be overlooked simply because employees aren't physically in the office. The same concept holds true for day-to-day operations, where it's critical to ensure all meeting attendees are provided the same opportunity to speak and be heard, whether they are physically present or dialing in from a remote location. One way to achieve this is by equalizing meetings, so that if even one participant is off site, all team members (including C-suite participants) are required to attend using the same software to allow for equal contributions. By leveling the playing field, you'll ensure that all employees have the opportunity to showcase their leadership abilities regardless of physical location.

Equalize Opportunities for Recognition and Promotion.

Ensuring your remote team members are adequately set up for success is one thing, but making

sure they are being fairly recognized for their accomplishments is an entirely separate challenge. In one recent survey cited in *Fast Company*, remote workers reported having 25% fewer conversations with their managers about career growth than their in-office colleagues. It may seem obvious, but when it comes to recognition and promotion, it's important to consider both in-office and remote employees equally based on merit and not location, even if this means putting a clear structure in place to ensure you aren't inadvertently playing favorites. This same logic also applies to conveying simple, day-to-day appreciation. By ensuring all employees receive the same visibility across the team when it comes to showcasing and celebrating good work, you're not only reinforcing successful behaviors, but also helping to ensure remote employees feel seen, even when they're physically out of sight.

So what does this all mean?

Based on the strong benefits that telecommuting can deliver to both employees and employers, the rise of the virtual workplace represents a great opportunity for companies who are willing to adapt their talent strategies to align with the evolving corporate environment. At the end of the day, sustained success in any business requires strong leadership, so to thrive in this new era, remote employees cannot be treated as the exception, but rather must be embraced as the new normal and viewed as an integral part of your future success.

Does your company have talent strategies in place for hiring and developing strong remote leaders? At RRG, our [seasoned search team](#) is expertly poised to find and attract innovative, A-caliber leaders, while our [certified management coaches](#) help existing leadership adapt to changes in business climate and company culture. To learn more, give us a call today at 708.738.5040, or visit our website at RRGExec.com