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Strategies for Managing Remote Teams

By Jennifer Cameron and Kaleem Clarkson

About Us

We help onboard and engage remote teams.

Founded in 2013, Blend Me, Inc. consults with startups and small businesses to improve the remote employee experience.

Our services range from Onboarding Strategy and Design, Inclusion and Diversity, Employee Research and Engagement, Internal Marketing and Communications.

Jennifer Cameron
Chief Executive Officer

Kaleem Clarkson
Chief Operating Officer

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Today's Roadmap

- How a Lack of Social Interaction Impacts Employees

- Overcoming the Need for Face-to-Face Supervision

- The Importance of Accessing Information

- Understanding The Remote Employee Experience (TREE)

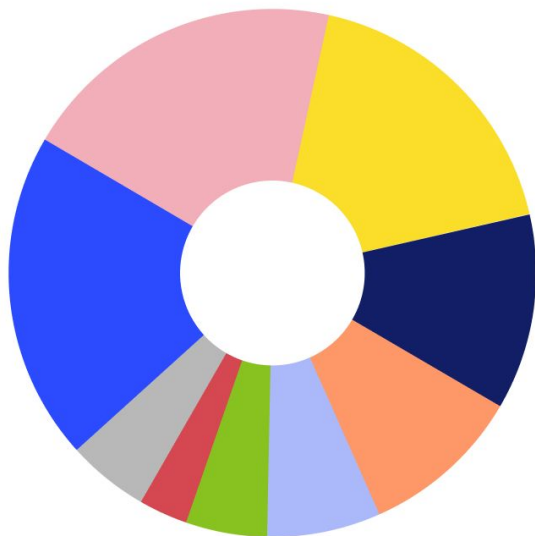- Planning Your Remote Management Strategies

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Remote Work Challenges

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Three Major Challenges for Managing Remote Teams

- Lack of social interaction

- Lack of face-to-face supervision

- Lack of access to information

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What's your biggest struggle with working remotely?

- **20%** 🔵 Collaboration and communication
- **20%** 🔴 Loneliness
- **18%** 🟡 Not being able to unplug
- **12%** 🔵 Distractions at home
- **10%** 🟠 Being in a different timezone than teammates
- **7%** 🔵 Staying motivated
- **5%** 🟢 Taking vacation time
- **3%** 🔴 Finding reliable wifi
- **5%** ⚪ Other

State of Remote Report 2020
buffer.com/state-of-remote-2020

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How a Lack of Social Interaction Impacts Employees

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What is Loneliness?

... is a complex set of feelings that occur when intimate and social needs are not adequately met.

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Physical Impacts of Loneliness and Isolation

1 As bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day

2 As dangerous as being an alcoholic

3 As harmful as never exercising

4 Twice as dangerous as obesity

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Loneliness' Impact on the Workplace

1 **Lonely employees take 2X more sick days**
Lonely workers take double the number of sick days in a year compared with non-lonely workers.

2 **Reduces job performance**
Lonely employees feel alienated and less committed which causes them to not work as hard and so performance suffers.

3 **Reduces executive functions**
Chronic stress causes decline in executive functions such as reasoning and decision making.

4 **A best friend at work Increases engagement by 7X**
Employees with best friends at work are seven times as likely to be engaged in their jobs.

5 **Loneliness also impacts C-Suite executives**
61 percent of all CEO's and nearly 70% of first time CEO's believe loneliness hinders their performance.

6 **Decreased engagement**
Due to the lack of trust a decrease in the willingness to communicate and collaborate with team members; A degree of engagement goes down.

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What is an engaged employee?

An engaged employee "shows up," physically, emotionally and cognitively.

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Why Engagement Matters?

An engaged employee "shows up," physically, emotionally and cognitively.

$550 B

Disengaged employees cost US companies approx. $550 billion a year.

21%

Highly engaged teams show 21% greater profitability.

10%

Highly engaged business units achieve a 10% increase in customer ratings.

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In-Office Informal Communications:
A strategy for increasing social interactions

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"In an all-remote environment, informal communication should be formally addressed. Leaders should organize informal communication, and to whatever degree possible, design an atmosphere where team members all over the globe feel comfortable reaching out to anyone to converse about topics unrelated to work."

Gitlab, 2020

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Get Formal About Being Informal

Basis	Formal Communication	Informal Communication
Origin	Deliberately Structured	Spontaneous and Unstructured
Nature	Well Planned, Systematic and Authorized	Unplanned, unsystematic and unauthorized
Flow	Prescribed through chain of command	Unofficial channels not Prescribed
Flexibility	Rigid	Flexible
Authority	Official Channel	Unofficial
Purpose	To achieve Business Objectives	To satisfy personal needs
Speed	Time taking	Fast
Accuracy	Accurate, Legal and Authentic	Often Distorted, may be Rumors and Gossips
Form	Oral and Written	Usually Oral
Source	Can be traced	Cannot be traced

Distinction between Formal and Informal Channels – Business Communication – R.C. Bhatia

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Examples of Formal and Informal Communications

Formal

- Email
- Memos
- Reports
- Executive Blogs
- Conference Calls
- Meetings and Presentations

Informal

- Instant Message
- Group Social Calls
- Coffee Chats
- Show and Tell
- Virtual Tours
- Online Forum

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Out of Office Social Connections:

A strategy for increasing social interactions

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" social connectedness generates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional and physical well-being."

Dr. Emma Seppala
Stanford Medicine

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Examples of Out of Office Social Connections

1 **Provide wellness rewards**
Promote wellness activities and offer prizes; provide wellness app discounts for meditation, live workouts, nutrition; provide gym memberships.

2 **Provide resources for networking opportunities**
Resources for networking opportunities are useful for meetups, conferences, cowork memberships, etc.

3 **CEO house dinners**
Invite employees to dinner at CEOs hours - builds trust, engagement, and connections.

4 **Team visiting grants**
Provide each team with a grant to travel to a different location to participate in some type fun activities in a new city.

5 **Set up a social calendar**
Create a social calendar that includes different voluntary events, such as different type of events Escape the Room, karaoke, group cooking class, show and tell.

6 **Fun days during a retreat**
Social events outside of the retreat that allows for fun. The key here is to have balance between work and play.

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Overcoming the Need for Face-to-Face Supervision

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Establishing Trust:

A strategy for overcoming the need for face-to-face supervision

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"Research shows that managers who cannot "see" their direct reports sometimes struggle to trust that their employees are indeed working."

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Why Trust Matters?

Compared with people at low-trust companies, people at high-trust companies report:

76%

More Engagement

74%

Less Stress

50%

Highly Productivity

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Establishing Trust

1 **Starting with a trust mindset**
Empower your employees by defaulting to trust. Give them the autonomy to do what they do best. Innocent Until Proven Guilty.

2 **Articulate a clear vision**
Keep everyone on the same path by aligning employee goals to the vision. Everyone want to be part of something bigger than themselves.

3 **Lead with empathy**
Show openness to new perspectives and ideas, and an interest in the experiences of those you work with.

4 **Own mistakes and give recognition**
Take responsibility for mistakes because they are inevitable and shows you are human. And never forget to recognize the efforts of your employees.

5 **Intentional communication**
Take deliberate steps to build connections with your employees; this enables idea sharing and constructive feedback.

6 **Practice transparency**
Keep employees up-to-date with decisions and results in real-time. Solicit feedback as developments occur to increase engagement.

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Asynchronous Work:

A strategy for overcoming the need for face-to-face supervision

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"This concept simply means that work doesn't happen at the same time for everyone…Instead of relying on everyone being online at the same time, we try our best to communicate in a way that keeps conversations and decision-making open to all teammates, no matter where they are."

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Synchronous Work

How managers are used to working

- Real-time responses to inquiries

- Teams all in the same time-zone

- Work being completed at the same time

- All people present at the same meeting

- Impromptu meetings

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Advantages of Asynchronous Work

1 **Quality communication**
Having time to think about a response enables employees to deliver well thought out responses.

2 **Fewer interruptions**
When team members can respond on their own time, they can really focus on the work at hand and not get distracted by incoming requests.

3 **More control over workday**
Rather than having to respond immediately day and night, asynchronous allows for better time management and for employees to work when they are most productive.

4 **Creates a living document**
Because it's in written form, all asynchronous communication becomes immediate documentation that can be referenced indefinitely.

5 **Better planning**
Removing the expectation of instantaneous input, employees can ahead to work through projects and processes with remote teammates. This can lead to a proactive, rather than reactive, mindset which leads to more effective output.

6 **No time-zone barriers**
When there's no expectation of an immediate response, teammates from all over the world can contribute to a project.

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Lack of Access to Information

"Newly remote workers are often surprised by the added time and effort needed to locate information from coworkers. Even getting answers to what seem like simple questions can feel like a large obstacle to a worker based at home."

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Collaborative Documentation

Remote workforces need a shared set of operational guidelines through living documents like handbooks. Structured and organized documentation gets everyone on the same page for how the company is run.

Tools and Resources

- Gitlab
- Notion
- Tettra
- Trainual
- AirMason

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Cloud File Storage and Sharing

Files stored and maintained in a central location allow remote teams to mobilize and work seamlessly without sacrificing performance.

Tools and Resources

- Dropbox for Business
- Google Drive Enterprise
- Microsoft OneDrive
- Box for Business
- iDrive

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Synchronous Collaboration

Editing documents in real-time allows remote teams to work simultaneously without delayed back-and-forth exchanges.

Tools and Resources

- Google Docs
- OnlyOffice
- Mural
- Miro
- Microsoft OneDrive

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Project Management

Tools for facilitating and tracking the progress of tasks help remote teams stay informed on the project status.
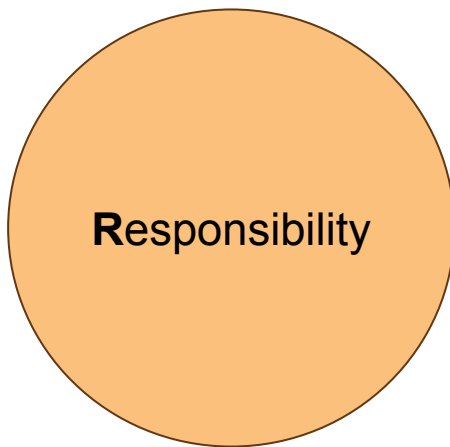
Tools and Resources

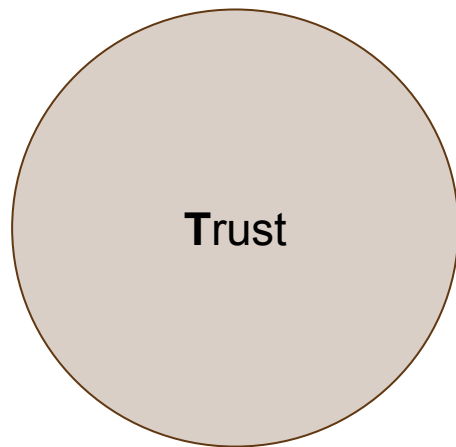- Trello
- Notion
- Asana
- Airtable

Understanding The Remote Employee Experience (TREE)
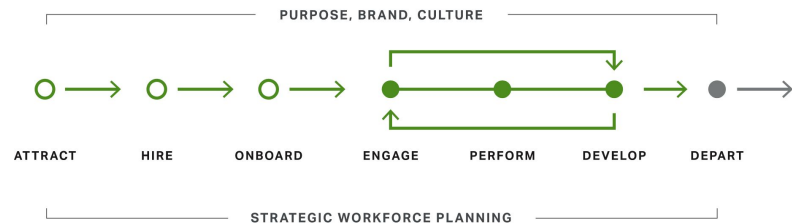
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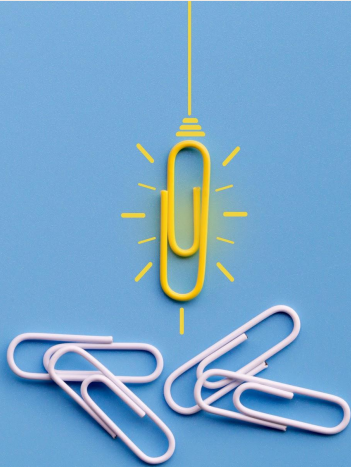
The employee experience is the journey an employee takes with your organization. It includes all the interactions an employee has with your organization before, during, and after their tenure.

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At Blend, Me. Inc. we have adopted Gallup's concept around the employee experience and developed a specific framework for the remote workforce around two additional principles, **Trust** and **Responsibility.**
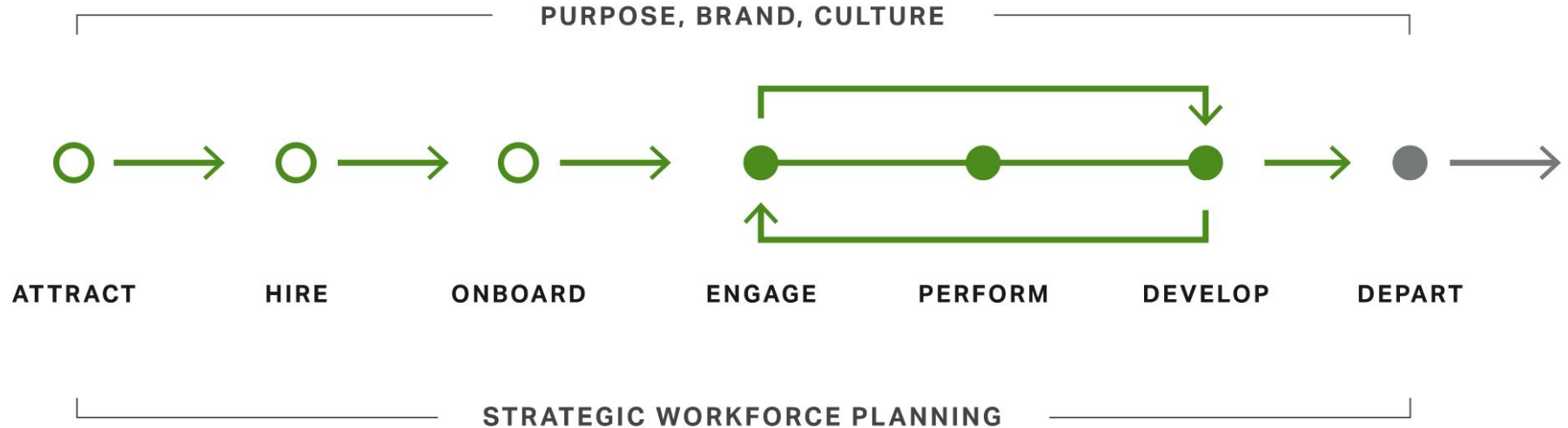
The Remote Employee Experience (TREE)

Trust

Responsibility

Employee **E**xperience

PURPOSE, BRAND, CULTURE

ATTRACT   HIRE   ONBOARD   ENGAGE   PERFORM   DEVELOP   DEPART

STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING

Candor

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The Employee Life-Cycle

PURPOSE, BRAND, CULTURE

ATTRACT   HIRE   ONBOARD   ENGAGE   PERFORM   DEVELOP   DEPART

STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING

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Attract

Given the increased demand of remote work, organizations are now in a global competition to recruit the best talent. By aligning your internal and external branding strategies you will be increasing the visibility of your company's job opportunities among job seekers.

- Increased demand for remote work opportunities

- Global competition to recruit best talent

- Align internal and external branding strategies

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Hire
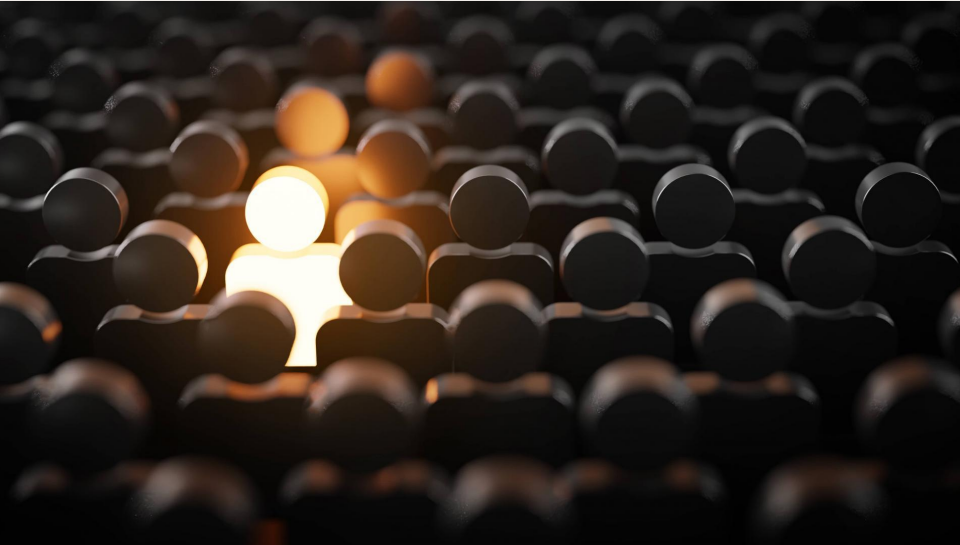
The interview and selection process should be designed with clarity and fairness to eliminate any unconscious bias. Through deliberate applicant review practices you increase your chances of selecting the perfect candidate.

- Design clear and fair interview and selection processes

- Understand your needs so you hire the right people

- Survey current employees

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Onboard

Prioritizing onboarding strategies is critical. New employees need to affirm their decision to come work for you and the onboarding experience is your opportunity to prove them right.

- Opportunity to illustrate who you are as a company

- Employees begin participating as a member and identifying as an insider

- Setting employees up for success

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Engage

Employee engagement is an essential management competency to keep productivity high and turnover low. Engaged employees develop a meaningful connection to your mission, coworkers, and their roles and responsibilities.

- Engaged employees develop a meaningful connection to your mission, coworkers, and their roles and responsibilities

- An essential management competency to keep productivity high and turnover low

- Engaged employees have a direct impact on the company bottom-line

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Perform

Results-driven evaluations reinforce accountability and establish trust which drives individual and organizational performance.

- Results-driven evaluations are critical for remote workforces

- Assessments should be consistent and objective

- Structured to eliminate any unconscious biases

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Develop

Employees seek growth opportunities by gaining new skills, working with diverse people, and obtaining challenging work. Providing individualized performance paths creates autonomy and sparks engagement.

- Individualized performance paths creates autonomy and sparks engagement

- Professional development helps ensure skills and knowledge stay relevant

- Employees who feel that their employer cares for their future and well-being are more likely to commit to you

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Depart

Whether an employee separation is voluntary or involuntary, a structured offboarding program provides you the opportunity to understand what motivates employees to find other employment or what prevented them from performing to expectations.

- Develop a structured off-boarding program

- Mutual feedback exchange

- Departure data collection helps in future decision-making

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Session Wrap Up

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Key Takeaways

- Get intentional about informal social connections

- Trust and asynchronous work can replace face-to-face supervision

- Collaboration tools are efficient

- Centralized and accessible documentation is critical

- Loneliness impacts the workplace

- Prioritize The Remote Employee Experience (TREE)

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Thank you for attending.

Let's do some Q&A