



8 Techniques to Ensure Great Employee Experience in Times of Crisis



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Every crisis is an opportunity



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Finding new ways to work



The world can be a stressful place

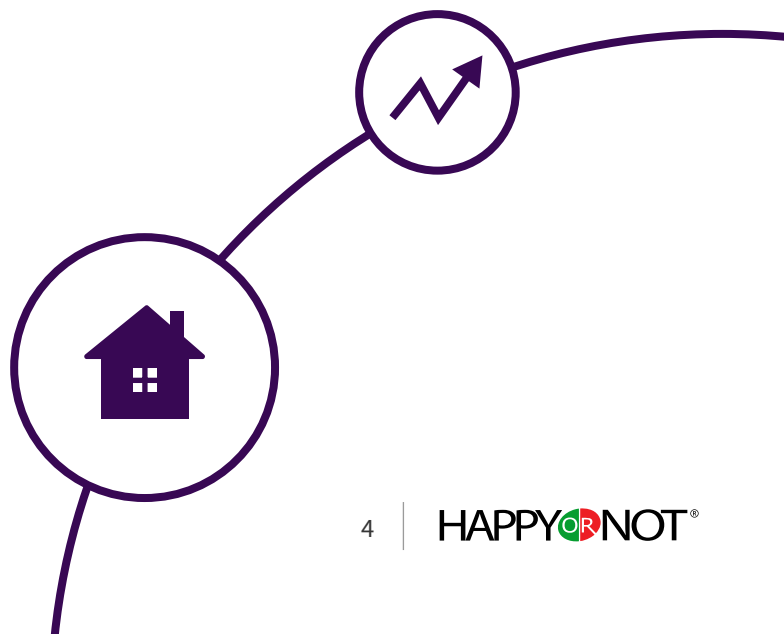
Between a global lockdown, rapid shifts in technology, and new trends in working arrangements, the world can certainly seem like a stressful place lately.


With over 41% of workers around the globe working remotely to some degree during the recent lockdown, billions of people are confronting the challenge of these new circumstances.

In order to keep businesses running and ensure customer satisfaction, companies have had to find new ways to ensure continuity of business during this disruption. On top of that, many HR directors and team leaders are wondering exactly how they can keep their people engaged.

Whether it's keeping people motivated when working remotely, giving people the space they need to cope with stress, or making sure people can offer feedback on how they're feeling, the right tools and techniques can turn any crisis into a positive opportunity.

This is about employee wellness, but it's also about productivity. After all, keeping staff happy and engaged also helps to drive better business performance.





Recently, we held a ‘Rethinking HR’ webinar with experts **Gil Cohen**, founder of Employee Experience Design; **Laurel Farrer**, CEO at Distribute Consulting and president of the Remote Work Association; and **Sami Hero**, Chief Operating Officer at HappyOrNot to discuss how to address the challenges of remote working during stressful times.

We talked about the need to engage your teams without overloading them with information, how to help people avoid burnout at home, and how you can maintain a healthy work culture with the right habits, tools, and platforms.

In this eBook, we’ll offer **8 helpful techniques** and strategies for ensuring great employee experiences during times of crisis, and after the crisis is over. With our help, you’ll have everything you need to turn any crisis into an opportunity for growth and change.



Watch On-Demand Rethinking HR:
Engage your employees in the age of remote working



Remote working is here to stay

The current lockdown has disrupted existing ways of working, with billions of people around the world looking for new ways to connect with their colleagues, customers, and clients without face-to-face contact.

This disruption has had some negative impacts. For example, internal data collected by HappyOrNot® demonstrated a sharp decline in overall employee satisfaction in March 2020.

The disruption has, however, created the opportunity to get a little perspective on our existing working arrangements and improve upon existing habits. For example, one Gartner study suggested **74% of CFOs** plan to shift at least some employees to remote work on a permanent basis in the wake of the current lockdown.

At the very least, the rapid evolution in online meeting platforms and remote collaboration tools is making the physical location of teams less relevant. In this context, businesses should expect remote working to become a permanent feature of the way we get things done.


There are, however, shades and degrees to what remote working means for each individual. While some people may adjust well to working remotely, this isn't the same thing as working from home. Many people prefer to work from shared spaces such as coworking locations or coffee shops. Working from home may involve additional challenges, including domestic distractions, lags in motivation, and the care of children or elderly family members.

So, given these trends and patterns, what are some tools and techniques you can use to ensure great employee experiences in times of crisis?



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Towards happier employees



8 tools and techniques to keep your employees happy and engaged

Managing crisis and disruption doesn't have to be all doom and gloom.

In fact, remote work in times of shared challenge can be a source of meaningful social connection, providing you have access to the necessary technical infrastructure, the right approach from management, and a team culture of trust and care.

With that in mind, here are our 8 tools and techniques to ensure great employee experiences in times of crisis and disruption:



1. Connectedness



2. Burnout



3. Empathy



4. Flexibility



5. Adopt Tools



6. Listen and Learn



7. Act



8. Adopt



1. Connectedness



Foster a sense of connection within your teams

Physical distance and isolation can be tough, but it doesn't have to result in loneliness or a lack of human connection.

In fact, with the right approach from management, your teams can feel engaged and connected, no matter where they are. Similarly, it's entirely possible to feel disconnected from your colleagues even in a crowded office. It all depends on the team dynamic, and on the wider values, priorities, and culture of the company as a whole.

Taking the time to create trusted relationships is key. This is about leveraging your existing workplace culture and making sure the best parts of this culture - your shared values, personal connections, and strengths as a team - can be translated into a remote working environment.

After all, your team doesn't have to be in the same physical working space to be connected. There are plenty of ways to build and maintain a healthy sense of team unity and cohesion, even during remote working:



Adopt alternative forms of contact

For example, you could ask different team members to chair your team meetings, brainstorm new ideas, or continue the tradition of having after-work team drinks via video conference.



Share positive feedback

When things go well during remote working (for example, if your team secures an important sale or completes a tough project), you should celebrate the occasion and acknowledge those involved.



Incorporate remote working perks

To balance out office-based perks. For example, you may have an office quiz every week, with prizes for the winning team(s). Continuing this in a remote context is a great way to create a sense of stability and normality.



Direct your attention where it's needed

Some of your team members will adjust to remote working better than others, and some might need more support. Take the time to catch up with people one-on-one and assess their needs.



2. Burnout



Find the balance between connection and overload

Working in times of crisis is all about finding the right balance. You want to connect your team and give them ample chances to communicate with each other, without overloading them with unnecessary distractions.

Given all the channels of communication available - Slack, email, Zoom, remote collaboration platforms - people can quickly become overloaded with information and unnecessary catch-up meetings. In fact, a recent UK survey suggested **42% of remote workers** feel more stressed and overwhelmed by work communications than they did in the office.

The solution to this problem? Focus on intentional and deliberate communication, asynchronous working, and flexible task completion.

In practice, this means taking the time to understand the value, meaning, and intent of each communication with your team. It also means letting people communicate and work on their time, rather than responding immediately. This might mean a slight drop in short-term productivity, but it will result in higher long-term engagement and performance.

Remember, if you're working remotely, you don't have access to environmental context cues that tell you someone is overwhelmed, like body language or tone. Instead, you need to pay attention to task allocation and give people the chance to tell you when they're struggling.

Given the communication alternatives, you should also consider whether a meeting is strictly necessary, or if you can provide information in written form instead. After all, why soak up time with meetings when you can just let people get on with the job at hand?



42% of remote workers feel more stressed and overwhelmed by work communications than they did in the office



3. Empathy



Acknowledge everyone's individual circumstances

In an office environment, it's easy to operate under the illusion that everyone is working within the same set of circumstances. When a crisis such as the current lockdown forces everyone to work from home, however, it's a different story.

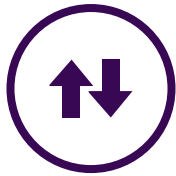
Some members of your team with young children will need to sort out their learning activities for the day. Others will have to take care of aged parents or other domestic obligations. Some will have geographical or residential limitations (for example, a shared apartment) that make it tough for them to participate in work calls.

Being empathetic in your management approach helps you to acknowledge these circumstances. Try to understand what your teams are going through, and trust that everyone still wants to contribute to the success of the business. People aren't using remote working arrangements to slack off; in fact, they're probably more motivated than ever.

Build trust by showing your teams you're paying attention to their needs. This may mean adjusting your expectations in terms of availability, productivity, and performance.



Try to understand what your teams are going through and trust that everyone wants to contribute to the success of the business



4. Flexibility



Adopt a flexible and inclusive definition of productivity

Global crises might present challenges and disruptions for businesses around the world, but at the end of the day, productivity is still a top priority.

When people are working remotely, your productivity metrics need to shift. You need to build a degree of flexibility and inclusiveness within your expected outputs and accept that this isn't business-as-usual.

For example, if you expect your teams to bill a certain number of hours in a day, you could give them the flexibility to complete these hours at a time that suits them, rather than dictating when they need to be completed. This can be a big help for people juggling multiple obligations.

Switching to remote working will also require some tough calls from management in terms of priorities and strategy. For example, under normal working conditions, you might be focusing on executing a range of different projects. Given the realities of remote working, however, you might find yourself having to choose between competing priorities.

If you can adopt enough flexibility with what productivity means in a crisis, you can get critical projects over the line and keep your teams happy and engaged.



Remote workers need a degree of flexibility and inclusiveness within their expected outputs



5. Adopt Tools



Invest in your communication infrastructure

It may sound obvious, but it's worth spelling out: ensuring a positive remote working experience requires investment in the underlying communication infrastructure.

After all, you can have the most talented and engaged team in the world, but without the right tools to connect your people and allow them to collaborate remotely, it won't make a difference.

Your team needs hardware and remote collaboration tools to get work done and engage with each other. This isn't as simple as a laptop and an email account - your people may need software subscriptions, gear such as noise-cancelling headphones or microphones, and access to secure networks for sensitive projects.

The current lockdown has also forced many of us to confront the fact that access to a high-quality internet connection isn't a given. In fact, many of your team members may live in areas where connectivity is either limited or highly expensive.

A recent HappyOrNot Survey found that, while a majority of employees felt their companies were prepared to migrate work to a remote situation, many companies were under-prepared. This means there are plenty of people out there without access to the tools and infrastructure they need to thrive in a remote context.

So, consider your team's technology needs, and make sure they can communicate and collaborate.



You can have the most talented and engaged team in the world, but without the right tools it won't make a difference



6. Listen and Learn



The value of employee wellness feedback

Crises can have a huge impact on employee wellness and engagement. In times of disruption, leaders and managers need to pay attention to how well their teams are doing, including picking up on explicit and implicit cues that someone might need additional support.

This is about talking, listening, and being receptive to team needs. It's crucial to give employees a way to communicate their concerns and overall experience in a way that is simple, quick, and discrete. This way, you can check in with them regularly to see how they're doing.

Traditionally, businesses have used suggestion boxes and anonymous email portals to collect this feedback. These techniques aren't just old and clunky - they also take too much time.

Solutions such as **HappyOrNot's Smiley Digital™** allows workers to give instant, regular feedback on how they're feeling, in a discrete and secure way. This lets you feel the pulse of your company, and compare results across departments. For example, you could ask a mix of broad questions ("how was your workday today?") and specific questions ("how well were you able to manage your tasks today?"). You can either embed Smiley Digital panels on your intranet or distribute them via email to increase employee response rates.

Beyond simply collecting this information, you need to break it down into useful insights. These insights can include the times and days employees experience frustration and low morale, and any specific locations in which your people are having a hard time.

With these insights, you can engage your team in an open conversation on potential improvements to your working conditions. Then, you can work together in taking the necessary steps to address any underlying challenges employees face.

HappyOrNot's simple yet powerful experience management solution allows employers to understand feedback patterns and digest information effectively. On the other hand, being able to provide feedback on their overall satisfaction with working arrangements helps people to feel engaged, valued, and heard.



7. Act

Show people you're taking action in response to feedback

Gathering and studying employee feedback is one thing, but you also need to show your teams what you're doing in response. This helps to close the feedback loop, letting your people know you're not only learning from what they have to say, but you're willing to act on their feedback and improve their working experience.

For example, let's say the feedback suggests a pattern of people being too overloaded with the workload on a particular day. It might be the case that you're scheduling team meetings and division meetings for the same afternoon, leaving people feeling worn out. In response, you could shift these meetings, and let people know why you're doing this.

Taking action in response to feedback builds trust and confidence in management. Sharing these actions, and the outcome of these feedback loops, will increase employee engagement and make people more willing to provide honest and constructive feedback.

And remember the words of **Juho Toivola, Organisational Psychologist**: "As an employer, you don't know what people say about you when you are not in the room. And yet, that is the most honest feedback that tells you what your employees think about their job, peers, community, management, and the company culture they work in."

By gathering this feedback and taking action in response, you can prove to your employees that you're committed, supportive, and interested in improving their experiences at work.



Prove to your employees your commitment by acting in response to their feedback



8. Adopt

Continue doing the things that work well

Finally, it's important to remember one fundamental thing: despite the technological innovations and instantaneous communications, remote working is still just working. There's no need to reinvent the wheel.

After all, your employees are under enough stress already without turning every aspect of their working day into an opportunity for innovation or increased productivity. As challenging as working during a lockdown can be, people are probably craving a bit of normality.

So, remember the skills, habits, and experience that makes your team so effective under usual working conditions. These are the biggest assets you have when working remotely, as they help to keep your team engaged and connected. They could be as simple as continuing your weekly team quiz, or taking the time to celebrate a colleague's birthday.

If you can hold on to all the things that make your team effective under normal working conditions, you'll give them a better chance of coping with the disruption of working remotely.





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**Every crisis is
an opportunity**



The possibility for growth and change

The current lockdown isn't just a disruption. It's also an opportunity to reflect on existing work arrangements, identify the strengths and assets of your team, and make sure they have the support they need to continue to do amazing work.

After all, the lockdown has resulted in some unexpected benefits. These include improvements to the environment, healthier eating habits because people are cooking at home, and time savings resulting from fewer employees commuting to the office.

With the eight tools and techniques we've discussed in this guide, you can let your team's natural skills and abilities shine through, no matter the disruptions they may face. This way, every crisis becomes an opportunity to learn and reflect on what your teams and employees need to be happy, engaged, and productive.

One of the most critical of these techniques? Collecting, understanding, and acting on employee wellness feedback. HappyOrNot's **Smiley Terminal™**, **Smiley Touch™**, and **Smiley Digital™** offer a range of ways for employers to give a voice to their employees and track how well they're doing. With these insights, employers, HRs and team leaders can act on the trends and patterns and learn from them.

When your people are working remotely, it's more important than ever to check in on how they're coping. With a feedback solution, you can access helpful insights about morale, and find out when people are in need of further help and support. Asking for feedback also helps your people feel valued and heard, while letting them know you care about their needs.

Now that we've reached the end of this guide, take a look at the key takeaway checklist and see if there's anything else you could be doing to support your teams.



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Key takeaway checklist



- ☐ Leverage existing culture: shared values, personal connections, and team strengths
- ☐ Adopt specialised and varied forms of contact, e.g. team drinks or brainstorming
- ☐ Share positive feedback and recognise good performance
- ☐ Incorporate remote working perks to balance out office-based perks
- ☐ Direct your attention where it's needed - some people need more help than others



- ☐ Focus on intentional and deliberate communications
- ☐ Give people the chance to work asynchronously as much as possible
- ☐ Pay attention to task allocation, and check in if someone seems overloaded
- ☐ Vary your meeting formats to allow people to exercise different modes of thought
- ☐ Consider the necessity of each meeting - are there other ways to get the job done?



- ☐ Use empathy in management - what are your teams going through?
- ☐ Consider the living and working circumstances of each member of your team
- ☐ Build trust by showing your teams you're paying attention to their needs
- ☐ Adjust your expectations in terms of availability, productivity, and performance



- ☐ Revisit your productivity metrics - are they still relevant and applicable?
- ☐ Give your teams the flexibility to achieve productivity metrics in their own time
- ☐ Reconsider your overall business strategy and priorities in light of the crisis
- ☐ Prepare to make tough calls between competing priorities and projects

Key takeaway checklist



- ☐ Consider your team's technology needs, e.g. laptops, microphones, or screens
- ☐ Are your collaboration platforms sufficient to support remote working?
- ☐ Do your people have access to high-quality internet connections at home?
- ☐ Ask your teams what they need, and do your best to supply it to them



- ☐ Talk to your teams, and be receptive to feedback about their needs and concerns
- ☐ Give your people a platform to provide quick, regular, and secure feedback
- ☐ Break this feedback down into useful insights, including comparing departments
- ☐ Use these insights to inform tailored responses to underlying problems
- ☐ Make your teams feel valued by taking action in response to feedback



- ☐ Turn employee feedback into a specific plan of action
- ☐ Make changes to address patterns and themes within employee feedback
- ☐ Show your employees exactly how you've addressed their feedback
- ☐ Encourage your teams to keep providing regular feedback on how they're doing



- ☐ Remember, remote working is just working - you don't have to reinvent everything
- ☐ Try to conserve as much normality as possible for yourself and your teams
- ☐ Use these eight tools and techniques to let your team's strengths and abilities shine

