



How To Build A Strong Team

In A Post-Pandemic Work Environment

By

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The Challenge

Building a strong team in a post-pandemic world is challenging for several reasons. Whether you are a hiring manager, a current employee, or someone looking for a job, the idea of “team building” in 2023 is different than it was before 2020. Why?

Well, for one thing, people spent eight hours a day (or longer) with each other — usually five days a week. I used to call the people I worked with “my second family.” We developed close friendships as we worked side by side to succeed in the tough businesses of journalism, media, and communications. That changed in 2020 when many businesses closed or had their employees work remotely.

Remote working for many businesses lasted for months or even years before employees began returning to work. Some employees are still working from home two or more days a week. Many employees want flexible work schedules to continue. If they don't get it, some move on to find employment elsewhere. That becomes a challenge for managers trying to build a team, and for employees who don't have a consistent team. Imagine trying to build a winning sports team with people who don't show up to practice or games, or who quit to find something else to do. That's a big challenge if you want to win.

The Future

As much as I might want the work environment to return to the way it was before 2020, I think the future will be different for many managers and employees. I still think building a strong team is possible, but the methods will need to adjust to meet changes in the work force.

That may sound strange coming from someone who has been working since the early 1960s. However, I am a realist. I remember a fellow manager in television years ago who loved to say, “It is what it is.” That’s facing reality. The work environment we find ourselves in 2023 is the new reality. ***It is what it is.***

I am 75-years-old and recently retired after 60 years in the workforce. Most Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are already retired. Gen-Xers (1965-1980), children of the Boomers, are also looking toward retiring in the next ten to twenty-five years. That means younger workers (e.g. Gen Y, Z, and A) will be in charge of the work environment soon. So, what does that mean for the future of work?

Here are some of things managers and employees will be dealing with in the years to come. The question for all of us is how we can face the changes and challenges of the future while still building strong teams.

- Quiet quitting
- Quiet hiring
- Remote and hybrid flexibility (flexible work hours, locations)
- Embracing remote and hybrid work
- Four-day work week?
- Knowledge skill gaps because of remote work during the pandemic
- Social skill gaps because of remote work during the pandemic
- Expanding hiring pipelines (searching for non-traditional candidates, including bringing older workers back into the work force)
- Employee mental health issues (e.g. stress, emotional exhaustion, burnout)
- Dealing with DEI
- AI assistance in hiring

- AI assistance in working
- New technologies (including new collaborative work platforms)
- Controlling costs
- Workplace surveillance
- Workplace privacy

Managing the Challenge

As many people have said the last year or two — “Remote work is here to stay.” Managing a team of remote and/or hybrid employees is going to be a challenge. Many younger employees say they feel less connected to fellow workers, even if they communicate with them regularly by phone, text, email, or during virtual meetings. I recommend managers talk with their employees about this challenge to find out what they’re thinking. Managers should listen to challenges their employees are facing, and employees should listen to challenges their managers are facing. Team building combines good questions, careful listening, and honest answering. People who work in journalism, media, and communications should be able to do all of those well. They’re part of the skill set we need to be good at doing our job. Let’s use those same skills to build a strong team.

Having managed teams in journalism, media, and communications for many years, I can attest that a lot of what's happening in the workplace now is not new. It may seem new to younger people who weren't in the workforce in the 60s, 70s, 80s, and maybe even the 90s, but stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout are not new. We got through difficult times that rival what younger workers are facing now. That means they can as well. Older workers can share our experiences with younger workers and help them get through the many challenges they're facing. That's how strong teams work.



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