

workhuman®

How to Create a Culture of Connection

IN A HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENT





What happens now?

The last year and a half has been a waiting game. Waiting for the pandemic to subside, waiting to see our friends, family, and coworkers, and waiting to get back to normal. Now, even when it seems the waiting may be over, what we once considered normal is nowhere to be found.

Rather than going back to what once was, we are entering a new era of work. According to PwC's recent report, It's time to reimagine where and how work will get done, the majority of companies are ready to adopt a hybrid work model where employees split time between working remotely and in the office.

While this new approach offers benefits for employers and employees alike, there is one caveat – culture. If organizations are not careful, hybrid work has the potential to disrupt the human connection, engagement, and sense of belonging that leaders have been working years to achieve.

To ensure that doesn't happen, here are six strategies to keep your culture of connection alive – whatever your return-to-work plan looks like.

ONE

Double down on human connection



Human connection is the heartbeat of your business.

Ensure employees feel equally connected wherever they are.

The pandemic highlighted just how important employee well-being is – both for individuals and the bottom line. New research outlined in the report, One Year Into COVID: The Pandemic's Impact on How We Work, reveals **workers are feeling more anxious (37%), isolated (31%), overwhelmed (28%), and less motivated (24%)**.

So, what caused this strain? By an overwhelming margin, 59% of those surveyed cited “less human connection” as the culprit.

Feeling connected to your organization and fellow humans is key to creating a strong workplace culture. Whether employees are in the office, remote, or a mix of both, leaders need to foster belonging throughout the organization. Here are a few ways you can strengthen a sense of connection:

Virtual happy hours or lunches

These are great for off-the-clock connection-building.

Mentor-mentee programs

Try pairing up those newly employed during the pandemic with veteran employees to gain a better understanding of each other's experiences. Or think about matching remote or dispersed employees with those working in the office to fuel unlikely bonds.

Employee resource groups (ERGs)

A network of employees with shared experiences, characteristics, or goals can help form authentic relationships among employees up and down the organization. Groups created by and for your people improve company culture while building camaraderie.

Another surefire way to cultivate human connection is through employee recognition. With the help of an employee recognition solution such as Workhuman's Social Recognition®, organizations can better show their commitment to connection and authenticity.

TWO

Listen and learn and then listen some more



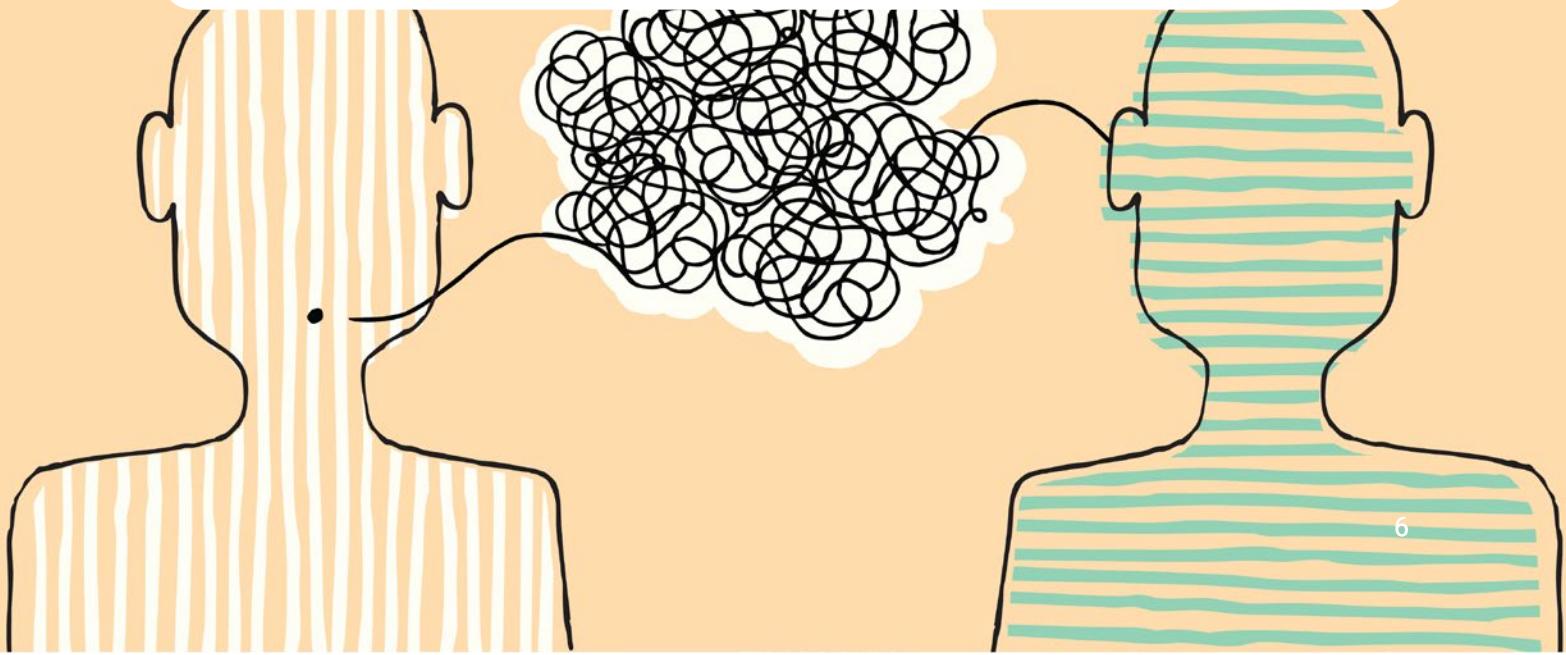
No one has all the pieces to the hybrid work puzzle. Listen to what your employees want – and need – from the company in order to continue doing their best work. The more supported they feel, the better work they will produce, regardless of where they are working.

Leading your team with empathy – whether from across the office or across the country – is key to sustaining an effective workplace culture. By putting yourself in the shoes of your employees – while considering that every individual has unique needs and desires – you can create a more authentic environment for both remote and in-person employees.

An empathetic leader understands that the next few months will consist of lots of changes. Employees hired during the pandemic will likely take their first steps into the office. Organizational structures have changed, protocols will be developed and adjusted, and meetings will be a mix of people in a conference room and employees dialing in from home.

Leaders should be aware that these changes will affect everyone differently. Consider implementing monthly employee surveys to gauge the pulse of your people. If something is working well, great. And if something isn't, adjust it and keep moving.

Unsure how to create an effective employee pulse survey? Check out Moodtracker®, the free tool from Workhuman® that makes it fast, easy, and actionable to get to the heart of organizational issues.



THREE

Inspire shared purpose around core values

“Building a culture of human connection – of shared purpose and individual meaning – takes time, and it can’t wait.”

ERIC MOSLEY
Workhuman Co-Founder and CEO

Enlightened organizations have long been aware of the power that shared purpose can have on their bottom line, but this notion is now more important than ever. Shared purpose brings employees together while aligning their work with the company's mission and values.

In a hybrid work model, the shared purpose that's so essential to your culture may be harder to come by. Being together in the office allows employees to connect and collaborate in a way that embodies a sense of community. While this connection is still possible in a hybrid environment, now leaders must be much more intentional in communicating how each employee contributes to the greater company mission.

FOUR

Recognize the culture champions



Constructing a culture of connection may sound daunting, so let's break it down. A strong company culture is simply made up of humans with a common goal – to better themselves and the organization. Train leaders to keep an eye out for those employees who have taken an extra step or gone the extra mile to promote your culture.

These employees – rightfully dubbed “culture champions” – improve morale while creating an example of what could be. If the employees who have gone above and beyond are recognized for their efforts, it's likely others will follow in their footsteps, leading to a more resilient and united workplace.



Remember to recognize your culture champions.

Be on the lookout for recognition-worthy moments such as:

- An employee giving a tour of the office to a new hire that joined the team during the pandemic
- An employee offering to be involved in the interview process for a job candidate in a different department
- A hybrid employee adjusting their schedule to attend a rescheduled meeting before an important deadline
- An employee going above and beyond to create new ways of connection, such as creating a Slack group for new parents or an ERG for women in technology

FIVE

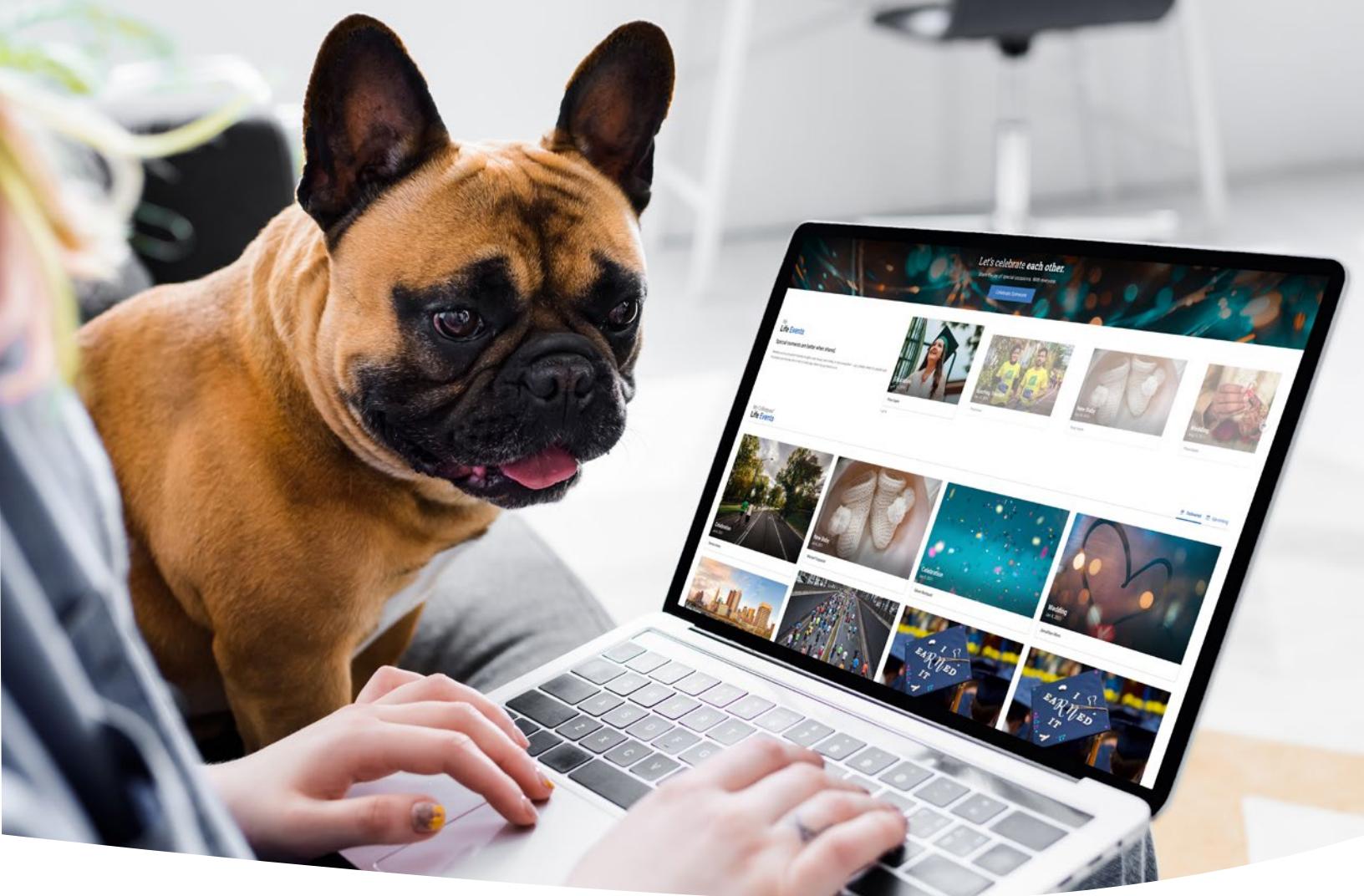
Celebrate often – in and out of the office



Consider everything that has happened over the last year and the moments of resiliency each employee showed to keep your business moving. Now is the time to celebrate those moments.

No matter what your work environment will look like, remember to recognize both big and small wins. And make sure to include both remote and in-person employees in these celebrations.

A culture that celebrates the career milestones, life events, and group achievements of your employees promotes a vibrant and connected community when your employees need it most.



With the help of Workhuman's Life Events® and Community Celebrations® solutions, organizations can do just that – showing employees they are valued for their whole self, not just the return they provide the company.

Now is not the time to pull back on celebration – it's time to double down. Whether employees are back in the office, remote, or somewhere in between, organizations should empower their people and continue forging the essential connections for a human workplace.

SIX

Embrace failing forward



Over the past few months, hybrid work has been top of mind for individuals, organizations, and business publications alike. And while new tips and tricks are published every day, we won't know if these will work until we try.

More than likely, some of the implemented strategies won't have the intended results people leaders are hoping for. And before panic sets in, remember that this is OK. Leaders must be open to failing forward if they are committed to making a hybrid approach work for their people.

The pandemic proved we are all human – and being human means not always getting it right the first time. By admitting this – while ensuring your organization knows you will adjust and try again – you create a culture of authenticity and vulnerability, where your employees will feel supported and psychologically safe.

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People need a level of psychological safety to fully engage with their manager, peers, and colleagues. Being open, vulnerable, and authentic lets people know where they stand with you.

LYNETTE SILVA HEELAN,
Principal Consultant at Workhuman &
DR. MEISHA-ANN MARTIN,
Director of People Analytics at Workhuman

Next steps

In the past, some organizations considered a culture of connection and humanity as a nice-to-have, rather than a necessity. That is no longer the case. Employees want to feel a sense of belonging, shared purpose, and appreciation at work. And only with a true culture of connection will that be possible.

To learn more about how Workhuman Cloud® can help build a culture of connection, contact us today.

+1 888.743.6723 | workhuman.com
Or read more on our blog: workhuman.com/whblog