

How to build a corporate culture for your remote team

 By [Dorine Reinstein](#)

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Did you know that almost 80% of knowledge workers worldwide work at least one day of each week remotely? By 2020, analysts expect that more than 1,3-billion people will work remotely.



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In South Africa, the global trend is becoming hugely successful, but how is it affecting our country's corporate culture?

The City of Cape Town recently introduced flexi hours and the option for working from home for some employees to help reduce the city's rush-hour gridlock. The city has encouraged private companies to do the same.

Dimension Data recently surveyed more than 70 executives of companies with a minimum of 1,000 employees. The results show that 42% of organisations already have employees who work from home on a full-time basis, while 67% said they would have employees based at home full-time within the next two years. That figure is 10% higher than the global average.

Flexibility - a powerful tool for talent

In a world where work-life balance is seen as increasingly important, there can be numerous benefits for both the employee and their employer. What's more, flexibility has become a powerful tool for talent retention.

The number of people who say they've quit a job due to lack of flexibility has nearly doubled from 17% in 2014 to 32% in 2017. And, 34% of Millennials said they had left a job because it did not offer work flexibility, while 45% of Millennials planned to quit jobs within two years that didn't offer flexible work environments.

But flexibility does come with a few unique challenges. Working with colleagues situated on the other side of the country (or world) can be complicated, especially considering that research shows that trust is essential to high-performing virtual teams. How can you build this trust with people who you don't see regularly? How can you create a robust company culture among employees who are scattered around the country?

Travel content and marketing company, Big Ambitions is a good South African example of a remote but high-performing team. The team is spread between Durban, Johannesburg, Cape Town, and a farmstead in Malmesbury, but still has a very solid company culture and a fantastic connected network.

There are several ways in which the team has managed to increase the camaraderie in its remote team. We have created simple things like a digital water cooler platform where employees can share random non-work-related stories and updates. We also make sure to stay in regular contact and always share information.

Destination and the breakaway concept

Without a doubt, the best way to build a close-knit company culture remotely is to meet face to face. Face-to-face meetings create opportunities for employees to bond, build trust, build relationships and have fun. These are all core elements to building an enduring company culture.

That is why, twice a year, our team hits the road to meet in somewhere in South Africa. The first trip was to Brits. In 2019, the decision was made to spice up the destination and the breakaway concept, and the company organised a family weekend to Dream Hotels & Resorts Piekenierskloof Mountain Resort in the Western Cape.

Motivational speaker Brian Scudamore said recently that the most successful, memorable team-building events are those that don't feel like a day at the office. He mentioned: "Activities that overtly aim to draw in leadership lessons or practical takeaways are less powerful. Spending time together, sharing an experience or working towards a common goal allows bonding to happen more organically and far more effectively."

Promoting organic bonding

We found that to be true. It proved that a great way to promote organic bonding is to involve the most important people in your employees' lives: their family. By extending the invitation to your employees' partners and children the day becomes one of bonding on a deeper level.

It is, however, crucial to find the right destination and venue for this kind of exercise. Your chosen location needs to cater for young and old and keep everyone entertained. Piekenierskloof was ideal. From lazing next to the pool with a daiquiri in hand to hiking for the more active, zip lining for the teens and adventure scavenger hunts with the Dream Xplorers entertainment programme for the tots, everyone in the team had a fantastic time.

Although remote working can have its challenges, a team getaway addresses these problems and sets the tone for another six months of working at a distance. There are people in the same office that only ever communicate via e-mail, and who barely have the time to chat. As a remote team, everyone makes a concerted effort to keep the company vibe alive and keep communication lines open.

It certainly is the workplace of the future.

ABOUT DORINE REINSTEIN

Dorine Reinstein is corporate division leader for Big Ambitions. She is a seasoned travel writer and editor, who is passionate about corporate and retail travel. She has written for several award-winning publications including Travel Weekly and Travel Buyer.

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