

Resources for Engaging Your Team During COVID-19

It is no secret that how we conduct our work is evolving by the day and despite the constant change, teams are conducting incredible work. That being said, staying engaged as a team has become a greater necessity than ever before, regardless if you are working remotely or onsite. *Virtual Teambuilding* is a great way to ensure that your team maintains the emotional and social connection that previously came from in-person interactions. It is a fantastic way to build collaboration and productivity, while unwinding from the stresses surrounding us. Here are some ways your units can participate in virtual teambuilding.

The Importance of Recognition

Employee recognition can come in a variety of forms, ranging from a simple thank you, to a formal reception, and everything in between. However, the common characteristic is that it communicates to employees that their contributions are valued. If there are members on your team working at home or onsite, send them a thank you note, letting them know how much you appreciate what they are doing. Perhaps make a weekly routine out of it, hosting a “Thankful Thursday,” for example, where your team recognizes each other’s contributions. Recognition does not have to be grandiose, and it does not need to be expensive. Simple words of thanks go a very long way.

Gamification

Gamification is the practise of incorporating games into your team’s daily work. Research shows that gamification can increase engagement, instil a sense of accomplishment, and increase overall engagement levels. Here are some examples of how your team can “gamify” their work.

- Use quizzing or polling tools such as [Kahoot](#). Kahoot can be used live during team meetings, and is compatible with Microsoft Teams, Slack, Google Hangouts, and Zoom.
- Use online whiteboard tools such as [Miro](#) to play games at the beginning or end of team meetings that you would otherwise play using a regular whiteboard.

Making Lemonade

First started by our colleagues in the Registrar’s Office, in the spirit of keeping connected with one another, a question, or a “lemon” is asked to your team once a week. These questions are light in nature, and are best responded with a photo submission. Examples of questions include *What is your favourite coffee mug you are using?* or *What are you doing to keep your home office cozy and comfortable?* At the end of the week, someone makes a slideshow with all of the photos in order to take everybody’s lemons to make lemonade. The slideshow is then shared with the team at the end of the week, and is a great way to keep everyone connected, both onsite and remotely.

Be Your Own Tour Guides

With the use of webcams and conference calls, team members can take turns showing off their remote or onsite work locations! They can show off their office space, while guide their teams through various rooms in the house! Working onsite? Team tour guides can also put together a short list of what their home town is known for- it can include favourite restaurants, shops, or tourist attractions, giving your colleagues an opportunity to learn more about where you are from!

Aliens Have Landed

Imagine that aliens have landed on Earth and want to learn about what your team does. But since they can't understand what you're saying, it needs to be explained with symbols or pictures. Each of your team members can upload five simple images that best describe and communicate what your team does to enhance the employee, student, or client experience at McMaster. Take a few minutes to look at all of the images. Are there common themes?

Replicate Work Traditions Digitally

Does your team eat lunch together on a weekly basis? Have coffee together in the morning? Do you wear your favourite McMaster clothes or wacky socks on Fridays? If so, do not let distance stop you from doing this over digital meetings, connecting both remote and onsite employees. Keep traditions or "rituals" that your team does together is important in staying happy and connected. If these are not things your teams currently participate in, there is no better time than the present to start!

Team Member Trivia

Team Member Trivia is a personal facts guessing game, and is a great way to learn one another's interests outside of work. One person is to collect facts about their colleagues. To generate ideas, there can be probing questions such as *What is your favourite food?* or *Where is the most exotic place you have travelled to?* Then, create a sheet with personal facts on one side, and team members on the other. Your group then matches the names to the facts to see who knows everyone the best! It is a great way to open up to your group while learning more about others.

Scavenger Hunts

In this fun and interactive activity, give your team a list of basic household or office items that they need to collect. The first team member to collect the items, and share a photo of all of the items with the group, wins! To learn more about your team members, have some of the items they collect be personal to them, and give them the opportunity to share what they found. Examples include a photograph that is important to you, your favourite article of clothing, and a favourite recipe you like to make.

Virtual Art Class

Using a virtual meeting space such as Teams, nominate one person to be the speaker, with everyone else being an artist. The speaker selects an image at random, with the goal of describing that image in such a way that the artists can draw it successfully. The one guideline that makes this a challenge is that the speaker must only describe the image using geometric shapes and their locations. For example, the speaker could say “Draw one large circle, with two triangles in the top right and left parts of the circle,” if they were describing the beginning steps of drawing the head of a cat. This game is a great way to build effective online communication while having fun!

Do you have any other ideas you would like to share with us for how your team participates in virtual teambuilding? We would love to hear from you! Please send any ideas via email to od@mcmaster.ca, or share via Twitter or Instagram by tagging @McMasterOD