



**FOR EMPLOYERS TO NAVIGATE  
THE FUTURE WORLD OF WORK**

# 2020 WILL BE REMEMBERED FOR MANY THINGS, INCLUDING A ONCE UNIMAGINABLE SHIFT OF EMPLOYEES FROM BEING MOSTLY ON-SITE TO WORKING FROM HOME.

And across a variety of industries – technology, banking and finance, sales, consulting, and beyond – employers are dramatically changing their views about work-from-home arrangements. “I have done an about-face on this,” David Kenny, the CEO at Nielsen, said of his support for employees working from home, in a [recent article](#) for *The New York Times*. What’s catching employer attention is the multitude of positives – financial and otherwise – from a growing remote workforce. That includes big savings from site optimization, building rental and maintenance costs, the lack of long commute times and the potential for higher productivity and engagement levels, among other factors.

Still, even with the interest in work-from-home arrangements, one size does not fit all. Employees will continue to crave flexibility, with some preferring to work on-site now or when re-entry is possible. Furthermore, employers will always need to set aside time for employees to gather. Some essential work is best done together, such as co-creating strategy, brainstorming innovations, and working to build high-performance teams. Employers will need to navigate the competing and evolving needs of their teams, which is what this e-book is all about.

The good news for employers is that at least for now, many employees are embracing the chance to work from home on a more regular basis. Nearly half of employees currently working from home want to keep that arrangement, according to a recent [employee survey](#) conducted by our team at The Grossman Group. My own experience with clients shows that the grand work-from-home experiment has turned out relatively well so far, with employees adjusting, stepping up to the plate in a time of crisis, and generally feeling that their relationship with teams and supervisors have held up nicely in a virtual work world.

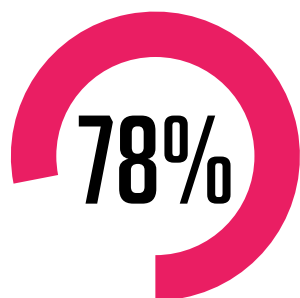


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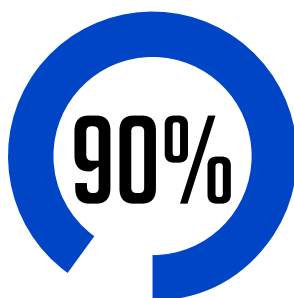
- David Kenny, Nielsen CEO

Our recent employee survey of 841 U.S. employees across a variety of industries found that employees working from home had high marks for their employers' communication and overall response to the pandemic. This may have helped build the employees' confidence in a remote working situation for the long-term.

## KEY FINDINGS FROM EMPLOYEES NOW WORKING FROM HOME:



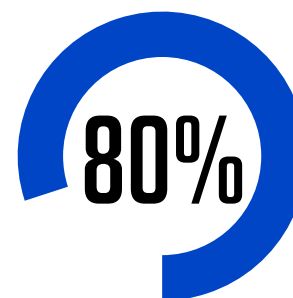
**agreed their company leadership has lived up to the values of their organization during this time**



**said trust in their organization increased or stayed the same**



**said their satisfaction with their organization as an employer increased or stayed the same**



**agreed their direct supervisor is communicating the information they need to do their jobs during the pandemic**

No matter where their employees work, employers face important questions and decisions on managing their teams, shifting from a pre-pandemic world to the realities of today. Here's our best advice for managing the transition in ways that best serve employees' changing wants and needs...



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# LISTEN

to employees and be open to  
their wants (not just needs)



A great deal has changed in employees' work lives in a short time, so it's more important than ever to have a pulse on how their views on the ideal work environment may be evolving. Do research with employees to understand their desires and concerns about the future of work, where they would work best, and why. We're learning more about how employee wants are very diverse. Adapting to those differences will strengthen the capabilities of a team and organization. For every employee, consider what enhancements are needed for safety, productivity and wellbeing.

## KNOW YOUR EMPLOYEES



To truly move employees to action, we have to know what they really care about and get into their mindset. In a nutshell, here's what every employee wants from you:

1. To show you care in a genuine way
2. More listening
3. Empathy
4. Recognition and appreciation
5. Less BS and more humanity
6. To know your expectations
7. To see you respond or take action on their suggestions



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Ensure a  
**SPECIAL  
FOCUS**  
for on-site workers



Many employees do not have a choice about coming to work, whether it's in manufacturing or other sites like labs, hospitals or even package delivery. Listen to these employees to understand what strategies are working today, what they need and want to stay safe, engaged and motivated in their work.

Take special care to educate and inform workers on safety measures. Consider adopting an even more clear and generous sick leave policy and emphasize the importance of staying at home whenever employees are sick. Additionally, think about how to include workers' families in your communications because they are often expressing the greatest concern and have the biggest influence on employee attitudes.

You may want to send communications to employees' homes so information about safety measures and other key updates can be shared with the entire household. You could also hold "open house" phone calls or video meetings for employees and those they live with.

## ON-SITE WORKERS

The Grossman Group's recent survey of employee perceptions of their supervisors' communication skills showed **significant differences** between those working from home and those still on site with their employer. For on-site employees...

64% 

agree company leadership has lived up to the values of the organization at this time, compared to **78% of employees working from home** who agree with the same statement.

20% 

disagree company leadership has put the needs of employees before financial/business considerations compared to **11% of employees working from home**.

21% 

say their satisfaction with their organization as an employer has decreased, while only **12% of those working from home** shared that opinion.



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# BE "FLEX-ABLE"

as you determine where  
employees work in the future







While not surprising, many employees have gotten a taste of a new way of working – and they like it. This is leading to varying preferences from employees; embrace those differences as a strength. As the old saying goes, “There is nothing so unfair as the equal treatment of unequals.” Treat employees as individuals. Recognize that people have different work styles and capabilities, which is a foundation of inclusion, diversity and belonging. Companies are stronger when they cultivate the strengths of their diverse employee base. This requires organizations to define:

# **FLEX-ABILITY** *noun* • flek-sə-bi-lə-tē

ALLOWING EMPLOYEES TO WORK WHERE THEY  
FEEL IS THE “BEST PLACE” FOR THEM AND WHERE  
THEY’RE MOST “ABLE” TO BE AT THEIR BEST.

## TWO COMPANIES RESPOND TO VARIED INTERESTS OF ON-SITE AND REMOTE WORKERS

Like other companies during the COVID-19 pandemic, a biotechnology company found itself balancing two tracks of workers: those who transitioned to working from home and those who remained on site to handle “essential” responsibilities. Wanting to understand its employees’ perspectives on desired work arrangements in the future, the company worked with The Grossman Group to conduct focus groups to listen to its people.

What they heard was that remote and on-site employees shared a feeling of uncertainty about the logistics required to operate safely if large numbers of employees return to working on site. Further, employees had differing perspectives on where they could do their best work, as well as differing emotions about being on site.

Company leaders responded by factoring in employee concerns and suggestions in planning for a future with a more populated worksite. Perhaps most importantly, the company adopted a policy of supporting employees in working wherever they can be at their best for the foreseeable future. Similarly, a health care manufacturing company faced a challenge with employees who shifted to working from home and those remaining on site

to produce essential products. Working with The Grossman Group, company leadership ramped up communications to strengthen trust and transparency among leaders and employees. Workers were given more opportunities to share their perspective on the new working dynamic and leadership committed to adjusting messaging and policies to keep employees safe, productive and engaged.

Two pulse surveys were created for the two tracks of employees, those on-site and those working from home. There was high participation in the survey, signaling real interest in employees having their voice heard. Leadership is using the results to make future workplace decisions about how teams work in the next phases of re-entry.



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Ensure new employees  
coming on board virtually  
feel supported and  
**ENGAGED**







Many new employees joining companies since the pandemic began have never even met their employer, supervisor or any team members face-to-face. From the interview process to their first days working, everything was handled virtually. Yet those employees are still thrust into a situation where they are expected to work very closely with their new team virtually. This means trying to connect with one another through video meetings or phone calls, and without the benefit of the normal casual interactions that help people get to know each other. Given this reality, it's especially important to pay even closer attention to new employees, ensuring that ample time is set aside for them to ask questions and engage. Assigning new employees a mentor or someone willing to check on them regularly can go a long way toward helping build a more seamless transition.

## 3 TIPS

to help newly onboarded employees grow – even if they're working remote:

- 1. Encourage professional development.**  
High-potential employees are not satisfied with the status quo. If given the proper guidance in their development, they will become the future leaders of your organization.
- 2. Create a development plan.**  
Help your employees establish goals that are aligned with their strengths, interests and experience, as well as with the overall business strategy. Establish goals and expectations to help them set their sights on career opportunities.
- 3. Challenge employees with assignments.**  
Get your employees to leave their comfort zones. Employees can't move forward if they don't grow, and they can't grow if they never leave their comfort zones.

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# NARROW

your go-forward  
priorities and focus



This pandemic has provided a clear focus on what is/was important. With those learnings in hand, review and revise your organization's strategy to ensure it reflects how you will win going forward, in the context of the realities of the current situation. That plan should help employees know the broad performance goals and how everyone will be measured. Once codified, communicate what's most important (*and what can wait*) and help employees understand what they can do to help the company succeed.

## HELP TEAMS FOCUS



In the early weeks of the pandemic, leadership teams were forced to shift business plans in significant and unexpected ways to survive, respond, redirect, recover and still succeed in the face of the global pandemic. The best companies kept employees informed of the changes to strategy so they were clear on the priorities and how they could contribute. As leaders prepare for the next phases of the pandemic, plans and adjustments to the strategy continue. While some employees may have small windows into business plans, very few have a full view. It's up to leaders and communications teams to help employees have the same clear picture of the updated strategy as leaders:

**Put the updated strategy on a simple, single piece of paper.** Let it serve as a strategic framework from which all leaders and employees operate.

**Ensure your leaders are aligned.** Give them context behind the strategy so they understand how you got there, what's different and why.

**Use the updated strategy consistently.** Employees know what's important when they see and hear it from multiple sources.

**As your thinking evolves, update the strategy.** Communicate regularly so employees are in the loop and understand the reasons behind the changes.

**Celebrate wins.** Always connect back to and reinforce the core elements of the strategy.



# Consider a cultural **RE-SET**

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Seize the opportunity to make improvements in how you operate. Challenge the status quo and codify new ways of working for the future that spell out how you win through your mission, vision, values and behaviors. If needed, update your values and behaviors to reflect the new realities. Do the values and behaviors from the past continue to serve the organization well? Do some need to be jettisoned? What new behaviors need to be added given the new business environment?

In particular, you may have more to say about the level of trust that's needed. If more people end up working from home, trust will be essential as employees won't be in front of each other as much to see how time is being spent. You'll also want to clearly communicate the cultural re-set with employees so everyone understands what's changing (and what's not), why, and what's expected of them. Finally, it's always critical to ensure that leadership embraces the updated culture and leads by example.

**FREE**  
TOOLS &  
RESOURCES





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# ASSESS

and streamline your  
communications





Know what's working and what's not in your organization's communication system, including channels. Ask employees for their feedback and determine the most effective way to communicate in the future to reach key audiences where they are, and to help them feel engaged. As part of that communication assessment, identify the communication successes and failures from the COVID-19 working environment. As difficult as the early days of the pandemic have been, some organizations may have identified some surprising success stories. Maybe teams have learned that some meetings are best held virtually after all. The crisis mode might have helped the organization better collaborate across divisions and make decisions faster. Researching which communication efforts worked and which didn't will help your company decide what to do to make all teams more efficient and effective in the future.

## 3 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

1.

**Do you know** what's working and what's not when it comes to communications in your organization driving business performance – beyond your own gut intuition?

2.

**Do you have** opportunities/issues that need to be addressed right now?

3.

**Do you want** to make your communications and/or your function better but don't know where to start?



**A COMMUNICATION  
ASSESSMENT MAY BE THE  
BEST PLACE TO START**

FIND OUT HOW 

# NARROWING THE COMMUNICATIONS FOCUS FOR BETTER RESULTS

The employee communications team for a major financial services company didn't know if their communications were reaching target audiences and having the intended impact. The lack of data also made it difficult to make changes and describe its value to the business.

Leveraging The Grossman Group's Internal Communication Climate Index™ – an assessment survey tool that studies key dimensions of employee communication effectiveness – the company has since established a baseline of data and tracked progress annually for senior leader and supervisor communications, channel effectiveness, message pull through and employee advocacy. The data guided action planning that forced focus on areas of greatest impact. This led to:



**YEAR-OVER-YEAR INCREASE  
ACROSS ALL 5  
INDEX DIMENSIONS**



**7-POINT  
INCREASE**  
in effectiveness of  
senior leadership  
communications



**4-POINT  
INCREASE**  
in effectiveness  
of supervisor  
communications



**5-POINT  
INCREASE**  
in effectiveness of  
information flow (i.e.,  
messaging, cadence, etc.)

**LED TO A STRONGER CASE FOR CHANGE:** When data surfaced gaps following an acquisition and organizational change, leadership realized the need to support parts of the company where communications were not as strong

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Double-down on  
**"REAL"**  
employee  
communications



One of our biggest learnings is that when leaders take communication seriously, employees can not only weather the storm but rise to any challenge. Frequency, empathy, authenticity, focus, clarity and timeliness matter far more than presentation and wordsmithing. With a clear focus and priorities during COVID-19, leaders have communicated with a sense of truth and urgency, sharing what they knew when they knew it while addressing persistent questions from employees as daily news coverage elevated fears.

Leaders also understood that they needed to clear a path for employees to get important work done. Leaders also need to continually invite employees into real conversations about their concerns. By addressing them promptly, leaders demonstrate that they generally care about responding to employee needs. This more urgent approach to communication was highly effective and drove greater engagement. In fact, this is a best practice that should always be done, pandemic or not.

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**REMOTE WORK ARRANGEMENTS HAVE POSITIVELY IMPACTED EMPLOYEES' SENTIMENT TOWARD THEIR COMPANY. AMONG THOSE WORKING AT HOME:**

**78%**

agreed their company leadership has lived up to the values of their organization during this time.

**90%**

said their trust in their organization increased or stayed the same.

**88%**

said their satisfaction with their organization as an employer increased or stayed the same.

**80%**

agreed that their direct supervisor is communicating the information they need to do their jobs during the pandemic.



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Surround yourself with  
**TRUTH  
TELLERS**



Even when they are regularly invited to share their views, it is naturally difficult for many employees to offer honest feedback with senior leaders. On top of that, many may fear that challenging leaders could jeopardize their jobs, particularly in this uncertain time. Yet leaders need to know what is truly on the minds of their employees, what's working and what's not. Identify who those truth tellers are in your organization – the people willing to share candid concerns about issues. Particularly in times of crisis, having frequent talks with your truth tellers will help you get a better pulse on the organization's unmet needs.

**WONDER HOW THINGS ARE  
GOING WITH YOUR TEAM?**

**ASK!**

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Listening to employees and thinking more deeply about what may be on their minds is always a leader best practice. But one thing that many leaders don't do is make a point of finding those employees inside or outside the management team who will be consistently brave enough to share honest assessments of your leadership style and approach. And having that feedback has never been more important than it is now during the pandemic crisis. The most courageous – and effective – leaders will identify that group of people, then regularly check in with them. Your key ask of these folks is this: "What am I doing well today and what could I do to be even better?"



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Share

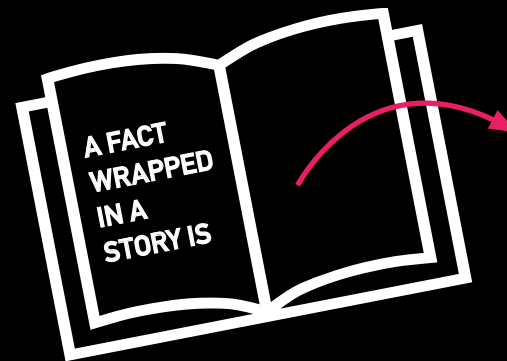
SUCCESS stories



When new ways of working lead to impressive results, share those wins with the team so everyone can continue to learn from evolving best practices. These stories also provide the company an opportunity to thank teams and individuals for achieving great things for the company, for each other, and for customers. After all, the only way to truly get things done in any business is through people. Recognizing those people through stories helps to reinforce the desired behaviors you want to replicate across the company.

## POWER OF STORYTELLING

Sometimes leaders dismiss stories because they feel unnecessary, too soft or off-point. They may think, “My team just needs the facts!” However, a growing body of research proves that simply communicating facts or directives will not accomplish the leader’s most important goal – moving people to action to enable lasting change. Facts inform, but they don’t inspire. This is where telling stories about recent successes in a business – and highlighting what the teams did right to achieve them – is essential to reinforce the best path forward.



22  
TIMES  
MORE MEMORABLE<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jerome Bruner, Cognitive Psychologist



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# PREPARE

your managers for  
the new world



Managers will need different skills and techniques to support and motivate their teams, regardless of where they work. Collect best practices learned from managing during COVID-19 and make a deliberate effort to share them. Be sure to apply lessons learned from things that didn't work so well too. Consider training to help prepare managers to be effective managing remote as well as site-based teams. You'll also want to keep training top of mind for employees. For instance, many employers have increased class offerings and tutorials to help their teams learn and brush up skills using Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, and other software aids.

## Words of Wisdom

The Grossman Group recently surveyed leaders and other workplace advisors for their best advice in managing the new world of work; here are a few examples of what we heard:

### Communicate consistently

*"I have kept a constant open line of communication and actually probably talking to my people even more now than I was.... trying to keep a handle on the 'pulse' of how they are doing."*

### Help manage information overload

*"I learned a long time ago that people can absorb and react appropriately to bad news if the content and the messenger are credible. Tell the truth. Be consistent. Deal with facts. It's really not complicated. It starts with doing and saying what's right."*

### Leverage your leadership

*"Leaders who are relatable and compassionate help us to feel more connected and less fearful. A dose of appropriate humor is also appreciated."*

**DOWNLOAD**  
THE FULL RESOURCE HERE



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# RESIST

the trend to become a  
“big brother” to employees





As many media outlets have recently reported, some managers are turning to surveillance software to ensure employees are productive while working from home. Some employers are even requiring employees to constantly keep webcams on to monitor their active work hours. They are also scheduling multiple daily check-ins to keep a close eye on employee activity. This is a big mistake as it erodes the trust that is vital to a healthy employer/employee relationship. Employers should manage productivity not by the hours spent, but by the results their employees deliver. Are your team members meeting their deadlines? Engaging effectively with their coworkers? Helping to deliver innovations and impressive results for the business? That is what really matters, not whether they had a lunch break or took the dog for a walk.

## **DEMONSTRATE YOU CAN BE TRUSTED**



As a leader, trust starts – or stops – with you. Trust is contagious. When you trust others and demonstrate that you can be trusted, it builds an opportunity for others to trust and be worthy of trust. Here are a few of the ways to build trust in everyday scenarios:

- Keep your promises
- Give credit when others do great work
- Admit if things go wrong or don't turn out as you planned
- Be approachable and friendly, people trust others they like
- Instead of using your position of power, work to win over people
- Ensure your words and your actions match
- Actively listen and check for understanding by paraphrasing what you've heard
- Show support for your team members, even when mistakes happen
- Be honest and tell the truth; Telling people what you think they want to hear erodes trust
- Collaborate with others across teams and functions and avoid silos and turf battles



As challenging as the COVID-19 pandemic has been for everyone working today, it provides employers a much-needed opportunity to rethink their vision for the future of work. Now more than ever, it is time to re-write the rules in ways no one even imagined only weeks ago. The changes to come could result in a completely transformed work environment, or at least a far more flexible one.

**IN THE END, I'M HOPING TO SEE A TRANSITION  
THAT DELIVERS A WIN-WIN FOR EVERYONE,  
BOTH EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES ALIKE...**



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# DAVID GROSSMAN, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, CSP

David helps leaders drive productivity and get the results they want through authentic and courageous leadership and communication. He's a sought-after speaker and advisor to Fortune 500 leaders, and three-time author. His latest book, "No Cape Needed: The Simplest, Smartest, Fastest Steps to Improve How You Communicate By Leaps and Bounds," recently won the Pinnacle Book Award for the "Best in Business" category and the Beverly Hills

International Book Award's President's award. His other books include, "You Can't NOT Communicate: Proven Communication Solutions That Power the Fortune 100," now in its second edition, and its follow up, "You Can't NOT Communicate 2". His leader**communicator** blog is also ranked the #1 blog on communication by Feedspot for the third year in a row. David counsels leaders at top organizations to unleash the power of strategic internal communication

and drive performance. Clients include Abbott, Astellas Pharma, CVS Health, Health Quest, Hillrom, Johnson & Johnson, Kimberly-Clark, Lockheed Martin, McDonald's, NYU Langone Health, Sage Therapeutics, U.S. Pharmacopeia and Wyndham, among others. He's Founder and CEO of The Grossman Group, an award-winning Chicago-based strategic leadership development and internal communications consultancy, and teaches at Columbia University in NYC.

David has been featured in:

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

NIGHTLY NEWS

TODAY

Chicago Tribune

FAST COMPANY

Los Angeles Times

## LET'S PARTNER

If you're looking to improve how your organization navigates the evolution of the workplace today, we can help. These are just some of the ways we're supporting organizations today:

- Develop strategies and plans to keep employees informed, connected and inspired
- Facilitate focus groups to learn from employees what's working well and what could be better, to help inform decisions you make as an organizational leader
- Coach leaders to be even more effective during times of change
- Provide tactical implementation writing and communication support
- And more



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