



Bridge the distance during virtual year-end reviews

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Conducting year-end performance and development reviews in a normal year can be challenging enough. But 2020 is anything but normal.

Beyond the likely more complex content of the conversation, you'll likely be conducting some, if not all, of these meetings at a distance. That means fewer cues, diminished human connection, technology glitches, and greater potential for misunderstandings and misalignment.

While it may take more effort virtually, there are countless small things that leaders can do to create a positive connection and a memorable experience that will leave employees feeling valued, engaged, recognized and motivated as a result of this year's reviews.

Make sure that you both have access to the necessary documents

Since virtual interaction requires a bit more preparation, ensure that all necessary documents are distributed well in advance of the meeting. Then, during the review, use screen sharing and annotation tools to create the feeling of sitting across a desk collaborating on a document.

Establish a celebratory tone even from miles away

Imagine the delight when the employee answers the door minutes before your meeting to find that you had their favorite food or beverage delivered. With services like UberEats, it's easy to personalize the experience and set a positive tone.

Add some fun

Anxiety can be a part of the review process any year; but 2020 introduces the opportunity for even greater nervousness. Additionally, everyone could use a little lightness of the heaviness

of the past nine months. So, consider ways to take the edge off. Introduce a delightful surprise by using a silly but appropriate filter or border. Laughter is known to reduce stress and increase oxygen... both of which will contribute to a richer conversation.

Be present and curious enough to recognize and act upon every cue possible

Given the events of 2020, this year's performance and development conversations might be the most important of your career -- and likely so for your employees, too. A meaningful celebration of successes, as well as consideration of challenges and learning, requires all of the focus and care you can muster. So, mute notifications and eliminate all environmental distractions so you can deploy 100% of your attention toward reading and responding to the employee's virtual reactions.

Create as human a connection as possible despite the technology

Use whatever features your platform might have to humanize the experience. Have your view of the other person take up the full screen and as close to life size as possible. Look directly at the camera when speaking to approximate eye contact. If you both have the necessary documentation in advance, there's no need to trade face-sharing for document sharing for the entire meeting.

Visualize your key messages

The standard documentation you create will include the key points you'll want to make but consider creating a summary slide featuring what you think is most impressive and important. It might include key achievements, feedback from others, pictures and more. Imagine the pride and engagement this small amount of extra effort can foster.

Make note-taking visible

Since it can be unnerving for the employee to see you making notes during this important event, use a whiteboard or chat window to capture highlights, agreements and/or next steps. This transparency creates greater comfort and ensures that you're on the same page.

The time and energy you invest in bridging the virtual distance will ensure that this year's performance and development reviews make the most of the challenges associated with 2020 and help employees move into 2021 better prepared to take on whatever is ahead.

Looking for additional ideas and resources to ensure effective year-end employee performance and development reviews? Download the complimentary e-toolkit "Hot Mess? Dumpster Fire? Train Wreck? You Still Have to Conduct Year-End Reviews." In it, you'll find a novel way to get employees to prepare, a roadmap to a productive conversation, the must-ask questions, pitfalls, tips for handling it remotely, and even strategies for addressing the dreaded money question.

Julie Winkle Giulioni works with organizations worldwide to improve performance through leadership and learning. Named one of Inc. Magazine's top 100 leadership speakers, Giulioni is the co-author of the Amazon and Washington Post bestseller "Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go: Career Conversations Organizations Need and Employees Want," You can learn more about her speaking, training and blog at JulieWinkleGiulioni.com.

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