

10 Ways to Unleash Your Employees' Potential in 2021

You've heard it before, and you'll hear it again: 2020 was a rough year. And few of us (if any) were left untouched by the various forces that rocked our world. Your company has been through close to 12 months of rough terrain, and you're ready to get back on track. The new year presents an ideal opportunity to shift from surviving to thriving.

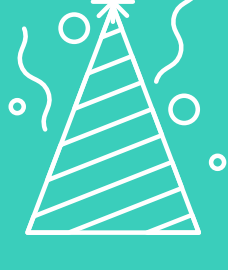
Following is a list of ten ways to unleash your employees' – and your company's – potential based on major trends we see on the 2021 horizon.



1

THROW A "HINDSIGHT IS 2020" OFFICE PARTY

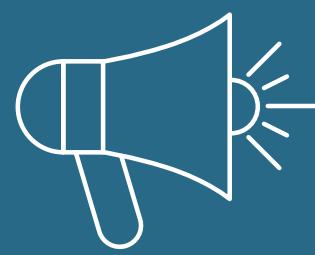
Let's all breathe a collective sigh of relief that 2020 is behind us. Your employees are probably suffering serious holiday (and 2020) hangovers, so kick-start the new year by throwing a virtual or in-person "Hindsight is 2020" party! The goal for this shindig is to simply have fun. It's not the time to initiate a strategy session or discuss your company's new policies. Focus on welcoming 2021 with open arms and a positive outlook. If you're (safely) partying in person, drape your workspace in decorations for the new year, put on a playlist brimming with employee favorites and play games that are social distancing-friendly, but fun. Challenge everyone to wear their fanciest – or most creative – facemask and gift hand sanitizers and other COVID-19-approved items as party favors. You can do the same for a virtual party with a few tweaks. This is a fantastic way to demonstrate appreciation for your employees' hard work during a difficult year and proactively step into 2021 as a unified team.



2

ORGANIZE AN EMPLOYEE RESET RALLY

After the office party, it's time to get down to business. Once your employees have had a little time to settle into work, consider holding a virtual company-wide rally to talk 2021. The agenda for this meeting should feature weighty subjects—new and revised (pandemic-related) policies and procedures, goals for the new year, and diversity and inclusion initiatives—but approach them from a positive point of view. Acknowledge the challenges your company faced in 2020 and seek feedback from employees about how your company can enact real change in 2021. Discuss accountability measures and next steps, including your company's plans to hold mid-year and end-of year rallies where you discuss progress and make adjustments. Use your company rally as a launchpad for a year of insightful change and growth.



3

LAUNCH A 2021 INNOVATION MOVEMENT

It may have been hard for some businesses to look in the mirror in 2020, if what they saw staring back was a somewhat stale organization set in its ways. Collectively, the pandemic, social justice movements and an economic downturn took America by the shoulders and shook us out of a state of apathy. Take advantage of this awakening—and your employees' need to hear, feel and see change—to innovate within your own workplace. Launch a 2021 Innovation Movement designed to spur new ideas, fresh perspectives, proactive change and dialogues across your organization. Your "movement" can take many forms. Start by creating a diverse committee supported by Human Resources (HR) to lead the effort, hold brainstorming events to encourage employee input, and plan monthly or quarterly launches to celebrate milestones.



4

CREATE A LIVING, BREATHING TRAINING PROGRAM

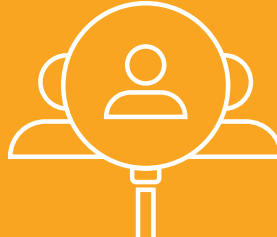
The COVID-19 pandemic spurred a range of changes in the workplace—both temporary and permanent. These changes should be communicated to your employees and make their way into your company's policies and procedures. Develop a [robust employee training program](#) that focuses on new and revised office policies, procedures and safety protocols. Make it virtual, in-person (or both), and have it accompanied by written documents and digital information posted on your company's intranet. Then plan for the future. As 2021 progresses and your company faces new challenges, revise your policies and procedures and incorporate those into your training program. As you bring employees back to the workplace or shift to a long-term hybrid environment, new training programs that build skills in online communication, engagement, and management of remote and hybrid teams will grow in demand.



5

EXPAND RECRUITING EFFORTS IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

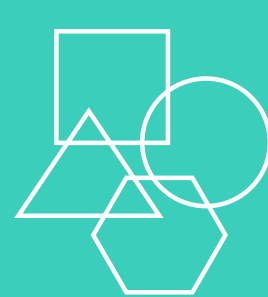
When offices, stores and restaurants were faced with the coronavirus in 2020, they had no choice but to pivot operations or shut down altogether. Many employees were able to work remotely, which proved to be a game-changer for companies. Geographical boundaries faded away and companies discovered that, not only was remote working a viable option, virtual recruiting was as well. This opened the doors to a global talent pool for many businesses. Now is the time to push the boundaries of your company's recruiting program and find out if going online is a good option. Recruiting in a virtual environment is new to most, so it's important to adopt best practices and technology platforms to provide a best-in-class experience for prospective job candidates.



6

CHAMPION DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (D&I) INITIATIVES

Societal and cultural expectations are encouraging companies to move from simply setting diversity and inclusion (D&I) goals to making inclusion the norm in their workplace. Make 2021 the year [your company weaves D&I](#) into the fabric of your culture. If you don't have a D&I plan, create one. If you have one, review and revise it as needed. Choose an in-house representative to lead this effort, or consider bringing on a consultant with D&I expertise (like G&A) that can help you establish equity in your hiring practices, revise policies and procedures to ferret out potentially discriminatory practices and provide diversity training for all employees. Take meaningful, proactive steps to equalize the playing field for all employees. And, at the end of 2021, review your successes, failures, challenges and progress, and incorporate changes into your evolving D&I plan.



7

ELEVATE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

As the world slowly emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, many of its effects will linger with employees, including stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness and more. [Mental health](#) awareness campaigns are becoming mainstream, as are the availability of resources for individuals and families who struggle with mental health issues and challenges. Still, many people fear being shamed or sidelined if they seek help through their employer-sponsored healthcare provider. A company-wide mental health awareness campaign is a proactive way to educate employees about available counseling and mental health resources provided through your healthcare and employee assistance plans. You can distribute information through printed and digital resources, a virtual mental health fair, and employees designated to provide information about options in a private setting. Above all, continue to demonstrate empathy for your employees who are coming off a year of tremendous upheaval and change.



8

HOLD AN INTER-OFFICE TECH CONFERENCE

The world was already in the midst of a technological revolution, when 2020 came along and sped up the process tenfold! Companies implemented technology that accommodated expanding digital needs and a new remote workforce. Employees who once stuck to software programs to perform in-office job duties started exploring the digital world of apps, virtual meeting platforms, and more. While many of these may not be incorporated into your office-sphere due to cybersecurity issues, it does make sense to draw on employees' experiences to learn what worked for them—and didn't—while in a remote setting. Plan a mini inter-office technology conference where employees can pitch digital tools they discovered and used in quarantine, explore new tools that your IT department is considering and discuss your workforce's technological skill gaps and training needs.



9

ADOPT A "FAMILIES FIRST" STRATEGY

A funny thing happened when millions of employees transitioned to [working from home](#). Parents rediscovered the ups and downs of caring for children and pets, 24/7. People traded dinners out for home cooking and evenings at the movies for Netflix. In short, we rediscovered the wonders of home and family. And the truth is, as we move forward, most employees don't want to return to normal, but they do want to keep their jobs and contribute to their company. Because your company adopted a family first outlook during the pandemic, why not keep it in place? Consider shifting to a more permanent remote work program that allows employees to work from home a few days a week or a month—whatever version works best for your business. Your employees bear a heavy weight of responsibility outside of the office. Your investment in them will pay dividends in the long run.



10

PLAN FOR THE NEXT PANDEMIC

It sounds dire and depressing, but it's our reality. We must plan as if another pandemic will happen in our lifetime. Take what you've learned this year and proactively put it to work. Safeguard your employees with a Pandemic Response Plan or a section in your company's [emergency response plan](#) that addresses pandemic-related policies, procedures and protocols. Stay on top of federal, state and local regulations that apply to emergency response in the workplace, as well as those that pertain to the COVID-19 pandemic which continues to affect a majority of American businesses. Do your part to safeguard your employees year-round by promoting [health and wellness programs](#) and continue to provide them up-to-the-minute access to COVID-19 information. In a nutshell, show employees compassion, communicate important information and share helpful resources.



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