

Seven Ways to Maximize Homebound Employees' Time

As businesses transition their traditional workforce to working remotely, many are finding that some positions are harder to convert than others. Still others are encountering coronavirus-related business slowdowns that are leaving workers with unproductive time on their hands. Layoffs or furloughs may seem like the only options, but both carry the risk of costly knowledge leak. Employers interested in retaining their workforce can take a page out of seasonal businesses' playbooks to discover ways to best utilize employees as they wait out COVID-19.

1. Participate in professional development.

Employers know that professional development is important but often have a difficult time pulling staff away from essential job functions to participate. For some employees, now is an ideal time to catch up on those training initiatives. Professional development can take different forms, which can include listening to industry podcasts, reading leadership-development books, or attending online courses.

Professional development can be specific to an employee's job function (e.g. brushing up on Microsoft Excel skills) or more generalized (e.g. handling conflict at work). If your training budget is limited, many of the software programs you may already have, [Microsoft 365](#) for example, offer complementary online tutorials and training videos.

2. Develop process-documentation manuals.

Process documentation outlines the exact steps that need to be taken to complete a task from start to finish. This document also includes screenshots and links to associated files. Not only does process documentation help preserve the company knowledge, but it can also be a useful tool for training.

Employees can be tasked with creating process documentation for their key job responsibilities and then assembling these processes into a comprehensive digital manual. This manual should be reviewed and updated annually, or as new processes are implemented.

3. Cross-train.

Like process documentation, cross-training helps protect companies against disruption of services and knowledge leak. When employees learn the skills needed to perform an additional job function successfully, they become an incredible asset. In addition to being able to step in and provide coverage for their coworkers' planned and unplanned absences, they can also be called up to provide additional support during peak times.

Not only does cross-training benefit the company, it can benefit the employees as well. The employees learn new skills and gain a better understanding of other aspects of the organization.

Cross-training is made easier when employees have access to the process documentation mentioned earlier. Depending on the type of skills being taught, trainers may need to have the ability to share their computer screen.

4. Communicate with customers.

If a business has slowed due to the coronavirus, it's possible their customers are running at a slower pace as well. This could be a great opportunity for employees to call the clients to let them know how much their business is valued. Another option is to survey employees via phone calls or anonymous online surveys.

5. Follow up on outstanding invoices.

Contacting customers about unpaid invoices can be tedious, which is why many businesses struggle to keep up with it. Most account-receivable departments would welcome the help contacting customers about unpaid invoices. Employees can be given a script to follow and either email customers or make phone calls.

6. Conduct competitor research.

Employees don't need a Master of Business Administration (MBA) to research the competition. They can be tasked with reviewing websites, reading reviews, and monitoring social media. Where is the competitor's advertising? What is their pricing? What types of positions are they hiring? The goal is to identify what the competition does well, where they have weaknesses, and what the customers are saying about their products and service.

7. Problem-solve.

Front-line employees have a unique perspective that may be often overlooked. Now could be an ideal time to gather valuable input from employees on how to improve processes. What problems are they observing? Do they have ideas for cost savings,

potential new customers, or untapped business opportunities? These same employees can be assigned to teams and tasked to develop potential solutions or action steps based on the shared feedback.

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