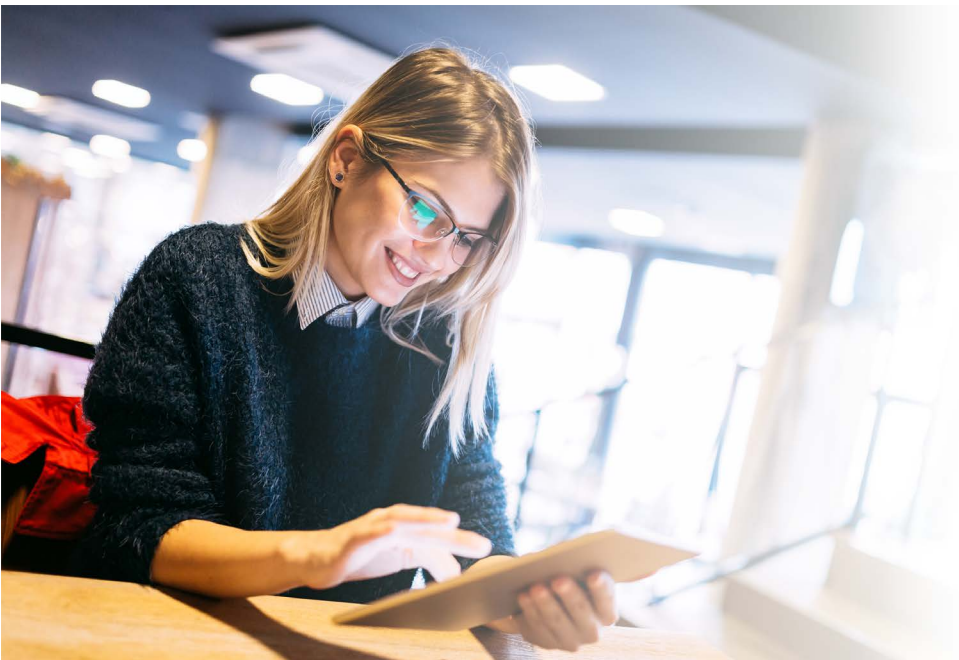# Increasing Employee Engagement in the Remote World of Work

Essential Steps for Behavioral Health & Human Services Organizations

Introduction

Employee engagement continues to be a top priority among behavioral health and human services organizations. It's well documented by now how closely tied employee engagement is to the organization's overall success. We know that engaged employees are productive employees – ones who are more likely to go the extra mile the ensure the best results for the organization and its clients. However, employee engagement continues to be an area where human services executives and employees alike see room for improvement, and it's an area where continuous improvements are needed.

While improving employee engagement is a gradual process where you won't see results overnight, it is an area where simple steps taken today can make a lasting impact on every employee throughout the organization. Especially in today's new world of work, doubling down on your employee engagement initiatives can offer a strategic advantage for attracting and retaining top talent while producing the transformative outcomes your organization is on a mission to achieve.

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Increase Workforce Visibility in Hybrid & Remote Work Environments

The concept of management by wandering around doesn't apply when all or even half of your employees are working remotely. But workforce visibility is still needed even when employees aren't physically present in the office. Managers need to ensure employees have the tools and resources they need to be productive, no matter where they're working. And employees need to show that they're able to be productive, whether they're in the office or not. Therefore, strategies are needed to address workforce visibility in a way that's equitable for on-site and remote workers.

Who's the Most Concerned About Workforce Visibility?

It may come as a surprise, but it's not your leadership team. According to the 2021 Work Tech Report, executives and those at the highest job levels were the least concerned with workforce visibility. Meanwhile, front-line staff and those in non-supervisory roles showed the highest levels of concern about their visibility.

This provides an important clue about how to address workforce visibility. If executive leaders aren't concerned about this visibility, they're probably already seeing the big-picture results and outcomes they desire at an organizational level. The concern about visibility appears to be more granular, at a much more individual level, as dispersed employees want to ensure their contributions are still being seen.

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Recognizing Employee Contributions

Understanding who's concerned about workforce visibility and why paves the way for better strategies. In this case, employee recognition seems to be the missing puzzle piece. While individual productivity may be continuing to contribute to organizational outcomes, those individual employees may not be getting the feedback they need to understand that their work is recognized and appreciated. Especially in a remote environment where water cooler chats and passing conversations have been minimized, those front-line and non-supervisory employees may feel that they are increasingly operating in the dark.

Fortunately, establishing and implementing an employee recognition program is one of the simplest (and lowest-cost) steps an organization can take to remedy this situation. In particular, an online platform for recognizing and celebrating employees creates a unified system for allowing on-site and off-site staff to participate equally in giving and receiving recognition.

By encompassing both manager recognition of their direct reports and peer-to-peer recognition, human services leaders can encourage better participation at all levels of the organization. From celebrating milestones to recognizing someone who lent a helping hand, an online employee recognition system can foster appreciation and help remote employees continue to feel connected to the organization as a whole.

Thanks for all your help today!

Clients always have the best things to say about you.

Great presentation yesterday. Excited for Q4!

In the 2021 Work Tech Report, 83% of human services professionals indicated their organization promotes a positive company culture through **communication and transparency.**

Human Connection in a Virtual World

In a dispersed work environment, another challenge to employee engagement is maintaining that ever-so-important human connection. An online recognition system is a great start, but falls short of being a complete solution for fostering a sense of connectedness to the other people at the organization.

Human services professionals overwhelmingly indicated that they're able to provide effective care both in person and remotely. Due to regulatory requirements and the nature of the services these organizations provide, a lot of human services leaders focused on the clients and ensuring continuity of services in the early days of the pandemic. While these efforts may have initially been seen as a temporary scenario that we just have to deal with for the time being, now we've seen that, in many cases, hybrid and remote work is here to stay.

From Temporary Solutions to Sustainable Practices

That shift in perspective changes the approach that human services leaders need to take in how they think about delivering care. Those temporary solutions just to hold the fort down until things can go back to "normal" were generally not focused on the ongoing needs of employees. And we now know that the future of work is not simply a back to normal situation. Therefore, a more sustainable approach for the long-term means putting some focus back on the employees, ensuring your workforce is still cared for and has the tools, resources, and information needed to be successful.

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Regular Communication as an Essential Engagement Strategy

Communication is essential to human connection. It's the person-to-person interaction that enables collaboration and camaraderie. At an organizational level, communication is essential for improving employee engagement, as it keeps remote workers connected to the goings-on of the organization and how their individual work contributes to the whole. While this type of communication can be accomplished through an email, that's missing a huge opportunity for more personalization and opportunity to connect.

When possible, company-wide or department-wide video meetings offer a better alternative for establishing and maintaining a human connection across the workforce. This method of communication is great for both on-site and remote staff as it:

> ◈ Allows for real-time interactions between receiving information and responding
>
> ◈ Enables employees to see each other face to face (albeit still virtually) so that facial expressions and verbal cues can help communicate meaning and tone
>
> ◈ Provides employees with the opportunity to ask questions so that everyone can hear the answer

Some considerations when using video meetings to improve communication and connectedness include the time, length, and frequency of the meetings as well as what type of information will be covered. The best option for your workforce will depend on the structure, operation, and unique culture of your organization.
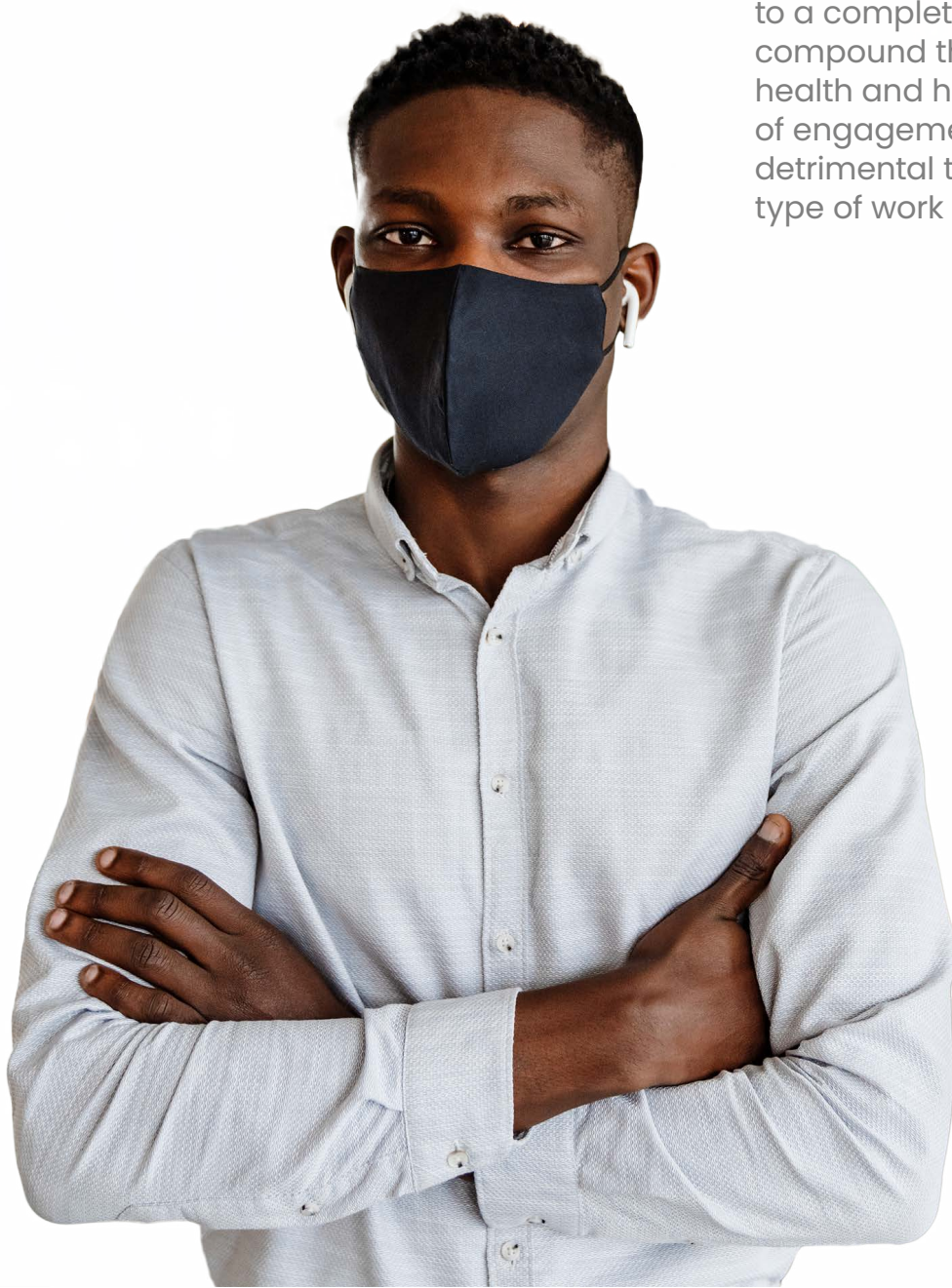
> "Burnout occurs when an individual has experienced **prolonged demands, chronic stress, fatigue, a lack of support**, and a **decreased satisfaction** in what they are doing."
>
> **Dr. Asa Don Brown**

Employee Burnout & Compassion Fatigue

Employee burnout has become a widespread concern across a range of industries as workloads increase and the division between work and personal life becomes increasingly blurred. But burnout is perhaps seen and felt the most within the behavioral health and human services industry, where compassion fatigue among clinical staff has long been a concern as well.
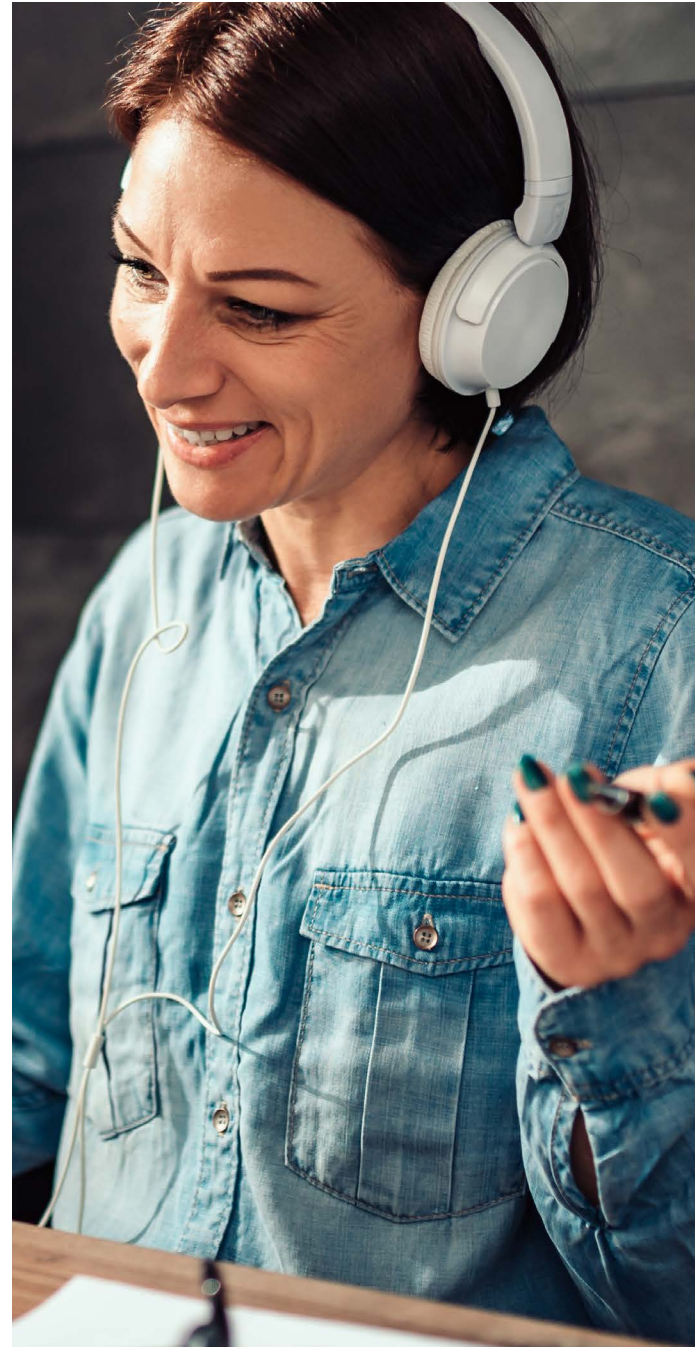
Increased demand for services and adjusting to a completely new world of work only compound the challenges faced by behavioral health and human services professionals. Lack of engagement is a symptom of burnout and detrimental to productivity no matter what type of work environment the employee is in.

Checking In to Avoid Checking Out

Direct supervisors and managers can take a lead role in helping to address and prevent burnout among their team members. Having regularly scheduled check-ins with employees can help ensure that human connection is maintained. And, in an increasingly remote world, making this an intentional effort is essential, as more casual conversations are less likely to happen naturally.

In addition to checking in, managers also need to be cognizant of employee workloads. The 2021 Work Tech Report found that front-line workers and those in a clinical position reported a higher level of concern about managing caseloads than those at other job functions and job levels. When caseloads become overwhelming and unsustainable, it leads to higher levels of stress among employees. Left unaddressed, this can easily turn into burnout. Working with employees to ensure workloads are manageable is a preventative step in the right direction. It also helps employees see that upper management recognizes what's on their plate and what they're doing, informally serving as a form of employee recognition as well.

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Access to Mobile Tools to Empower Employees

Ensuring employees have a manageable schedule also means looking at ways to make their day-to-day tasks easier. If they're too bogged down in administrative tasks, they'll have less time to focus on their functional roles and the meaningful work they contribute to the organization. This can be as simple as enabling employees to clock in and out of work from their phone or as comprehensive as providing an integrated system for scheduling clients and uploading case notes.

Leveraging Technology in Your Engagement Strategy

In a remote or hybrid world of work, technology is an essential tool for enabling employees and improving the employee experience. From facilitating communication to streamlining repetitive tasks, the right technology solutions can be leveraged to increase employee engagement and enhance the overall experience employees have at your organization.

For behavioral health and human services organizations, finding the right technology is easier said than done, as complex operational processes and workforce structures don't fit neatly into most tech solutions. Furthermore, investing in the wrong technology can be detrimental – having the opposite of the desired effect on employee engagement and process improvements. Ideally, the technology you leverage for your workforce operations should be unified, providing a single source of truth, and tailored to your unique needs, to enable your workforce rather than hindering your people.

Technology on its own isn't the solution to employee engagement. Leadership and human-centered strategies are the essential elements of any successful employee engagement initiative. However, technology has become a necessary tool in enabling employees and allowing for employee engagement strategies to be successful.

About ContinuumCloud

ContinuumCloud offers a spectrum of cloud-based software solutions intentionally designed to meet the unique needs of the behavioral health and human services industry. These solutions include an EHR platform, powered by Welligent, and an HCM system, powered by DATIS HR Cloud. Through these offerings, ContinuumCloud empowers organizations to provide high-quality care and deliver on their mission.

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Have questions?
We have answers.

Contact us at any time by emailing hello@continuumcloud.com or call us directly at 877.386.1355.