

SELECT

How to foster a culture of community during COVID and beyond

Creating a culture of community at your company will help everyone feel more appreciated, engaged and acknowledged — not just now, but into the future. Here are a few ways that you can foster that



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BY JILL BUTLER

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As local businesses, we have a responsibility to the communities that support us to create spaces — both literal and figurative — for [connection at a time](#) when it's needed the most.

As business owners, it's up to us to build this responsibility into the way we run our companies. That starts with ensuring that our businesses are more than just a place for employees to punch the clock. We can do this by deliberately and thoughtfully creating a culture of transparency and community.

Why a culture of community matters — now and into the future

Despite the physical distance the pandemic has created in our workplaces and beyond, you've probably felt a little closer to the people you work with this past year. It's not surprising. The switch to remote work for companies across practically every industry forced [over half the country's](#) workforce to invite coworkers into their kitchens, dens and home [offices via video calls](#).

Inman Connect



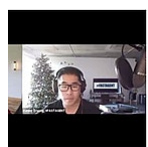
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partners sharing makeshift office spaces.

With millions resigned to quarantining at home, and [over a third](#) of Americans reporting feeling lonely and isolated multiple times per week since the start of the pandemic, our workplaces have become vital sources of sorely needed social connection.

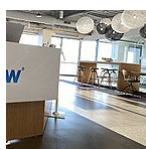
Creating community is about more than just connecting, though; it's about connecting deeply and meaningfully. It's about making space, not just for your teams, but for every individual on those teams to be heard, seen and valued.

2020 also brought another crucial reminder about the [importance of community](#) in the form of powerful calls [for racial equality](#). Just as business leaders must find ways for employees to connect even when in-person interaction is limited, we must also find ways for employees to talk openly and compassionately even when the conversations are difficult.

How to foster a culture of community

Creating a [culture of community](#) at your company will help everyone feel more appreciated, engaged and acknowledged — not just now, but *always*. Here are a few ways that you can foster a culture of community in your business:

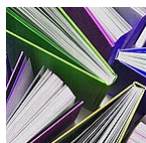
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1. Create comfortable spaces

Nothing makes you appreciate the incredible variety in the way spaces are designed than being stuck in the same one for too long. While safety and sanitation guidelines may change after the pandemic, our new shared awareness of the importance of space likely won't.

When you begin thinking about what a return to a physical office space will look like for your team, consider how you can create variety in your workplaces. For example, we designed our new training and media center with health and safety (plus different work styles) in mind.

What's more, in our new office, we created a coffee bar designed specifically [for social distancing](#) and equal spaces for individual, small team and large group work — with enough room to safely spread apart.

2. Inspire your team

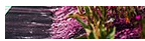
During high-stress times, [your team members](#) need to know they're supported. Find ways to make it easy for your team to support one another, both personally and professionally.

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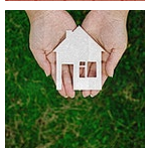


Everything that happened in 2020, the wildest year of our lives

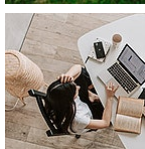
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At RedKey, we started an internal video series called “Lead Connect Grow,” where leadership, real estate agents and staff can share helpful, inspirational or empowering information to the group.

Each day, we also provide ideas for random acts of kindness so our team can find easy ways to touch the lives of people outside of the company, too. Getting personal with your team will not only make them feel supported during difficult times, but it’ll also help them work together more effectively.

3. Create a digital connection

With so many people staying home, it’s pivotal that your business is taking advantage of technology to stay connected with clients and the community. As we expand our offices, we’re looking for ways that our physical spaces can facilitate virtual connection, too.

This includes a recording space in our new training and media center that’s open to both RedKey and outside agents to help them connect with clients through videos, [podcasts and other](#) digital channels.

4. Get personal with your team and client meetings

The use of videoconferencing has been steadily surging since the pandemic began — and for good reason. When we can’t be face to face, being screen to screen is a substitute that coworkers and clients alike are grateful for.

For example, at RedKey, we've started using bits of prerecorded videos, live music and other creative elements to make our virtual meetings just as special and fun as if we were sitting at the same table.

5. Be vulnerable

It's important to commit to discussing things as a team — it will help you build trust and embed inclusion into the DNA of your company. Vulnerability begins at the top, so create dedicated time to give tough conversations the focus they demand, and lead by example.

We've started by having full team discussions about topics that may be uncomfortable at times, like race [and mental health](#). Our leadership team has prioritized re-examining how we can make a difference internally.

For us, this meant implementing special programs and creating specific goals around the ways that we, our teams and our business as a whole can become fiercer advocates for inclusion — including a deeper understanding of the [role that fair housing](#), race and behavioral health have in our industry and our community.

While these measures seem small, they will make a big difference to your team. Creating spaces, both physical and figurative, where employees are free to speak openly and safe to connect meaningfully is what turns your company into a community.

When you foster a sense of community in your company — deliberately, passionately and authentically — you're showing your team members that their personal successes are just as important as their professional ones. That they — and *every* client, customer, partner, coworker and neighbor — are uniquely and equally valued.

The best thing about [a culture of community](#) is the ripple effects; when your employees feel connected, the clients they serve see the positive impact, too.