8x8

Out of sight out of mind? Career development advice for remote employees

Practical tips remote workers can use to advance their careers

Introduction

Are higher paychecks, flexible work hours, and better benefits at the top of prospective employees' wishlists? While those perks certainly don't harm recruiting or retention efforts, what employees really want most may come as a surprise. According to **research from TINYpulse**, the opportunity for growth and advancement is top of mind. Employees who feel they're progressing in their career are 20% more likely to still be working at their company in one year's time. And **70% of high performing employees** say they'll need to leave their current employer to advance in their career. While remote employees most often want the same opportunities as their peers, they have to approach career growth more intentionally. We've interviewed dozens of experts, all of whom either work from home or manage remote employees, and in this eBook, we'll share their advice. Want to ensure you're not out of sight, out of mind? Keep reading.

Challenge #1
Lack of visibility and access to senior leaders

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In theory, remote employees have the same opportunities as office-based staff. However, if as Woody Allen notes, 80% of success is showing up, then it would seem remote employees have a great chasm to cross.

—Simon Slade, CEO and Co-founder of SaleHoo

In an informal poll, we asked remote workers to share what they felt held them back from promotions or other career growth opportunities. The top answer, by far, was a lack of presence, visibility, and access to organizational decision-makers. And more formal research backs up this assertion. According to a **2019 study conducted by Capterra**, 25% of millennial remote employees worry they're missing out on career opportunities. And the same study found that regardless of age, remote employees are more prone to **feeling left out or shunned by others**, partly because they're worried decisions and changes are being made without their input.

Simon Slade, CEO and Co-founder of **SaleHoo** has experienced this first-hand, both as a remote employee living overseas and as a manager of remote employees. His best advice for bridging the divide? Work on being heard when you can't be seen.

"Remote employees should accept that they are going to miss out on hallway conversations and often won't be top of mind for the urgent assignment. To combat this, they should sign up for key projects, volunteer to lead team meetings, and most importantly, develop a skill that complements one of their manager's shortcomings," says Slade. "For example, if your boss struggles with spreadsheets, become the Excel whiz she can't live without. If he botches key communications, showcase your skills as a one-man PR firm."

Tim Toterhi, TEDx Speaker and Career Coach at Plotline Leadership wholeheartedly agrees. "Visibility isn't about being seen. It's about being relied upon. Demonstrate your value and your manager won't care if you work from the moon," he says.

Beyond stepping up to take work off a managers' plate or volunteering to take on special projects, how can remote employees use technology to their advantage? Video plays a critical role, and maybe not just in the traditional meeting format. Brandon Griffin, a career coach and co-founder of Next Gen Forward, encourages his clients to schedule exploratory video meetings with team members they may not ordinarily interact with. Gaining visibility to leaders across departments increases your odds of finding a suitable career path, helps you to learn more about existing internal opportunities, and above all else, boosts your visibility.

"Don't be afraid to reach out to leaders and request a short 20–30 minute chat, just to learn more about them, their role, and department," he says.

Looking for a few quick, practical ways to boost your presence? Here are a few examples of special projects that are a great fit for remote employees to lead:

- Start a virtual book club

- Start a company-wide fundraiser to support a cause you're passionate about

- Join the beta testing group for new company product features

- Start a team fitness challenge—see who can log the most steps each week, or drink the most water

- Organize an Hour of Code event for your team

- Start a Fantasy Football League or a March Madness bracket challenge

Challenge #2
Fewer opportunities for formal training and coaching

When monthly lunch and learns, new product demos, hackathons, or keynote speeches take place in company HQ, employees who work remotely often miss out on those opportunities to connect and learn. Particularly when teams span timezones and offering in-office training sessions virtually isn't feasible. But that's no excuse to ignore ongoing learning and development opportunities, many of which exist locally or online.

"Employees who are committed to self-improvement are very impressive to management. Doing things like proactively learning a new language that is relevant to the company or acquiring computer programming skills will go a long way. Go-getters with a growth mindset will get promoted whether they are in-office or remote," says Kean Graham.
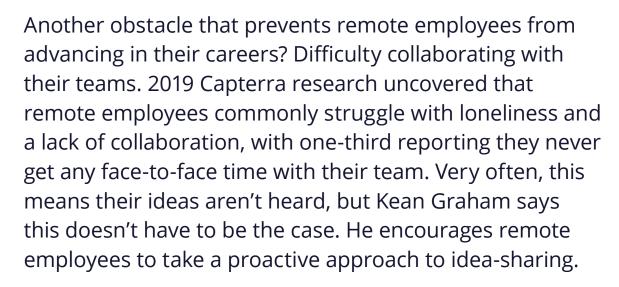
8 ways to engage in learning & development opportunities—no matter where you work

1. Attend free online webinars—both internal and external
2. Sign up for an online course via Udemy, LinkedIn Learning, or Coursera
3. Seek out a professional certification
4. Join a local chapter of your profession's association (Ex: The American Marketing Association, The Chamber of Commerce, etc.)
5. Flex your public speaking skills by joining a local Toastmasters Group
6. Join an online community or social media chat
7. Start—or join—a virtual book club
8. Attend a conference related to your profession

In essence, figure out what you want to do and determine the skills you'll need to learn to help you get there. Then take the initiative to fill the gaps.

"Management appreciates intentionality. Ask to have a career growth conversation with your manager and make your intentions be known," says Jordan Carroll. " If there's a certain role you want to be in about a year later, you can build out the steps to get there. Once you've made them aware of what you want, co-create a success plan with the metrics needed."

Challenge #3
More difficulty collaborating with peers

Another obstacle that prevents remote employees from advancing in their careers? Difficulty collaborating with their teams. 2019 Capterra research uncovered that remote employees commonly struggle with loneliness and a lack of collaboration, with one-third reporting they never get any face-to-face time with their team. Very often, this means their ideas aren't heard, but Kean Graham says this doesn't have to be the case. He encourages remote employees to take a proactive approach to idea-sharing.

"When working in an office and being in face-to-face meetings, brainstorming is more effective and more opportunities for new projects arise. To compensate for this, a remote employee should be more proactive to suggest improvements or new opportunities for the company," says Graham. "This will get noticed by management and will be a great way to ensure the remote employees' upward mobility in the company."

Early in 2019, 8x8 commissioned a research study on workplace collaboration in partnership with Hanover. The findings? Aside from connectivity issues, the biggest stumbling block to collaboration is miscommunication due to a lack of face-to-face interaction. Does that mean the burden is on remote employees to over-communicate? Forbes Coaches Council member Jordan Carroll says the best remote employees find ways to overcome this challenge.

"As a remote employee, you have to be able to create high bandwidth communication from afar. As you're trying to become indispensable to your employer, one of the biggest challenges of being remote is not being able to impact your teammates in person. Find tools that can help you: use video walkthroughs, voice notes, and pick up the phone and call someone when you have a question," he says. "Always be prepared to over-communicate, and document any processes for your job that you can. The more you can bridge the communication gap, the easier it will be—and if you've created documentation for your job processes, you can train the person that replaces you as you advance up the ladder."

Looking for ways to make a bigger impact with your communication and collaborate more effectively with your peers? Consider these **five tips from the 8x8 blog**.

5 ways to improve collaboration on distributed teams

1.   Commit to Communication 'House Rules'

Communication on virtual teams can be as rich as in-person interactions with the right behavioral engagement guidelines. House rules, when established and used properly, can set the right tone and proper context for respectful, positive team engagement.

For virtual meetings, house rules might include requiring meeting agendas with expected outcomes, limiting side conversations, going on mute, staying attentive, and avoiding multitasking. Teams working across different time zones might also consider equalizing the time-zone burden when possible and establishing a rotation of meeting times.

2.   Be Mindful of the Medium

Do you like receiving a text at 4 am from out-of-country colleagues? It's helpful to establish clear expectations for the use of different communications tools. For instance, certain communication methods imply urgency but may differ across geographies and cultures. It's important to agree on which communication modes work best for your virtual team and under what circumstances.

3. Sharing = Caring

Building a network of open, interpersonal trust happens when co-workers can develop understanding and empathy for their fellow team members' roles, challenges, successes, passions, and interests. In-office employees often share casual conversation at the coffee station or chat on their way to a meeting. That kind of communication doesn't happen as easily when you're miles apart. Building rapport with virtual colleagues needs to be intentional to create those connections that are typically present in an in-office environment.

4. Invest in Great Tools

Good communication begins with great technology. Technology is the lifeblood of a virtual team. Every virtual team member needs a high-quality headset to optimize their audio experience. Make sure your selected headset includes noise cancellation to filter out distractions from ambient noise and allows for clear, ungarbled sound.

5. Don't Forget Your Voice

Using a communications platform like 8x8 Virtual Office provides the transparency you need in the office (regardless of where you are). It also seamlessly integrates your business phone or soft-client with voicemail, company directory, instant messaging, video calling, fax, call recording, and video conferencing. Add in presence status and you have a perfect collaboration toolset. While people may not see you physically, they can reach you quickly when they know you're available versus on a call or in a meeting.

Challenge #4
Lack of awareness of the opportunities for advancement

In-office employees who have a track record of success are usually the first to find out when new positions open up in the company. As a remote employee, you have to establish your own record of success and share it widely. Why? You want to become the first person management thinks of when a new opportunity becomes available. This means no matter how humble you may be, you have to become comfortable sharing your wins with others.

"The hallway introductions to new leaders don't happen naturally when you are remote. The spur of the moment conversation around a whiteboard about a special project happens with the people in close proximity," says Aimee Lucas, Senior Principal Analyst at Qualtrics. "Know those moments and consider how to build relationships with the people who create those moments so that you are not out of sight, out of mind."

Looking for some non-cringeworthy ways to toot your own horn? Here are a couple of easy-to-implement ideas:

1. **Keep a file folder in your email with compliments from customers and kudos from coworkers.** That folder becomes invaluable during end-of-year or quarterly review season. For those who feel awkward bragging about their accomplishments, this offers a loophole. Let your peers do the bragging for you.

2. **Share your excellent work on social media.** Did you win an industry award? Get an article published? Share it on LinkedIn or your company's internal social networks. You'd be surprised how often senior-level leaders see and appreciate those posts. Sharing your best work publically also spreads goodwill for the brand you represent, so it's a win-win.

And don't pass up the opportunity to go above and beyond if the option arises, says Simon Slade.

"Remote workers have to make more of an effort than in-office employees when it comes to making a personal impression on their manager. Because you aren't necessarily getting weekly facetime, you have to find other ways to get noticed for promotions and other growth opportunities. This means going the extra mile on all of your projects and demonstrating a deep commitment to your clients or the company you work for. Furthermore, it's important to be a candid communicator when it comes to job growth. Tell your manager or boss that you are looking to take on new challenges and explore more demanding roles. A good supervisor will applaud your proactivity and be impressed by your ambition, which will help you climb the ladder."

Bringing it all together

As the rate of remote work continues to rise, employees who choose to work on distributed teams will have to find ways to make themselves more valuable and nimble. In the war for talent, skills and ambition still win—regardless of location. But it's up to each employee to take charge of their professional growth and development.

Building a thriving career as a remote employee is possible with strong communication, careful collaboration, discipline, and presence. Having the right technology makes it all a whole lot easier, and 8x8 can help. With 8x8 video meetings, you can easily connect with anyone, from anywhere, with no limits. Make your next meeting with an 8x8 video meetings account. Totally free meetings, with no cutoff times. Sign up here to see for yourself: **8x8.vc**

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