

# How to Keep Your Team Focused and Positive in 2021



Skye Schooley

Staff writer

Business News Daily Staff

Dec 18, 2020

## Follow these steps to identify employee burnout and help your team stay focused and productive in the new year.

- Nearly three-quarters of workers are significantly less productive now, suffering stress and anxiety due to COVID-19.
- In 2021, employers should place a high priority on their employees' mental health.
- Ask each employee how their motivators and needs have changed this year, and create an employee engagement plan around their responses.
- **This article is for small business owners and team leaders who want to know how to reengage their teams and improve employee productivity and team morale in 2021.**

2020 was one of the most tumultuous and unsettling years for small businesses and employees alike. The COVID-19 pandemic spurred several unplanned business transformations, like company closures, employee [layoffs and furloughs](#), and remote work. It's no surprise that these sudden changes, in addition to the ongoing health crisis, have had a drastic impact on employee mental health, productivity, focus and morale.

In a [recent study by Ginger](#), 69% of workers claimed that "this was the most stressful time of their entire professional career, including major events like the September 11 terror attacks and the 2008 Great Recession," and 70% of workers agreed to being "significantly less productive because of stress and anxiety surrounding COVID-19."

Businesses and employees must continue to adapt to the new normal in 2021. The new year is a great time to reevaluate your business's processes and set new goals for keeping a healthy and productive workforce.

## How to keep your team focused, positive and committed

As a business leader, you need to put your employees first and nurture them to become the best employees they can be. This was a very transformational year, and your employees' needs and expectations have likely changed. We spoke to business leaders and mental health experts to

identify five strategies you can utilize to [boost company morale](#) and keep your team positive and focused throughout 2021.

### 1. Prioritize and vocalize employee mental health.

Employee mental health has been a hot-button issue lately, and for good reason. Employers can help their teams maintain good mental health by expanding their employee mental health benefits and educating their employees on how to take advantage of them.

For example, you could encourage employees to take time off, offer mental health days, allow flexible work schedules, and expand on formal healthcare benefits programs. You can also encourage employees to draw a line between their work and personal lives by asking them to avoid checking emails after work hours.

"Be transparent about what the company offers in terms of mental, emotional and physical support," Patrick Porter, neuroscience expert and creator of [BrainTap](#), told Business News Daily. "As employees feel their needs are met and that their employers understand them, employees will feel more committed to their companies and more positive and focused on their work."

Be sure to clearly communicate what your mental health resources and policies are, and encourage employees to take advantage of them.

### 2. Foster a workplace culture of open communication, frequent check-ins and anonymous feedback.

Communication is a key element of a productive workforce with high employee morale. Although how you communicate with your team may have changed over the year (e.g., using virtual platforms instead of talking in person), its importance has not diminished.

Business leaders should be frequently checking in with team members, [conducting employee surveys](#) and encouraging employee feedback. Another great addition is to offer a way for employees to provide anonymous feedback. Thoughtfully address any feedback you receive to ensure your team feels heard and understood.

### 3. Talk with each employee to reestablish their needs and expectations.

Your team members have faced changes in both their professional and personal lives in 2020, and that should be acknowledged.

"Employers need to be conscious that their employees have likely gone through a period of transformation – their needs, desires and motivators may have shifted in 2020," said Freddie Laker, founding partner of [Chameleon Collective](#). "It will be important for managers to take the time to speak to each employee and reestablish what drives employees."

Instead of assuming your team has the same needs as they did the prior year, discuss this with each member of your staff. Although every employee is unique, you can identify common themes in what they say to modify your organizational practices and boost employee morale.

#### 4. Offer positive feedback and employee recognition.

The success of your business is, in no small part, due to the efforts of your employees – and they should be reminded of that. Even if your team's productivity has decreased over the past year, it is important to highlight their wins. Offer positive feedback on what they're doing well, and remind them of the important role they play in helping the company achieve its goals. Recognition can serve as motivation to stay productive and engaged.

"Reinforce the positive impact of their work on their customers or other stakeholders," said [Josh Rovner](#), business consultant and author of *Unbreak the System*. "Remind them that what they're doing makes people happy (or makes peoples' lives easier or better)."

#### 5. Practice reassurance and understanding.

If your business has undergone changes over the past year (which it likely has), your employees may feel overwhelmed or burned out. Instead of letting these feelings fester, reassure your team by explaining the reason behind each change, and show them how each change can work in their favor. With that being said, adjusting to change does take time. If your employees continue to feel burned out, talk to them to find a solution.

"It's really important to talk about burnout openly and reassure your people that your goal is never to burn them out," Rovner said. "Tell them that if they're feeling overwhelmed or stressed, they need to speak up so you can help them problem-solve. Then, you just have to make sure you follow through on that."

***Key takeaway: You can keep your team focused by prioritizing employee mental health, reestablishing employee needs, fostering open communication, providing positive feedback, and practicing reassurance and understanding.***

## How to identify employee burnout

According to a [recent FlexJobs survey](#), 75% of people "have experienced burnout at work, and 40% said they've experienced burnout specifically during the pandemic." This isn't surprising, but every workplace should address it. The first step to reducing employee burnout is identifying it. There are several telltale signs that your employees may be burned out.

### Listen to your employees.

One way to identify employee burnout is simply to listen to them. Although some may directly tell you that they are struggling with burnout, Rovner said, seemingly innocuous phrases may

also indicate a problem. Listen for the frequent use of phrases like "I'm tired," "I'm just trying to keep my head above water", "thank goodness it's Friday," and "I wish it were Friday."

"If you hear a lot of people in your company say things like this frequently, you may have an undiagnosed burnout issue," Rovner said. "Even if you only hear one person or a couple of people say it a lot, there could be a deeper underlying issue. At the very least, it's worth exploring why that individual or those people are feeling that way."

When you hear these types of statements, Rovner suggests responding in a genuine way by saying something like, "I know you said you're tired frequently. Do you feel like you're burning out? What can I do to help?"

You can also listen to your employees by surveying them and addressing their responses.

Watch your employees' behavior.

Some employees aren't vocal about their burnout, but you may be able to recognize it through their actions. For example, Laker said, key indicators of burnout can include shorter attention spans, cranky behavior, clear fatigue, manic behavior, reduced engagement, absenteeism or longer work hours. Another key indicator to watch for is procrastination.

"[An employee] may tend to be completing their work at the final moment, as times of burnout often fuel toxic perfectionism, and therefore push for more procrastination," Porter said. "This procrastination is not a sign of laziness; rather, it is a sign of nearing absolute burnout."

When burnout hits, employees often become resentful, short-tempered, and overwhelmed, and a good employer will recognize these signs and jump in to assist, Porter added.

***Key takeaway: Identify employee burnout by listening to your employees and watching their behavior.***

## How to reengage burned-out employees

If you notice an employee is reaching the point of burnout, it is important to address it right away. Laker said an effective leader can step in, help the employee focus on higher-priority items, and give them permission to slow down.

"Many employees burn themselves out through an overwhelming sense of obligation to complete their tasks, and a strong manager can help them pull back, regain energy, pace themselves, then resume work effectively before reaching the point of burnout."

Laker recommends rebuilding company culture and reengaging burned-out employees by setting attainable, positive goals and implementing activities that can bring employees together in social ways – even if that means virtual activities.

"In 2020, many companies struggled to find ways to build their company's culture because traditional methods went out the window," Laker said. "Find ways to bring back the norm. Also, set short-term attainable goals that your employees and teams can achieve quickly and successfully. Having some quick wins is a great way to re-energize a company's culture."

Porter said one of the best ways to reengage employees is, again, by simply listening to them.

"Ask them questions, either personally or even through an anonymous response system," he said. "By showing employees you care through listening, they will feel more trust and greater engagement with the company."

***Key takeaway: You can help reengage burned-out employees by setting attainable goals and prioritizing team-building activities.***