



MAINTAINING MENTORING & CONNECTION IN A HYBRID ENVIRONMENT

Many organizations are reimagining their work environment after the pandemic, with flexible work at the heart of the discussion. A number of organizations are planning on instituting a hybrid work environment post-pandemic, based on positive productivity during the pandemic, employee feedback and desire to scale back real estate. A hybrid work environment involves employees working some of the time in the office and some of the time remotely. Organizations considering hybrid work models reap many benefits, but must make sure mentoring and connectivity are embedded in their culture and continuously fostered in order to thrive. To ensure that mentoring and connectivity are preserved within a hybrid workforce, organization should focus on these eight strategies:

- 1. Training.** Organizations should offer trainings on ways to develop mentoring relationships and maintain connections in a hybrid work environment. These skills are not always innate and organizations that provide such trainings will help foster these necessary relationships. Employee trainings should focus on effective ways to proactively build relationships, the need to be prepared and share specific goals, the importance of showing appreciation, and the benefits of developing relationships with many senior professionals. Supervisor trainings should cover the need to be receptive, ways to guide meetings/relationships with junior professionals, guidance on effectively helping with career development, and ways to be creative with mentoring in a hybrid environment.
- 2. Budgets.** Meetings and check-ins, both in-person and virtual, are vital to furthering mentoring and connections in a hybrid environment. Consider providing monthly/annual budgets to promote in-person and virtual coffee check-ins and lunch meetings. Organizations can also give out coffee gift cards for this purpose. By providing these budgets, organizations imbed mentoring into their culture and remind employees to keep mentoring top of mind.
- 3. Technology.** The right technology is key to thriving in a hybrid work environment. Proper technology allows for effective virtual collaboration and connections. Make sure that your organization outfits the office with necessary technology, such as high sound quality, clear video equipment, movable microphones, etc., so that those in the office can connect with those working remotely. Additionally, organizations should provide technology or stipends for employees to ensure their home offices have the necessary technology. This way, professionals can effectively connect and build mentoring relationships through virtual meetings and check-ins.

4. **Spotlights.** Focus on the positives and gather success stories along the way. Which employees have been able to build strong relationships? What types of activities did they do together? What do they suggest? How did they make it work? Make sure to publicize these successes to foster mentoring and connections, and show how it can work so others can replicate these efforts.
5. **Programs.** Create or leverage existing programs, such as affinity groups, mentoring programs, onboarding/integration programs, and sponsorship initiatives, to promote a culture of mentoring. How can you add virtual activities/events through existing programs? Should you add additional mentors through existing programs? Do you need to launch new mentoring initiatives to foster relationships?
6. **In-Person Events/Retreats.** Organizations need to host in-person events or retreats in a hybrid work environment, where employees are expected to attend. Consider monthly or quarterly in-person department events, where employees can come together. Think through hosting periodic social mixers where employees can meet and convene. Team and firm or company-wide retreats will be another important way to foster in-person connections.
7. **Virtual Benefits.** Make sure mentoring leverages benefits that exist in a hybrid work environment. Organizations fear that a hybrid/virtual environment could adversely affect connections – see our Harvard Business Review article, "[5 Myths about Flexible Work](#), discussing ways to overcome the fear of loss of connection. However, when it comes to mentoring, we have actually heard about specific benefits existing only in a hybrid/virtual environment. A number of professionals mentioned that including virtual measures in mentoring initiatives has led to more mentoring across offices, increased mentoring efforts of senior executives/partners, and allowed for more seamless group mentoring moments. We strongly encourage organizations to leverage the benefits of virtual mentoring by encouraging frequent video meetings, facilitating virtual group mentoring, incorporating inter-office mentoring, and reaching out to executives/partners to participate even if they weren't able to so in the past. Take a look at our [Bright Spot on Chapman & Cutler's virtual coffee chats](#), highlighting how the firm created a successful streamlined system to connect senior partners and junior associates and summer associates.
8. **Measure & Monitor.** For your organization to thrive in a hybrid environment, you must make sure that mentoring and relationship building is taking place. Make sure to measure mentoring and connections through stay interviews, check-in meetings, exit interviews and surveys. It's important to also make sure that you are asking the right questions to ensure that your processes are meeting employee needs. Have you developed mentoring relationships and connections? What types of activities (i.e.

work projects, pro bono projects, team events, etc.) helped foster these relationships?
What else can the organization do to help promote mentoring?

The Alliance is here to help you foster mentoring and connections in a hybrid or virtual work environment. Members have access to several Alliance resources as part of their benefits: the [Resource Library](#), [Strategy Calls](#), [Policy Reviews](#), [Advisory Hours](#) and [Signature Seminars](#). Take a look at our action step, [Leverage Alliance Benefits](#), which discusses ways to partner with us and most effectively utilize your benefits. To discuss specific strategic advice/resources, contact [Manar Morales](#).