

The Great eBook of Remote Employee Questions

Intro

Building and maintaining a strong remote company culture can be difficult when you only see your team for several minutes each week and can be especially challenging if these moments aren't optimized to be high-impact conversations. One of the ways I've been able to combat this challenge with my remote employees is by asking the right set of questions.

At [15Five](#), we've found that the key to building relationships is rooted in the art of inquiry. In our previous Question Master eBooks, we've equipped you with various questions aimed at helping you encourage ongoing feedback and improve company morale. This time around, we've put together a brand new series of questions curated specifically to support you in building highly engaged and productive remote teams.

As Chief Culture Officer, I focus a large amount of time on building quality relationships with our remote employees to establish and maintain mutual trust. By digging deeper and regularly asking about things that are meaningful, you can establish a better team structure and cohesion and turn your imaginary office into something tangible.

Whether you are shifting into a remote workplace for the first time, or have been distributed from the start like us, here are 26 questions designed to help you strengthen your relationships with your remote employees so that you can enhance collaboration, creativity, and boost levels of motivation all year long.

Stay curious!



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CHIEF CULTURE OFFICER AT 15FIVE



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1-on-1 Boosters

Holding regular weekly 1-on-1s is important for staying closely connected with your remote employees. Here are questions you can use during those uninterrupted times to help you get the most out of every meeting.

How are you feeling, and what's your energy level?

This one may seem obvious, but when everyone works in the same physical space, managers can easily stop by their employee's desk and check in with them. Even nonverbals can give insight into how your people are feeling, but it's not as easy to pick up on these feeling states and energy levels over a slack message or email.

PRO TIP

At 15Five, we use the practice of [Intentional Energetic Presence](#), or IEP. This can be easily adapted in daily practices, like at the beginning of meetings, and the goal is to be open and honest about how present you are at that moment. You can share your IEP level using a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing the lowest energy level and disengagement, and 10 being the highest, most present energy level.

Are you crystal clear on your role and what you should be working on? If not, what aspects aren't clear?

Without role clarity, employees will work towards a path they can only assume is correct. Creating a [psychologically safe](#) environment begins with a well-defined role because working off of assumptions can quickly turn into misalignment, and when remote employees feel disconnected their development and growth with the company become heavily stifled. Regularly checking in with your employee by asking how clear they are in their role and current responsibilities can help them define what success looks like for their role so they can continually strive for it.

Psychological safety is defined as being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status or career.



How am I doing as a manager? Would you mind sharing your feedback?

Similar to providing role clarity, explicitly asking for feedback promotes a deep sense of psychological safety. It not only shows your employees that you care about their opinion, but that you're helping to create a safe space for them to be open and honest. Having dedicated moments with your remote employees, like regular 1-on-1s gives you the chance to dive deeper and ask for this valuable feedback.

What motivated you to do amazing work this week?

In life and in business, motivation bleeds into everything you do and it helps us choose where to focus in our busy lives. Where you derive motivation is connected to how you expend energy both short- and long-term. Learning more about what drives your people can allow you to better support them in maintaining those levels of engagement.

Intrinsic motivation is all about doing something to achieve a deeper, more personal reward than money or any other external validation can offer. Supporting intrinsic motivation is a more sustainable way to drive employee performance and is a core theme in 15Five's Best-Self Management methodology.

How is life going outside of work?

Checking in with your direct report on how they're doing outside of their normal work routine is important for learning who they are outside of working hours. And because you don't get the chance to see them face-to-face each day, this gives you the chance to see if anything is impacting their work that you can help support them on. Maybe they're having a rougher than average week because a family member is in the hospital, or their child is sick at home with the flu. Knowing this information creates the space for more empathy and allows you to be the best coach you can be.



Maintaining Productivity

When people know what is expected of them and what their priorities are, they can work steadily towards achieving audacious goals.

What are your primary goals this quarter?

People can be extremely busy and still contribute very little to overall [company objectives](#). Helping your employees be strategic by focusing on higher-impact tasks allows them to contribute to the company's success in big ways. This question lets you get to the bottom of how effective your internal communications really are and how aligned people stay when they work from home.

Are there any projects or issues that you are worried about in either the short- or long- term?

For many, worry eats up much of our energy that could be spent more productively. And when you can't see our employees sitting a few desks over, it might be impossible to recognize the look of concern without asking upfront. Sharing what makes us uneasy or just getting it out of our minds and into a doc frees up that energy to accomplish the things you really want to be focusing on.

Do you foresee any distractions that might keep you from making progress on your goals?

No matter where a person works, there will always be interruptions. And while there may be outside distractions that can interfere like reading the news or checking social media, there can be plenty of distractions in a work environment as well. Maybe your employees are receiving a mass influx of slack messages throughout the day or even saying yes to meetings that are taking up too much valuable time. Finding out what is stealing the focus of your employees can present an opportunity to help them better manage their time and avoid these distractions in the future.



Do you feel like you have plenty of autonomy? Is there anything you'd like more guidance on?

Until tested, it's hard to know just how much you can accomplish on your own. Having direct oversight and not enough challenges can sometimes limit our growth because it can feel safe relying on a person with greater experience and expertise. [Studies on employee autonomy](#) have shown that workplaces that embrace it reap a multitude of positive outcomes, such as higher levels of job satisfaction and fewer intentions to quit. Conversely, zero guidance whatsoever can lead to complete failure, followed by a downward spiral of shame and frustration. Finding the right amount of autonomy is key.

What are you spending time doing that you feel has the greatest and least impact?

We all have to divide our time between tasks that are high impact and those that just have to get done. By analyzing how much time you spend on a project and how high leverage it is, you can start to see the opportunity cost of our efforts. Asking this question to your remote teams can help them redirect some of their efforts if they aren't making the best use of time. For example, if your direct report makes \$100 per hour and you can outsource some of the more tedious work for a fraction of that cost, do it. That will free up their time to do work that is directly tied to producing more revenue.



Deep Dive Questions

Questions can be a great way to get to dig deeper. Getting to on a more personal level helps you learn what makes them unique.

What part of your role is the most energizing, draining, and purposeful?

Part of being an effective coach for your employees is learning about their unique strengths and abilities. In this three-part question, you can quickly find out what they like and dislike about their role. Asking what parts of their day gives them the most energy helps you understand what's driving their performance. Learning what your remote employees find difficult or draining can reveal things that might be hindering their growth. And most importantly, asking what type of work they find most meaningful shares what they're passionate about.

As remote employees develop in their own career paths, they will naturally be given tasks that they can be trusted to execute well on, but the kicker here is that they may not particularly find enjoyment in doing those assignments. A manager may never know this without explicitly asking. This question can help you find out what specific practices are truly driving their overall performance and fueling their motivation so that you can curate more opportunities like them.

What challenges are you facing? What wins—big or small—did you have last week?

At 15Five, we often ask this question because it's important to find out what's not working well so we can catch issues before they grow out of hand. But most importantly, this question helps you learn what's going well. Giving your remote employees a chance to share both big and small wins is an important opportunity for you to recognize their hard work. Each experience of receiving thanks or appreciation brings with it a brief moment of gratitude that will contribute to a sustained sense of positivity.



What's one project you'd like to focus on for an entire week but don't have the time to accomplish?

Without asking them outright, your remote employees may not ever share with you any of their ideas they feel could be of value to the company. "While we're all capable of finding new ways to help our company succeed, we may not put in much effort, or feel welcome to, unless creativity is expressly required," [according to Gallup](#). While it may be implausible to think you can put aside an entire week's worth of work, it's important to share that creativity is something that is expected of them in their role. This question can help lead to great ideas and breakthrough thinking.

When do you thrive the most—when you collaborate with other team members or when you have time by yourself?

Not every employee has the personality type that allows them to easily speak up when they have something they'd like to say, but as a manager, it's your responsibility to help your remote employees feel like they have a voice. If your employee tends to be more introverted they often have a preference for space to develop their own ideas. Managers can use this question to learn about their employee's collaboration style and create more cohesive relationships between them and their team.

What's one personal goal that you'd feel comfortable sharing that the company can support you in achieving?

Productive employees will often do whatever it takes to get the job done, going above and beyond. Although this can be viewed as a good way to work, it may not be the most optimized route to take. Not every task should be aimed at fulfilling a business objective—in order to grow, employees must also focus on personal development.

PRO TIP

Personal and professional goals don't have to be at odds with one another. It may seem strange for a manager to support a personal goal, but those are the type of experiences that create strong work relationships and deeper levels of commitment especially among dispersed employees. In fact, when people feel fulfilled in both realms they bring more energy to work, not less.



What skill would you like to develop or improve?

As technology progresses, new pathways for personal development in the workplace begin to take shape. But remote workers may not be aware of the resources available to them. Asking these questions helps empower your people to adopt a growth mindset and develop alongside the company rather than apart.

The Growth Mindset, which was coined by [Carol Dweck](#), is the belief that you are a work in progress and, with enough focus and attention, you can control things like I.Q., competence, and so on. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.

Building Connections

Employees are more susceptible to feeling isolated when they aren't working in the same location as their coworkers, here are questions that can help remedy that.

Do you feel like you get opportunities to collaborate with other team members?

Creating a deep sense of camaraderie between your employees can be difficult to do in an office, and especially difficult when your team is dispersed. But facilitating this well can lead to better collaboration and a more positive work environment. Checking in with your people often by asking how supported they feel can help you get a pulse check on your team.

How could I better support our remote team?

Even the best leaders in the game have room for improvement when it comes to managing people because we are all works in progress. Don't just stick to your own research or ideas about management practices, go straight to the source and ask your remote employees how you can better support them as a whole. You'll get ideas for how to build a more cohesive team and give your direct reports an opportunity to offer valuable suggestions.



Do you think there are ways we can improve our communication?

Every person is different, and therefore, prefers different ways of communicating. Learning these preferences can help make your 1-on-1 meetings more impactful because conversations won't be perceived as a stretch or disruption. For example, improving daily communications could mean setting up quick, virtual stand-up meetings in the mornings to go over what's on the agenda for that day, or it may mean something completely different, like blocking certain parts of the day so your employee can stay in flow.

Do you feel like you are able to connect with other team leaders, managers, and directors?

Genuine conversations and consistent human connection have the power to bridge gaps, whether they are educational, generational, or hierarchical. But if your organization doesn't offer mediums like, conversation forums or company-wide surveys to encourage remote employees to give feedback and connect, it may be challenging for them to have open communication. Continuously supporting your employees to get out of their comfort zone can help your teams avoid silos.

Which coworkers or departments do you wish you had more connection with?

It's easy to facilitate workplace connections when you're in the same location with people, but when you don't see those you work with outside of the normal virtual calls, getting to know coworkers can be hard. Luckily, managers can help. A great way to do that is by asking directly if there are people in particular that they're interested in getting to know better and then encouraging them to make those virtual coffee dates.



Remote Workplace Questions

Questions can be a great way to get to dig deeper. Getting to on a more personal level helps you learn what makes them unique.

What's your daily routine like for working?

Within an office environment, it's easy to pick up on some of the daily routines of those around you without asking explicitly. But for those who manage remote employees, you won't necessarily notice if they are early risers or like to take walks throughout the day to keep their creative juices flowing if you don't ask. Learning about your employee's routine can help you get a better understanding of how they like to work and if they're creating healthy habits throughout the day.

What do you do to take breaks and recharge throughout the day?

The truth is, it can be difficult to separate work and personal time if both happen in the same place. [Science supports](#) that if you don't create safe boundaries you start to think about work all the time which can lead to burnout quickly. Check in with your remote employees and help them set limits between these moments. By asking this question, you can ensure they're taking necessary measures to avoid overextending themselves.

What challenges do you face as a remote worker that you didn't have when you worked in an office?

Working remotely comes with many perks, but it also comes with its own set of challenges. Giving your employees a chance to share specific issues they face gives you an opportunity to help alleviate some of their stress. For example, if your employee is feeling particularly distant from the team, you can make an effort towards setting up virtual team lunches or encouraging some of your team members to collaborate on certain projects.

What is your favorite element of remote work?

Let's face it, remote work can be a wonderful thing. You're able to make use of the time you would be using to commute to work. You can more freely move around your space, and you don't have to worry about ordering lunch because you can cook in your own kitchen. Asking which areas of your employee's remote set up they enjoy the most is an awesome practice of gratitude and can give you and your employees a moment to connect and get to know each other outside of business discussions.



Conclusion

Today, many companies are beginning to shift more towards remote work, some for the very first time. For those who might be nervous about this transition, take these questions and incorporate them in your 1-on-1s and continue working towards building a strong connection with your distributed employees and teams.

Get Started with 15Five

Other Resources:

[The Great eBook of Employee Questions](#)

[The Great eBook of Employee Questions: Return of the Question Master](#)



About 15Five

15Five is a continuous performance management solution that helps employees grow and develop, in just 15 minutes each week. Through a lightweight weekly check-in, 15Five delivers everything a manager needs to impact employee performance, including continuous feedback, objectives (OKR) tracking, recognition, 1-on-1s, and 360° reviews.

To learn more, visit [**www.15Five.com**](http://www.15Five.com)