

# DESIGN TRENDS: 5 Ways To Virtually Communicate



Business leaders are being challenged to keep that water cooler line of communication open with people who may be miles apart.

An icon for office banter for decades, the Water Cooler has become synonymous as a think tank for brainstorming and informal communication in the workplace.

Virtual communication has taken over these days, but with so many remote workers there is a big disconnect with impromptu idea sharing. The open office concept can do little for the idea-sharing island created between telecommuters and those who work full time from home.

Business leaders are being challenged to keep that water cooler line of communication open with people who may be hundreds or even thousands of miles apart.

Companies who embrace communication on multiple levels in their workplaces facilitate connectedness among their team, no matter where they might be. Here are some ways they stay in touch:

## Connect On a Personal Level

Start each virtual meeting with the opportunity for small talk so people can connect on a personal level and engage in deeper points of interest. Morag Barrett, founder, and CEO at business consultants SkyeTeam and co-author of The Future-Proof Workplace, says informal chit-chat can have a big impact on the social bonds between team members. "Ask them what they do for fun and when they are at their best." Try a different icebreaker and

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opening question for each meeting to keep it fresh and fun.

## Share the Small Stuff

When you share the same work environment, it's easy to swing by a team member's desk to catch up, wish them a happy birthday, or suggest they leave early on a Friday afternoon.

Replicating that impromptu interaction with virtual team members isn't quite as simple. So be sure to share office news with a quick email. For example, if someone is getting married or just completed a significant personal goal worth celebrating, share the office news. Simply checking in regularly is encouraged, instead of just calling your remote team members when you need something.

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## Strive For Inclusiveness

If you have a scheduled monthly meeting and you are having bagels served in your time zone, find a way to get appropriate snacks to virtual attendees in other time zones. "Taking a little time and effort to ensure an inclusive approach will differentiate your leadership and build team bonds," Barrett says.

## Take Time To Connect

Face-time with virtual team members is generally limited. There is a tendency to cram meeting agendas full of business items with little time to catch up on life events. It's important to include time for team building. Leave some "white space" in physical meeting agendas so that team members can get to know each

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other better. Send team members off in pairs or small groups to explore the city where the meeting is being held. This opens thing up to casual conversation so they get to know each other outside of the office. This can be a great opportunity for locals to show off their city or departments to cross communicate and learn more about what each contribute to the organization.



## Use The Best Technology

Utilize virtual meeting platforms that allow attendees to register and upload photos so everyone can “see” who is participating. When using Skype or other videoconferencing solutions, make sure everyone turns their camera on. It really makes a difference for others to see who they are speaking to. When we are building relationships with team members, it’s important to become more than just anonymous voices on the end of a phone.

Today’s leaders encourage more human interaction. Both in their office design and their company philosophy. Sometimes it is inevitable for part of your team to be off-site, depending on their role in the company. Sales leaders are often out in the field. Creating moments of connectivity for them is important for team building and inclusiveness.

One study found that a few moments of conversation between co-workers increases performance by 20% and another study uncovered that 72% of employees who have a best friend at work are more satisfied with their job.

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