

Virtual Work: Keeping Teams Engaged and Effective in the New Digital Workplace

By Stephanie Corey, Co-Founder, Up Level Ops

We've all heard the horror stories of headcounts and bed checks – the antiquated phenomenon of literally walking around to see who is at their desk and who just left a cardigan on their chair after a long weekend. No one is discounting the value of face-to-face interactions, but we've all learned a lot about remote engagement in the past year. The COVID crisis has caused an exodus from cities and physical office spaces alike. As fall approaches and companies figure out what the new workplace looks like, how can Legal Operations management continue to engage with their team and the legal department at large?

Two recent articles highlighted the core of the challenge: If you're not visible, perhaps you're not promotable, and yet, employees seek employment options with greater flexibility regarding work location.

The Wall Street Journal reported on a January 2021 Gartner survey found that while 43% of remote workers and 49% of hybrid workers were highly engaged, compared with 35% of on-site workers, many bosses still assume off-site employees are doing less. A subsequent Korn Ferry survey of professionals found that nearly 60% said that it would hurt their career advancement if they admitted to the boss they'd rather keep working remotely.

At the same time, Bloomberg reports that employees are quitting instead of giving up working from home. As office returns seem imminent for fall, many employees are considering different options. A May survey by Morning Consult on behalf of Bloomberg News showed that 39% would consider quitting if their employers weren't flexible about remote work. This figure is even more striking for millennials and Gen Z, who come in at 49%.

So what's Legal Operations to do? We present some tips with real-life examples to bring the advice to life.

1. Communicate with your team in the ways that work best for them, and maybe rethink a meeting or two

Enstar Group General Counsel Audrey Taranto says being respectful of time is just as important as how a team communicates. "The biggest challenge has been striking the right balance of the form of communication, especially where the technology allows us to work from our mobile devices more than ever," Taranto says.

"As a department, we are de-emphasizing email in favor of other forms of discussion and collaboration, and the video conference has been a great tool for this. We also want to avoid the dreaded 'meeting that could have been an email' and be respectful of people's time, so we

ask all of our team members to consider carefully. Just because someone can take your call or meeting more easily than ever, it does not mean it is necessary to ask them to do so.”

2. Stay Visible and Emphasize Cross-Functional Collaboration

At Stripe, Legal Operations Lead Jamie Ingles encourages creative scheduling to stay visible. “To get visibility means being findable and responsive and asking for both big and little stages to stand on,” Ingles said.

“Tactically, it takes many forms such as setting the alarm a little earlier some days or taking a meeting after dinner to capture precious live time with colleagues in other time zones. It also means suggesting jumping on a call when I see an instant message response being typed for an extended period, requesting virtual meet and greets with new hires, offering to present at organizational or other team meetings, and contributing asynchronously to community knowledge-sharing channels.”

Taranto also increased opportunities for her team at Enstar by reaching out to colleagues beyond Legal Ops and including the group’s initiatives in meeting agendas. “In our monthly departmental video meetings, we added the ‘Legal Ops Corner’ as a standing agenda item. Our Manager of Legal Operations presents quick tips and demonstrations so that everyone leaves with at least one new tangible way to be more efficient,” Taranto said.

They also pair lead attorneys and Legal Ops team members on critical projects to improve cross-department communication and cooperation.

Taranto notes, “We designate a lead lawyer in each major Legal Operations initiative who is equally responsible for delivery alongside the Legal Ops Team. Progressing these initiatives tends to require support from those outside of our department, and the lawyer often already has a history of trust and partnership with these people. We have seen this open more doors and pave the way for the Legal Ops Team to work productively by leveraging these existing strong relationships.”

3. Be consistent and continue to show up (wherever you’re needed)

Stripe’s Ingles encourages managers to keep their customers in mind and use new options to be where clients need them to be, in whatever form that takes. “Legal operations managers are in the service business, so it’s not about what works for us, but rather showing up where it works for our partners,” Ingles says. “This isn’t a new concept; however, what’s changed is the number of mediums available and how to leverage them effectively and authentically.”

Even as legal operations has grown more complicated in terms of geography, technology, and expectations for service across a multitude of communication options, the goal is the same:

Provide an environment where Legal Ops professionals have the autonomy to deliver the best service they can to all their clients, internal and external. And ultimately, the happiest team is the most effective Legal Ops team, leading to a satisfied and loyal client base as well as a robust corporate culture that continues to encourage growth and creative problem-solving.

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A veteran in the Legal Operations field, [Stephanie Corey](#) began her career at Hewlett Packard Company as Chief of Staff and head of Legal Operations. Stephanie has held similar positions at VMWare and Flex International. She is the co-founder of the Corporate Legal Operations Consortium (CLOC), a leading Legal Operations association, and co-founder and General Partner of [UpLevel Ops, LLC](#), a legal strategy and operations consulting firm. Stephanie holds a BA in Economics and an MBA from Lehigh University, and is a serial entrepreneur in her spare time.