

Unleash employee happiness in 2021

Your wellbeing strategy guide for remote
and non-remote workforces



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Employee happiness

Noun

When your employees are their happiest, healthiest, most productive selves.



Why is employee happiness important?

Happiness is the secret ingredient behind every great achievement. Seriously, it's like rocket fuel for teams. It helps people stay engaged, motivated and driven – inspiring them to deliver their best work yet.

It's easy for companies to fall into the belief that its single metric for success is how much they sell and how much profit they make. What we often overlook is that profit is a direct result of the people who make a great product, deliver fantastic customer service, work hard and are determined to succeed.

That's why employee happiness is so important.

Happiness is the difference between your employees being advocates or critics of your brand. It engages them to stick around and do their best work. It makes your employer brand shine, making it easier to attract top talent.

The bottom line is that every business should be putting effort into making employees happy. It's true that you can't please all of the people all of the time but, by at least putting in the effort, you'll show your employees you care. And once happiness is the mainstay of your businesses, you'll see a huge knock-on effect on what you achieve as a collective.

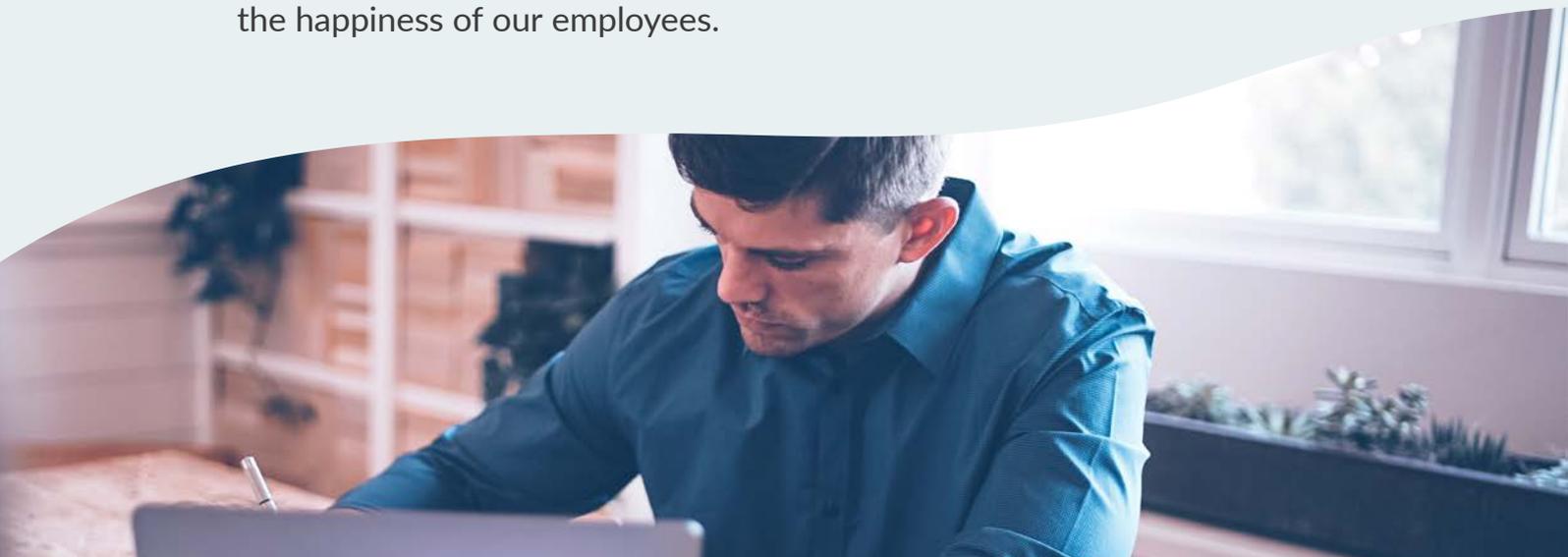
What's the greatest threat to employee happiness?

What seems like long ago now, an extensive study at Oxford University in October 2019 found that [employees are 13% more productive when happy](#). That was before the events of 2020 and a redefinition of what it means to be happy at work and in life.

[Our recent workplace wellbeing report series](#) has highlighted that 93% of UK employees have faced new wellbeing challenges in 2020 – and each challenge is having a serious effect on happiness. From that 93%, those employees told us:

- ▶ **Their emotional wellbeing has been negatively affected**
- ▶ **Burnout due to balancing work/life is a new challenge**
- ▶ **They feel lonelier and less connected to their colleagues**
- ▶ **Their financial wellbeing has been negatively impacted**

From our findings, it's clear that employees are struggling with all aspects of their emotional wellbeing, which is being compounded by their financial worries. And when all of that's combined, it's a huge threat to the happiness of our employees.



Four ways to fight back against the threats to employee happiness

The findings in the previous section show that we need to take steps to prevent anxiety, burnout, loneliness and money-related stress. With each one we solve, we fight back a little harder against the threats to employee happiness.

Provide support for anxiety

Before providing support for anxiety, it's incredibly important to recognise it as an issue in the workplace – especially when it can be triggered by different sources.

For example, [61% of employees who were furloughed are worried about job security](#). While this anxiety is harder to spot than someone panicking about giving a presentation, it's still all part of the same response.

Practising mindfulness is proven to reduce anxiety. Give employees the opportunity to get away from their work without feeling guilty. Even if this is one lunch hour a week where they have to eat away from their computer.

The NHS launched [this mood self-assessment tool](#) which employees can use to track how they're feeling and get advice.



Stop burnout from rising

[Our workplace wellbeing report series](#) revealed that employees ranked burnout as more of a challenge month on month. Despite this, employers we surveyed ranked burnout as less of an issue.

This could point to managers seeing the current wellbeing of employees as the new normal. This is dangerous if their people are already struggling. There could also be signs that remote working is blurring the lines of work and life even further.

Keep an eye out for an increase in the late-night working culture. While some may relish it, every late-night email sent might be received by a colleague who feels a pressure to reply and work longer to keep up. That colleague then sends a late-night message to someone else and the cycle continues.

Check out our [6 ways to prevent burnout in your workplace guide](#) for more on this.

Find ways to be more social

Social wellbeing is how connected employees feel with their colleagues and the wider world. From [our workplace wellbeing reports](#), we found that 49% of remote employees rate their social wellbeing negatively, compared to 36% of those non-remote. This shows that employees who work remotely are feeling more isolated and alone. A possible side effect of losing that daily face to face interaction.

While you can never completely replace seeing someone in person, you can use technology to create a digital office and bring back that face to face energy. Set up a video or audio call which people can have on in the background while working. This puts employees a little closer to their colleagues and can reduce loneliness for a while.

Non-remote employees may see colleagues and customers more regularly but that doesn't necessarily mean they'll be getting the interactions they need – highlighted in the 36% of non-remote employees who said their social wellbeing has been negatively affected.

If that's the case, find ways to make interaction easier while still adhering to the government guidelines at the time. This could be making break rooms larger or finding areas outdoors where people can interact – or you may find that a simple phone call could go a long way to making them feel less lonely.

Offer financial education

There was a time when the extent of financial education provided by schools was to open a bank account and put £1 every two weeks or so. This is not a real-world view of how finances work.

Now we have one of the [lowest levels of financial literacy in the world](#). And another of our studies showed [money is the biggest cause of stress for employed adults](#).

Providing your employees with the right financial education tools can help them to manage their money better. This could come in the form of online classes or having an outside professional facilitate finance workshops. They'll then bring less stress to the workplace – ultimately being happier and more productive.

How can a wellbeing strategy preserve employee happiness?

Your wellbeing strategy should include the following initiatives to combat the problems we've found and preserve employee happiness:

Physical wellbeing

Love it or hate it, there are numerous studies showing how exercise improves both physical and mental wellbeing – and [increases happiness](#). But not everyone likes to get their exercise in the same way.

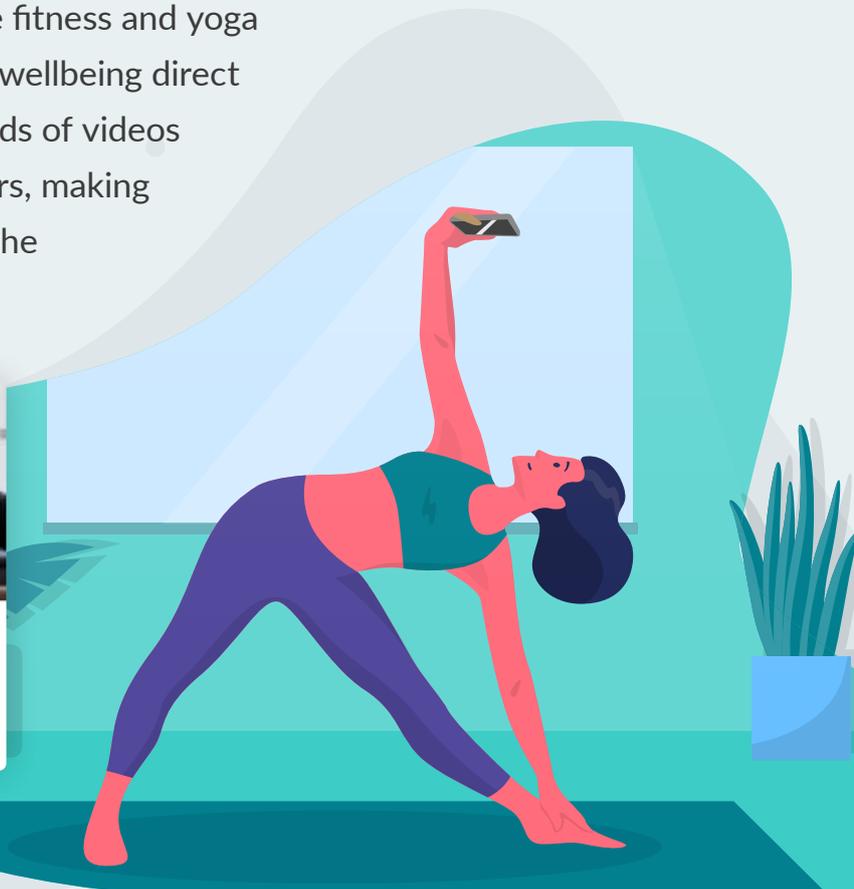
The events of 2020 have seen people shift from the gym to online fitness classes. Our free fitness and yoga classes from Boxx bring physical wellbeing direct to your employees. There are loads of videos available from qualified instructors, making it easy to work up a sweat from the comfort of their living room.



BOXX

Free online workout and wellness classes

Free!



On top of that, there's a wealth of health and fitness perks to help employees get their endorphin fix – including membership discounts at gyms nationwide, savings on activewear, protein shakes and powders, accessories, and more.

Part of your wellbeing strategy should also focus on healthy eating. And as eating right improves mental health too, we provide healthy eating offers, reduced-price recipe boxes, supermarket discounts and alcohol abstinence support to help make good nutrition more affordable.

Emotional wellbeing

Everyone goes through ups and downs in life. Whether an employee is experiencing a professional or personal issue, it always helps to have someone to talk to.

That's why every Perkbox membership includes an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) from Health Assured. This gives your staff access to valuable resources for emotional wellbeing, including a confidential telephone helpline – available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Employees can also get access to mindfulness and meditation practices with free access to the Aura mindfulness app, which they can use at home to relax and de-stress. Meditation is beneficial for remote employees as it helps them transition from work to home life without a commute marking it out. For non-remote employees, meditation allows them to de-stress and reflect on their day if they've found it particularly tough.



Financial wellbeing

No matter how careful someone is with their money, the unpredictable nature of life means anybody could find themselves in a pinch, especially towards the end of the month. Financial stress can be a significant pain point for employees, and it's something Perkbox addresses directly.

We have a range of tools to help your employees improve their financial wellbeing. They include access to a 24/7 EAP with guides and resources to ease financial stress, comparison tools to reduce outgoings and budgeting apps to help employees plan for the future.

Perkbox also has a range of discounts that cover every aspect of an employee's lifestyle. They give savings at supermarkets, when eating out, ordering in, on the latest tech, and hundreds more!



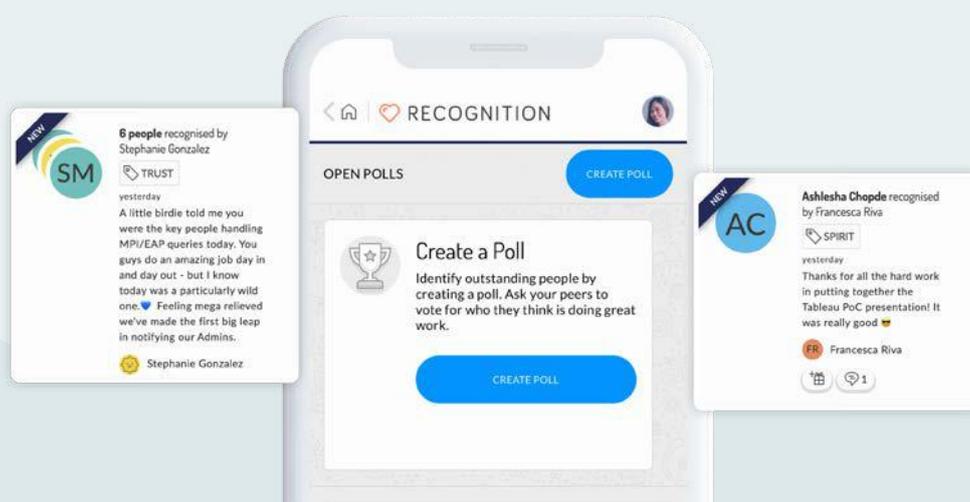
Recognition

It's easy for achievements to get missed, especially when things are changing rapidly and we're all busting a gut to keep up. This increases feelings of isolation and has a negative impact on mood. That's why it's important to recognise the work of employees and show them how they fit into the bigger picture. Recognition also helps to build a greater sense of community among remote workers – which has been shown to [improve mental health](#).

We make a big deal out of recognition at Perkbox. On Fridays, we take it in turns to read out the personal thank-yous we've sent to each other during the week, followed by a round of applause. And we use our own recognition platform to do this, as it's a fun way to enable peer-to-peer and manager-to-peer recognition.

It includes an interactive feed so everyone can celebrate achievements from across the company with comments and emojis. It only takes a few minutes to check the feed to see what everyone is achieving across the business and how their work fits into the company's wider objectives.

You can also create polls to promote friendly competition. Our remote team in Australia embraced this by having a fancy dress video call and voting for the winner!



What are the challenges for remote workforces?

No daily contact

The first challenge is not being able to see them. It's much easier to gauge the mood of your employees when you're in your workplace. Judging how people feel when they're working remotely can be a little trickier. And if moods are low among those working remotely, it will have as much of a negative impact on your business as when moods are low in the workplace.

Communication blocks

Communicating about and promoting your wellbeing strategy is also more difficult when employees work remotely. While remote employees can still receive messages through digital channels such as email and instant messaging, it's difficult to know if those messages are actually getting through. And you can't expect your at-home employees to use a wellbeing programme they don't know about.

Gathering feedback

As with all of the people initiatives you roll out, getting constant feedback on what you're doing is crucial to its ongoing success. The challenge of getting feedback from remote employees is a culmination of the previous two challenges. You're not with people on a daily basis to hear anecdotal feedback and you can't guarantee that employees will take the time to read lengthy emails and complete large surveys.

What are the solutions for remote workforces?

Increase daily contact

Encourage managers to have daily video calls with their teams so they can get as good a gauge on the happiness of their employees as possible. While you can't force them to turn their cameras on, being able to physically see and hear your people is a great way to track their mood. And if they usually turn the camera on but start to leave it switched off, it's a red flag to their mood not being as positive as it could be.

I've been part of these daily calls and can testify first-hand to how easy it is to track people's mood through them. My manager was aware that there were a couple of days where I wasn't my usual self over the video call and asked how I was in a private message after the call was over. This allowed me to open up about how I was feeling, work with my manager to prioritise what I had to do that day and be encouraged to go for a walk – greatly improving my mood!



Communicate, over-communicate, communicate some more

It's time to embrace absolutely every communication channel you've got and can think of. Don't be afraid to send your message multiple times through multiple channels as it's unlikely all of your employees will be checking each one – no matter how engaged they are!

Remote staff will also have their own working patterns so they won't necessarily pay attention to what you're sending the first time around. So as well as hitting multiple channels, don't be afraid of promoting your wellbeing programme more than once.

Depending on how much time you have, you can make your messages more relevant for different demographics. A good way to do this is to survey your remote employees for what elements of wellbeing they want to improve.

Once you've built up a picture of where people want to be, you can break them into groups and start promoting what's relevant to them. For example, it's not worth sending repeated messages about meditation to people who have no interest in it – they'll switch off and likely ignore things which might actually be relevant.

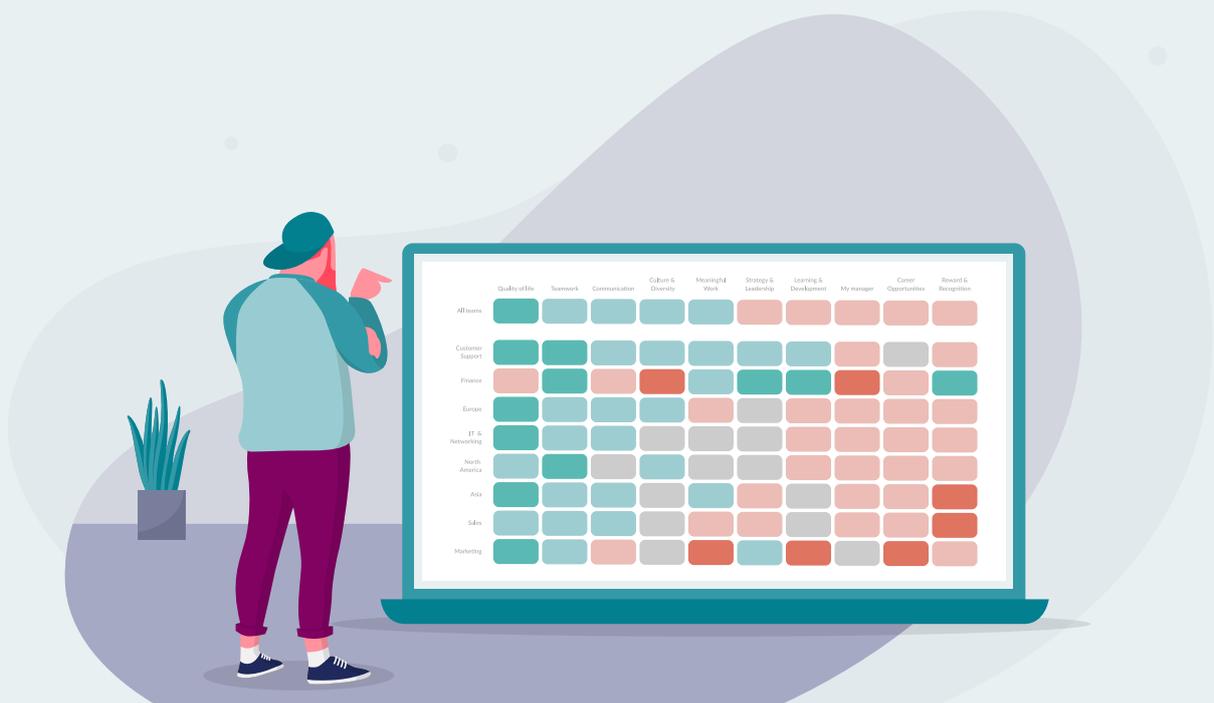


Get real-time feedback and act on it

To ensure you get ongoing feedback from your remote employees, you need to make sure your staff surveys are quick, to the point and sent at regular intervals. Employees are much more likely to engage with surveys if they know that they'll only take them a few minutes to complete.

Our Insights product makes it easy for employers to gather and act on employee feedback from a remote workforce. The short, engaging pulse surveys are sent at regular intervals, allowing you to measure trends in real-time and maintain a continuous dialogue with employees to help further prevent problems down the line. Surveys also extend beyond employee wellbeing so you can see how employees feel about other areas of the business.

Collecting feedback is only half of this. You also need to act on it. This is important as it shows your employees that you're continuously looking at ways to improve work for them. Not only will you be able to offer them wellbeing tools which they've requested but you'll also improve their mood just by listening to what they have to say.



What are the challenges for non-remote workforces?

It's not just physical

Much of the talk on wellbeing in 2020 has been around the mental health of remote employees, but [our workplace wellbeing report series](#) showed that employees who aren't working remotely are facing many of the same issues. A creeping sense of loneliness is rising among both sets of workforces, and even though people are still going to a physical place of work, they're still feeling lonely/isolated socially. This is possibly because they have to socially distance from colleagues, as well as being potentially cut off from friends and family after work.



Health & safety at work

From our workplace wellbeing reports, non-remote employees had one stand out challenge to their wellbeing which remote employees didn't – health & safety at work. These are challenging times and there's so much grey area for both employers and employees and what the right safety measures are. Ensuring that your employees feel safe in the workplace will be crucial to ease any anxiety employees may be feeling.

Stuck in the moment

It can be easy to slip into a mindset that everything is ok until you need to react to a wellbeing issue in the workplace. For example, now more employees are able to come back to the workplace, you notice that everyone seems a bit more stressed than usual. While we should be reacting to this, these reactive approaches can fall short and make the issues worse in the long run.



What are the solutions for non-remote workforces?

Have mental health conversations

Setting an example that it's ok to talk about emotional wellbeing can help people be more open. To do this, make yourself an emotional wellbeing ambassador, talk to employees honestly about emotional wellbeing, share how you're feeling and techniques you use to cope – and don't forget to encourage managers to do the same!

But don't be offended if employees don't talk. Not everyone will want to talk to you or their manager about their emotions. To make it easier for them, provide an employee assistance programme, access to mindfulness apps, or invite mental health professionals to give advice in confidence.

Remove health & safety fears

When employees can't see the workplace and the measures you've taken to make it safe for their return, there are few words which will reduce their fears. Think about any horror movie, the monsters are much more terrifying when you can't see them.

Alongside communicating the changes you've made to keep your people safe, take photos and film videos of new layouts or safety procedures. Share these through all of your communication channels so everyone can see them. The more exposure you give to the hard work you've put in, the more your employees will appreciate it and feel safe about returning.

Data from [our workplace wellbeing reports](#) showed that there are greater return to work fears for business leaders in non-remote workforces. Before making any changes, it might be worth consulting with them on how they believe health & safety should be managed. For example, if you have a chain of restaurants, the people working in them will know theirs inside out. They will probably have good ideas on how to operate them safely, and the more you allow them to take the lead, the safer they'll feel.

Be proactive

When you know where your business is going you can make predictions about which areas of wellbeing are likely to suffer. If there's a high demand for products then employees may be expected to work longer hours. Maybe production has slowed but employees still need to be motivated.

You can't completely predict the future but knowing what stressors may be placed on your employees can help you tailor your wellbeing strategy to them. For example, public transport may become limited so provide alternatives such as Cycle to Work schemes and facilities to shower at work so employees aren't stuck in their cars in traffic. You could also look at being more flexible with holiday requests so employees don't become burnt out if high workloads are on the horizon.

Talk to your employees as well, get a gauge for how they're feeling about specific areas of their wellbeing. People will give off subtle clues such as saying they're more tired than usual or that the days just seem to blend into one. See if this rings true with other employees and build your strategy around it.

10 steps to launching your wellbeing strategy

Now we've established what wellbeing support you can give, the challenges and solutions for both remote and non-remote workforces, we can cover the 10 steps to launching your wellbeing strategy.

We've also included a physical checklist which you can print off and use!

Step one: Get senior leader buy-in

Buy-in from senior leaders works on two levels. First, unless you're in control of the purse strings, they're the ones who have the final say on how much budget you'll get. Second, the more visibly they're taking part in your wellbeing initiatives, the more it will resonate with your employees.

Feel free to use the facts and stats we shared in previous sections to show your senior leaders the benefits of launching a wellbeing strategy for your employees. Not just for the success of the business, but for the health and happiness of your employees and your senior leaders!



Step two: Find out what your people want

Want to know exactly which areas of wellbeing your employees want help with? Ask them! You'll get a lot more buy-in the more you tailor it to what your people want.

The quickest way is to send out a survey with a few questions asking how they currently feel about their wellbeing, what they feel they need help with and what they would like to see. You can also invite people to give one-on-one feedback if you want greater context on their needs. Don't forget to focus on the three main areas of wellbeing – physical, emotional and financial.

Step three: Perform a health check

It's easier to see how effective your wellbeing strategy is when you know how healthy your employees are before launch. And you don't need a background in medicine to do it!

Collate all the data you can – with absence rates, staff turnover numbers and how your employees responded to feeling about their wellbeing from your staff survey as the three main data points.

And when you have the baseline health of your workforce, you can track it over time to see how effective your wellbeing strategy is.

Step four: Make a plan and set goals

Fail to prepare, prepare to fail. So based on your own research and analysis, build a roadmap of the actions you'll take and formally document your goals. Linking your strategy to existing company initiatives and demonstrating ROI will add extra credibility.

A simple plan might look something like this:

Employees want to feel more connected

- ▶ **Set-up communal initiatives**
- ▶ **Encourage recognition**

Employees want to build up savings

- ▶ **Improve financial education**
- ▶ **Help employees spend less**

Employees want to improve mental health

- ▶ **Reduce stress**
- ▶ **Promote mindfulness**

Once you have a clear idea of the actions you'd like to take, do the research into costs per item. One thing to keep in mind when planning your budget is to compare it to the cost of not taking steps to improve wellbeing and happiness. That could include the business cost of not reducing absenteeism and staff turnover.



Step five: Choose what to include

At this step, you should have a good idea of what your employees want and how much budget you can allocate from your plan. Now it's time to put the wheels in motion and solve the problems. Consider the elements mentioned in this ebook, as well as other initiatives that address a holistic view of wellness.

Your updated plan should now look something like this:

Employees want to feel more connected

- ▶ **Set-up communal initiatives – start a running club with prizes**
- ▶ **Encourage recognition – introduce new recognition platform**

Employees want to build up savings

- ▶ **Improve financial education – provide online financial advice**
- ▶ **Help employees spend less – provide employee discounts**

Employees want to improve mental health

- ▶ **Reduce stress – set-up formal switch-off sessions**
- ▶ **Promote mindfulness – provide online yoga classes**



Step six: Recruit wellbeing champions

Spearhead your wellbeing strategy with a wellbeing team who will champion the message of health and wellness across your business. This doesn't have to be any different for remote or non-remote workforces, you just have to be a little more tailored.

Look across your departments and identify people who'd be willing ambassadors in each team to champion wellbeing. Ideally, you'd have one person per team who meet regularly. That way they can talk to their team about the initiatives you're launching as well as getting feedback and answering questions about wellbeing.

If you find it hard to recruit enough champions for each team, you can send out a casting call for those who want to be ambassadors. They can then liaise with team managers to drop into their meetings from time to time and spread the message of wellbeing.

Step seven: Promote your initiatives

This step is probably the most important and most difficult – if people don't know that your wellbeing initiatives exist, they won't use them.

Through a combination of blitzing the communication channels you have, encouraging managers to speak to their team directly and relying on your wellbeing champions, you need to create a buzz. The more you press home the message that this strategy is tailored to their wellbeing and will positively affect their lives, the more engagement you'll see.

Remember, you know your workforce better than us so you'll know what type of communication resonates with them best.

Step eight: Set challenges

Challenges are also a great way to make people aware of your wellbeing initiatives. We've got a few going at Perkbox for our employees, including a running club and a burpee challenge.

It's easy to set up a running club the way we've done it. Once you've identified the people who want to join in, just ask them to track their runs on an app like Strava. The jogging lovers will no doubt already have this app anyway.

We have a wellbeing champion who created a running group on the Strava app as well as a channel on Slack – our instant messenger. Those in the group can compete against the distances and times of their colleagues. And to bring them closer together, they've even set times to run at the same time as each other!

Our burpee challenge worked by Maddie Pozlevic, our Employee Experience Lead, filming herself doing three burpees and nominating three others to do the same.

Inevitably this got round to someone naming our Founder who duly obliged and filmed himself doing his burpees. And as we outlined in step one, seeing a senior leader get involved, more people took notice of our wellbeing initiatives as a result.



Step nine: Measure the impact

Depending on your preference or how you track other initiatives at your company, let a set amount of time pass before measuring the impact of your wellbeing strategy. Say you choose to track it every three months. Allow the time to pass and see if the results you recorded from your initial health check have increased.

You can also track it alongside other elements of your business. Have you seen productivity increase, for example? Or have managers anecdotally said the happiness of their teams has increased? These are just two examples of the wider measurements you can take on the impact of your remote wellbeing programme. It's highly likely you've already got some in mind for your company.

Step ten: Celebrate your success

Using the same communication channels, report back to your people by sharing success stories of how your wellbeing strategy has made a positive effect. This could be from the stats you found when measuring the impact or from testimonials shared by employees. They have the win-win of showing the benefits of good wellbeing and promoting it to your employees even further.

And, of course, don't forget to celebrate your hard work. You could treat yourself to a well-earned break or a glass of wine. However you want to celebrate is fine by us.

Wellbeing strategy checklist

Print out or use digitally, either way, here's your launch checklist to tick off as you complete each of the ten steps.

- Step one:** Get senior leader buy-in
- Step two:** Find out what your people want
- Step three:** Perform a health check
- Step four:** Make a plan and set goals
- Step five:** Choose what to include
- Step six:** Recruit wellbeing champions
- Step seven:** Promote your programme
- Step eight:** Set challenges
- Step nine:** Measure the impact
- Step ten:** Celebrate your success



Helping employees live better, in life and at work

Perkbox is a platform designed to enrich the employee experience. Our four products help create environments in which people and companies thrive.

PERKS

Our Perks are carefully chosen to support your team's financial, emotional and physical wellbeing.

INSIGHTS

Insights is an agile pulse survey tool, enabling you to gather and act on feedback in a meaningful way.

RECOGNITION

Recognition brings your company values to life, helping you incentivise and reward top achievers.

MEDICAL

Perkbox Medical is the simplest and most affordable answer to accessible healthcare.

We also host events, publish books, write articles and create videos that will assist you in your journey to delivering the ultimate employee experience.

[See the platform in action](#)

