TINYpulse

WHAT LEADERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT REMOTE WORKERS

Surprising Differences in Workplace Happiness & Relationships

The picture that emerges is one of a workforce that has the potential for high levels of employee engagement but also struggles to be connected with the rest of their company.

In our analysis, we looked at four aspects of remote employees' workplace experience:

- **What does the remote workforce look like?** From the 58% of employees who work on an all-remote team to the 51% who don't work a typical 9-to-5 schedule, this group looks very different from a traditional workforce.

- **What are the best ways to get the most out of them?** An overwhelming 91% of respondents say they're more productive when working remotely. To maximize that productivity, we need to see what factors are helping or hampering their work.

- **How strong are their relationships with supervisors and colleagues?** 27% of remote workers say they have experienced a work-related problem because they weren't in the same place as their team. We need to take measures to mitigate these issues.

- **What impact does experience have?** Not all remote workers are created equal. We found significant differences between respondents based on their tenure at their remote job. Those who have been telecommuting between 6 and 10 years report being 11% happier than those in their first year.

The insights provided to us by these workers can act as a guide map for leaders to figure out best practices for managing their remote employees — or leaders who want to start preparing for them.

The Demographics of Remote Workers

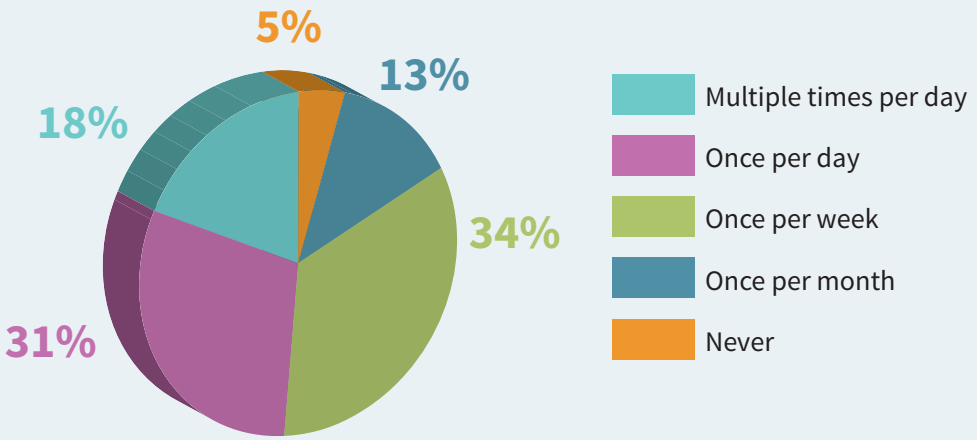
Of the 509 employees we surveyed, the majority (58%) are between the ages of 25 and 44. So while there are some millennials — a.k.a. the mobile-first generation — in this group, it's mostly made up of Gen X.

And they're not just a typical workforce that has been transplanted outside of the office; while 49% of respondents have a typical 9-to-5 workweek, the majority of them hold schedules that range from nights and weekends to being 100% on call. In addition, 58% work an a team made up entirely of remote employees. For these workers, there is no division between a "main" office and the telecommuters.

In regards to income, respondents ranged from below U.S. $25,000 to 6-figure salaries beyond $150,000. However, the largest group was solidly in the middle, in the $50,000 to $74,999 range.

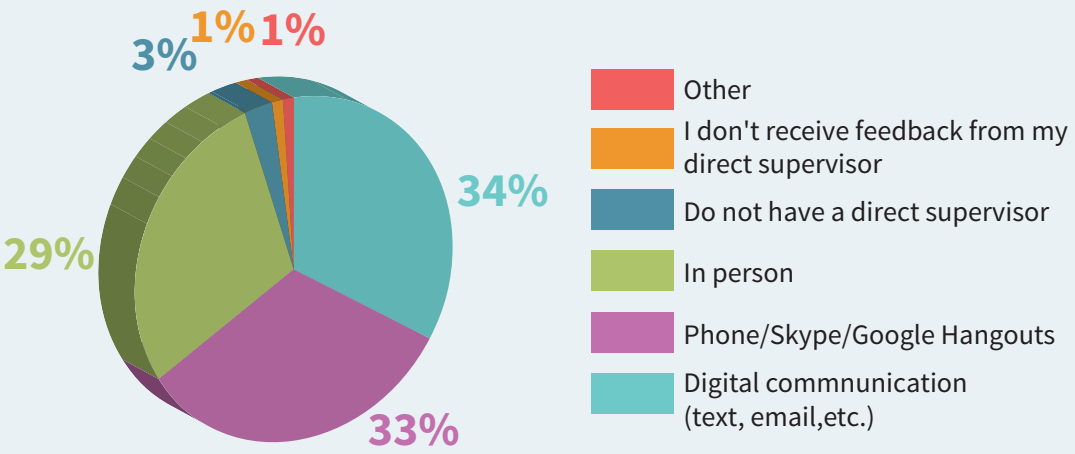
There was a notable difference according to gender: though there was a fairly even mix of men and women, the number of female remote workers earning $25,000 or less was more than double the number of men. The majority of respondents with salaries below $50,000 were female (87 women compared to 61 men).

How often would you like to have contact with your direct supervisor?

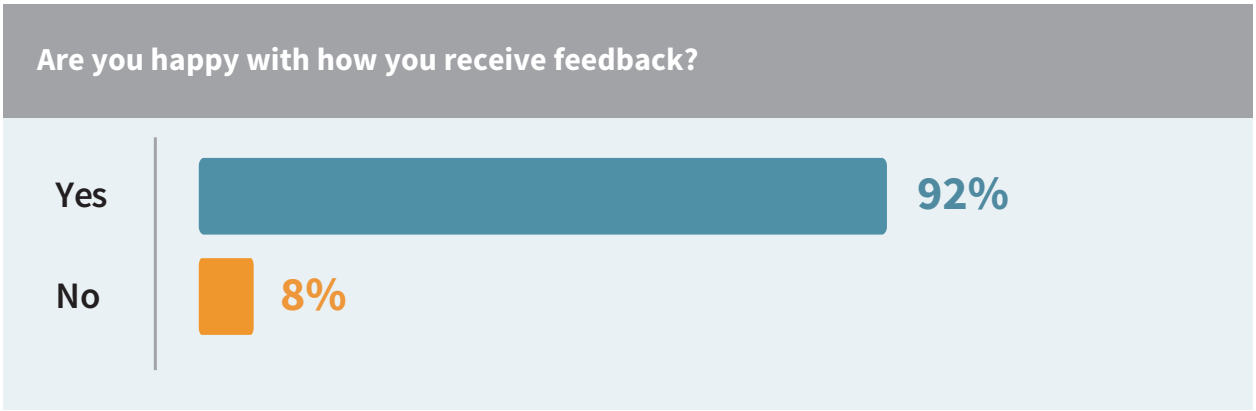


This level of satisfaction also applies to communication about their performance. The majority of remote workers, unsurprisingly, do not receive their feedback in person. Instead, they rely on communication technologies ranging from texting to Skype.

How do you receive feedback on your performance at work from your supervisor?



The vast majority of respondents are happy with the way their supervisor gives them feedback on their performance.



What these responses indicate is that it's not necessarily a matter of how or even when — effective management and feedback can happen even in ways that we don't typically expect to see.

Lipman boils it down to this primary requirement:

"[E]stablishing, and managing to, very clear, measurable and mutually agreed-upon employee objectives. In the absence of more regular in-person contact, periodic check-ins to review performance against clearly established goals becomes critically important. As I like to say, when it comes to managing for success (whether or not remotely, but especially remotely), clarity is king and queen."

Eric Siu, founder of Growth Everywhere and CEO of SingleGrain, achieves that clarity for his remote employees with these key communication practices:

"Daily 1-on-1s (yes, daily) and using Objectives and Key Results (OKRs)."

To facilitate communication and culture with the team as a whole, he makes sure to get everyone face to face on a regular basis:

"Quarterly get-togethers with the whole company. The in-person meetings are invaluable."

Between those quarterly meetings, remote employees may only "see" their colleagues virtually. But that interaction can be just as positive, if handled right.

In fact, one remote worker who spoke to us anonymously pointed to chat platforms such as Campfire, Yammer, or Slack as a great solution to the disconnect she and other remote workers feel. The key to building relationships is communication, she said, and the beauty of chat tools is that they let off-site employees participate in group conversations all day, unlike videoconferencing or other methods that have a limited timeframe.

"It's important for remote workers to get a sense of how people talk to each other all day during the work day. Remote staff should be encouraged to participate, if necessary, by pinging them specifically to contribute to the conversation. While this wouldn't fly for introverts in a face-to-face meeting situation, it's much easier to draw people out online. A channel dedicated to random thoughts, jokes, etc., is also great for remote workers as it replicates the type of banter that happens spontaneously in a shared physical workspace."

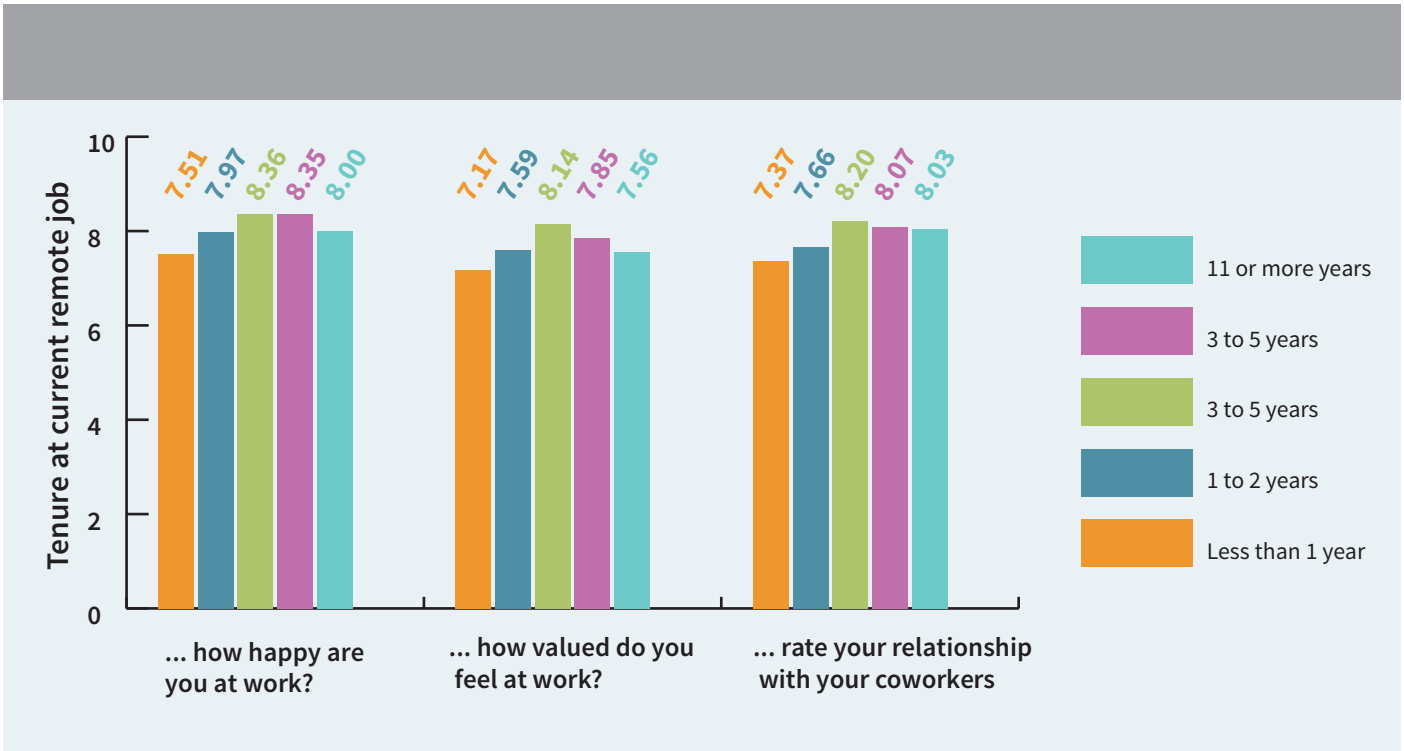
This means that virtual communication has value beyond just getting information to or from a remote worker. It's about the morale boost of being included with and laughing at the same jokes as their coworkers, being addressed (and appreciated for) more than just their work output.

The Importance of Timing

There's a vast difference between an employee who has been remote for years versus the new hire who is just logging on for the first time away from the office. And the difference shows in these employees' feelings about their workplace.

When compared to employees who have been at their remote job for less than a year, those who have been in their position from 3 to 5 years:

- Are 11% happier
- Feel 14% more valued
- Rate their relationship with coworkers that is 11% better



What's good about these numbers is that it means a remote employee's experience isn't static. While there may be a rough patch early on in the experience, things can improve. And this is where leaders can play a big role.

Conclusion

Leaders can draw a lot of useful information from the responses of these remote employees. We can target specific areas for action:

- **Treat them like the productive workers they are:** 91% of remote workers do better outside of the office. Don't treat them with suspicion just because they're not in your physical sight. After all, many of them love freedom, so micromanagement can crush their engagement.

- **Emphasize flexibility:** Freedom is the number one draw for remote workers. (And at the same time, freedom from remote work might be the best option for some.) Allow these employees to determine their own location and hours as much as possible. Many would be happy to work every day, in fact, albeit with shorter hours. It's an easy way to boost workplace happiness.

- **Make efforts to reach out:** Remote workers don't need you to replicate the in-person interaction you have with your employees at the office. You don't have to talk to them every day or give them feedback face to face. But encourage your team to reach out, giving their remote colleagues the same level of consideration and respect as their office counterparts. And make sure that your communication with them, however frequent, is meaningful.

- **Remember that a remote work experience is dynamic:** The state of a remote worker's engagement or collegial interaction in the first year will not be the case forever. Don't assume that early unhappiness has to persist, or that happiness will stick around without effort on your part.

By using the input from remote workers to inform best practices, leaders can find ways to make this workforce into an engaged, loyal, and thriving part of their organization.

Research Approach

This study analyzed responses from 509 U.S. employees who work remotely at all times. Averages were then compared to benchmarks based on responses from over 200,000 employees at organizations that use the TINYpulse employee engagement platform, collected between March 2015 and March 2016.

One-sample *t* tests were used to conduct the analytics. One-sample *t* tests measure the difference between a score and a single (benchmark) value. Cohen's *d* is used to assess the extent of the difference between the score and the single value. Cohen's *d* values above .50 are considered moderate differences, while those above .80 are considered large differences. *p* is the probability that no difference or relationship is present; therefore a *p* value below .05 indicates statistical significance.

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Appendix

Question		
Income	***n***	**%**
$0 - 24,999	29	6
$25,000 - 49,999	119	23
$50,000 - 74,999	139	27
$75,000 - 99,999	104	20
$100,000 - 149,999	90	18
$150,000 and above	28	6
Work-week		
Typical workweek hour (M-F, 9-5)	250	49
Unusual workweek hours (Night hours, Sunday-Thursday, etc.)	97	19
Random / On-call / Sporadic throughout the day	84	17
Seven days a week with shorter hours	75	15
Other	3	0
How long have you been working remotely at your current job?		
Less than 1 year	63	12
1 - 2 years	172	34
3 - 5 years	160	31
6 - 10 years	82	16
11 or more years	32	6

Do you work on a team of all remote workers?	*n*	%
No	213	42
Yes	296	58
What is the primary reason you work remotely?		
It is required for my job	114	22
I do not like working in an office	38	8
I enjoy the freedom of choosing when or where to work	208	41
It accommodates my family needs	140	28
Other	9	2
How often do you have contact with your direct supervisor?		
Never	17	3
Once per month	52	10
Once per week	173	34
Once per day	159	31
Multiple times per day	108	21
How often would you like to have contact with your direct supervisor		
Never	24	5
Once per month	67	13
Once per week	172	34
Once per day	156	31
Multiple times per day	90	18

How do you receive feedback on your performance at work from your supervisor?	*n*	%
Digital communication (text, email, etc.)	172	34
Phone / Skype / Google Hangouts	166	33
In person	145	29
Do not have a direct supervisor	15	3
I don't receiver feedback from my direct supervisor	6	1
Other	5	1
Are you happy with how you receive feedback?		
No	37	8
Yes	451	92
Do you believe that you get more work done when working remotely?		
No	48	9
Yes	461	91
How much of a difference in time zones is your main team?		
0 hours	228	45
1 hour	88	17
2 hours	77	15
3 or more hours	53	10
Do not work on a team	9	2
There is no main time zone	54	11
Have you ever experienced a work-related problem because you weren't in the same place as your team?		
No	373	73
Yes	136	27

About TINYpulse

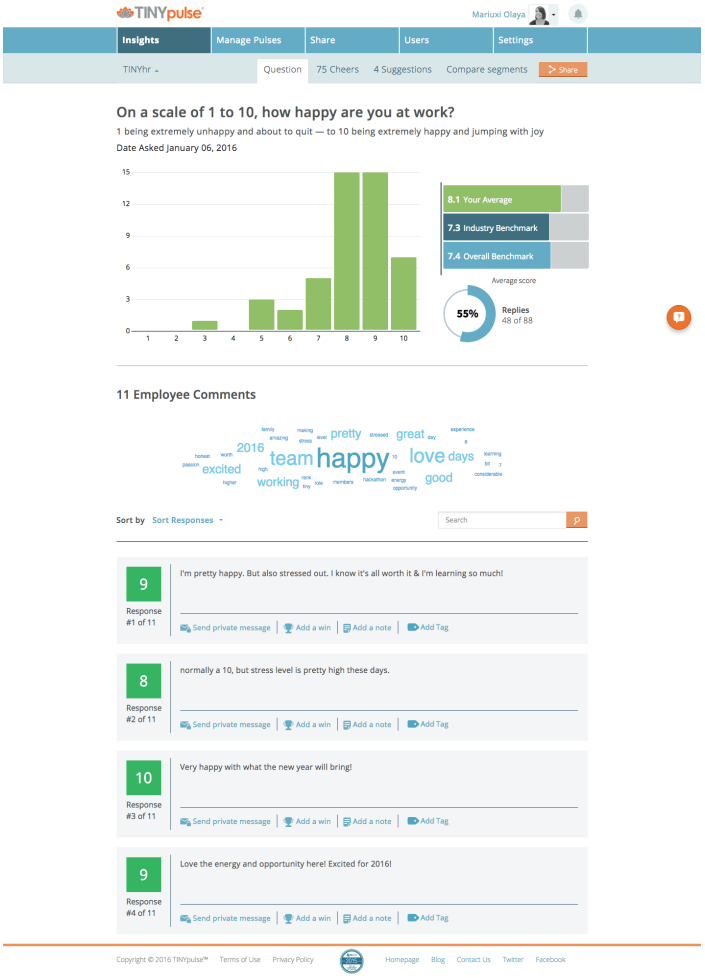
Companies make an effort to consistently track revenue, financial returns, and productivity. But they're forgetting one of the most important aspects of their organization: their people. And that's where TINYpulse comes in.

Our Mission

Founded in 2012, TINYpulse works hard to make employees happy. Our goal is to give leaders a pulse on how engaged or frustrated their employees are, helping managers spark dialogue that results in organizational change.

What We Do

We believe that information empowers leaders to create an engaging work environment and culture where people can thrive. Here is how we do that:



- **Pulsing surveys:** Our weekly pulse survey measures employee engagement using just one question. TINYpulse is a lightweight solution that captures anonymous feedback from your team to reveal insights, trends, and opportunities so you can improve retention, culture, and results.

- **Peer-to-peer recognition:** TINYpulse's Cheers for Peers™ peer-to-peer recognition tool captures the appreciation, extra effort, and little things that are often overlooked by leaders. Peers can easily send a quick shout-out to their colleagues to brighten up their day—because a little recognition goes a long way.

- **Virtual suggestions:** Our virtual suggestion box lets employees have direct input on how to improve the workplace. The anonymous format makes employees feel comfortable being honest and offering actionable ideas to improve their workplace.