

5 Tips for Staying Engaged in the Remote Work Environment

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What Does It Mean?

While there are many benefits that come with working remotely (like the lack of a commute or less workplace distractions), it is normal for staff to experience feelings of loneliness or isolation. After all, human beings are social creatures to some extent and spending 40 hours a week at home by oneself can feel like a long time for anyone. This is especially true for remote coders, who are more likely to work from home full time and are leading the charge for revenue cycle staff to work from home.

Before sending staff home, most managers of remote staff are understandably focused on the logistics (e.g., equipment), productivity tracking, and how to make staff feel part of a team they do not physically see. Yet, it is rare for staff themselves to be given instruction or adequate preparation for thriving in the remote environment. This resource focuses on five steps staff members can take to make their time at home enjoyable.

In January 2019, HBI's Research Manager Selby Rodriguez and Research Analyst Jill Barczak gave a presentation at Aurora Health Care's Annual Coding Conference. The presentation provided a state of the industry on remote work, an overview of remote coding structures in place at organizations, and strategies for staying engaged. This edition of By The Numbers provides an excerpt from that last section of the presentation and is meant to provide remote team members a list of actionable steps to help make their work-from-home experience a successful one.

1 | Stay Connected

As a remote team member, conference calls or meetings are likely one of the few times that everyone will be together. Make the most of that time. That means closing other programs and limiting distractions. It might also mean setting a goal to speak up at least once in every all-team conference call. If you have a webcam, consider turning it on.

Get to know your colleagues, too. Do you log in at the same time as a coworker? Use your organization's messaging platform to ask them about their night or talk about a television show you might have in common.

This direction can be taken both literally (i.e., ensuring you have a strong internet connection) and figuratively. Ask yourself: Am I doing everything I can to feel a part of the team?

Do you have colleagues in the area? Consider setting aside a time to meet up outside of work. No colleagues nearby? An international health system schedules virtual coffee breaks for its coders, where a few staff members call into a conference line at the same time just to chat. There may be some initial awkwardness, but it is worth pushing through to build that connection with one another.

2 | Recognize Each Other

Recognition is often considered a manager's responsibility, but some organizations offer online platforms (e.g., TINYPulse or Kudos) for their staff. These tools allow you to nominate one another for a job well done or an appreciated favor in a manner that recognizes the recipient publicly.

While these are nice options, you do not need to rely on these systems alone to recognize one another. A kindly worded email or a word of acknowledgement in a larger group meeting can go a long way toward making someone feel valued and important to the team. Also, do not fall into the trap of thinking only management can make someone feel this way. Often, the best thank-you notes are those coming from peers.

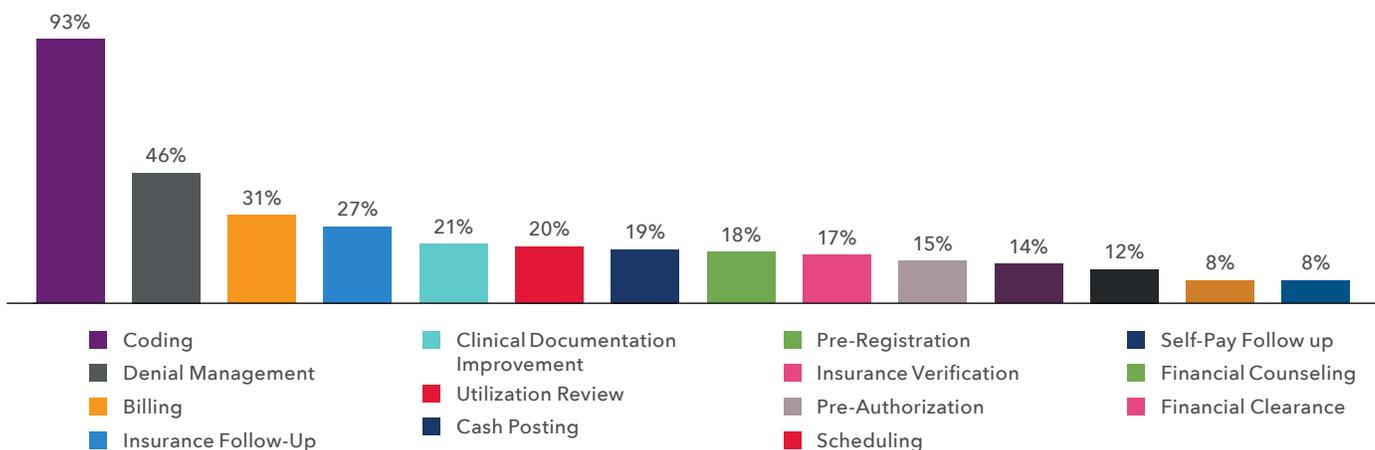
3 | Reach Out For Help

Remote workers often have a tendency to feel that it is up to them to solve their own problems. That thought makes sense when you consider that there is no one else around to help solve a problem, but that does not mean that you are alone as a remote employee. There are colleagues that can help—or even those whose role is to provide support—but remote workers need to take the initiative to reach out and ask for this assistance.

If your organization sends out an engagement survey each year, take it. Be honest and talk about what is going well and what could be improved. If you have an idea for how to make a process more efficient, get staff more engaged, or something else, let your leadership know. The best ideas sometimes come from staff who are on the ground floor. Being proactive in this way is also a good indication for future career success.

% of Revenue Cycle Staff Working From Home

Source: Healthcare Business Insights, Part of Clarivate (2016 and 2018)



While it is most common for coders to work remotely in today's revenue cycle, HBI has noticed increased interest in this structure in recent years—perhaps due to more millennials entering the workforce.

**This 2018 survey only asked whether CDI specialists worked remotely 50%-100% of the time.*

4 | Stay Healthy

As remote workers, there are a few things you should do to ensure you are taking good care of yourself. That involves making sure your workstation is ergonomic, meaning you have the right support for your back, you are not holding your wrists at odd angles to type or use your computer mouse, and the computer screen is at an optimal distance and height for your eyes. Having everything set up appropriately is the best way to avoid future pain in your back, hips, and neck; it might even help you avoid headaches or carpal tunnel.

Given the lack of distractions at home, it is common for remote staff to not take all of the breaks they need. Make it a point to stretch once an hour and take your eyes off the computer. If you get easily drawn into your work, set a calendar reminder telling you to do this. It will also help avoid the pain mentioned in the paragraph above.

Follow an exercise routine. You do not have to lift weights, but using your break to take a quick walk outside the house will do wonders if you are not exercising at all. Think of all the time you spend working. The trick is getting up more frequently—whether it is to go outside, to grab water, or to run to the bathroom—to avoid spending all of it sitting in one static position.

It might sound simple, but it is worth stating: Do not work in your pajamas. Think about how you feel when you put on a power outfit—whether that is an actual suit, a dress, or something else. You carry yourself differently when you have that on. You feel better about yourself when you wear it. And, chances are, that is not how you feel in pajamas.

5 | Set Boundaries

You are paid to do your job, and you have a certain number of hours to do it in a day. Give your all to work during that time, but once you are clocked out for the day, make sure that you have stopped working mentally as well.

It can often be beneficial to place your work desk in a room that you will not spend a lot of time in outside of work—primarily to create a physical boundary between that room and your home life. When you are in that room during work hours, you are working. When you are outside that room outside of work hours, you are living your life.

It is important to be able to separate these two main components of your life. Otherwise, it can be easy to fall into the idea of working for another five minutes (which soon turns into an hour), checking email or work queues outside of work hours, or letting work consume your time off. Creating an effective separation like this may be the key to achieving a positive work-life balance.

Have a question about this topic or another altogether? HBI's research team is on the case. Send a message to contact@hbinsights.com with your questions!