



Roundtable Member, **Sue Haas**, Vice President of Digital Media at Blue Ant Media, shares strategies for building connection and tapping into collective intelligence among dispersed teams.

Mentoring **MATTERS**



Even though my organization invests in technology and tools that support remote teams and individuals to collaborate, I feel like silos are still there (and even growing!). What advice would you share for building connection between team members so we can tap into the collective intelligence and work together?

Sue's Point of View

Work culture is crucial to our companies but also to ourselves as healthy humans who want a great life that includes working! When you talk to former employees they never bring up old financial results. It's always memories of the people, physical space, traditions and tone and values of the business. We can't virtually replicate in-person work and casual office encounters (lunchtime walks, getting coffee, bathroom breaks, etc.) yet here are some tips to improve connection with your colleagues while working remotely.

Flexibility & Fun

Be as flexible, kind and aware as you can of each team member's personal situation. Some staff have young kids at home, health concerns, issues with their physical space and want to get their work done and that's it. Others might be craving more social interaction and want more meetings that are socially oriented like trivia hour or virtual "coffee time." I suggest you offer a variety of social opportunities but not make them mandatory. Also, planning trivia games, or other online activities can be time consuming so recruit volunteers. Take on some of this "office housework" yourself as well. Having a senior leader model the company culture is the key to showing your team its value at the highest level. Keep in mind that something might work for a week, a month, or six months but then it gets stale. Switch things up and take hiatus breaks.

Face Time & Variety

If you're only meeting with a group once a month, encourage cameras to be turned on during meetings but make sure you let everyone know BEFORE the meeting. Introverts and staff who aren't comfortable with their home surroundings won't want to be put on the spot. If you meet with individuals weekly or even daily encourage them to take phone calls while on a walk to get outside, anything that helps them and also adds variety to your interactions.

Virtual meetings are definitely better in smaller groups. If you have a large team try splitting it up and having smaller check-ins and then mixing the team members around. This is more intimate and encourages more interaction.

Connect Without Inbox Clutter

I feel very close to the teams I engage with on Slack (or any alternative software). We work very productively but also can socialize and be silly without abusing each other's time. This is because you can scroll through threads and ignore non-work related chatter if you wish. Don't force staff to chit-chat on Slack or other chat platforms! But show them as a leader it's OK to do it and you can still have some fun. These software systems also allow you to connect with a group of people multiple times in a day without clogging up email inboxes. Plus, each team member gets to see the message and there is no broken link in communication.

Keep Traditions Going

Keep the social traditions you had in person as much as possible such as celebrating work anniversaries and birthdays. This can be sending a gift or food to someone's house and or a group video call—whatever is most respectful of your team's time and what you think your staff would appreciate.

Since office perks are limited with everyone working remotely, try to offer virtual training and professional development or job shadowing and mentoring online.

Overall, I'd say get to know your teams even more than you did when you all worked in person. Ask them questions, check-in and follow up without bombarding. Not everyone will agree on one specific framework on how to build culture virtually but allow them to weigh in. If team members feel they are responsible for culture as much as their leader, they are invested.



Sue Haas is a respected leader in the media industry, with over 20 years of experience working on TV and digital-first brands. In her current role as Vice President of Digital Media at **Blue Ant Media**, Sue works across niche multi-platform brands, including **Cottage Life**, **Animalogic**, **ASide** and **Makeful** and most recently **MobileSyrup**. She oversees the success of digital content on web and social, including strategy, content, operations, marketing and revenue generation. Sue continually adapts and evolves digital media to appeal to the latest industry trends. Prior to Blue Ant Media, Sue worked at **Alliance Atlantis** for **History Television** and **HGTV's** digital platforms. She is actively involved with the IAB, Interactive Ontario, Bell Fund, Ontario Creates and the Canadian Media Fund. Most recently, Sue was the recipient of the W/IFT (Women in Film and Television) Digital Trailblazer Award in 2020.



Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.