
Hold a Hybrid Watercooler Discussion

Here is a tool for bringing people together by creating social connection. Water cooler conversations allow your remote team to take a break from work to:

- Have personal interactions with one another and strengthen bonds between remote and in-office team member in a less stressful environment
- Allow people who don't work directly with each other to connect
- Bounce ideas in a casual setting
- Create a sense of community

How to Hold a Water Cooler Discussion

1. Lockdown a platform – Teams or Zoom if hybrid/simple slides if co-located

2. Create slides with compelling questions – not too personal, yet provocative and interesting to help people get to know each other or practice collaboration or problem-solving a business issue

3. Decide if the discussion will be a single event or short slides interspersed within your normal meeting slides

4. Formulate conversation topics

5. Enjoy and engage

Virtual Watercooler Topic Ideas

Take this opportunity to prepare topics that will support your team's sense of social connection and allow the team to think together. The topics should be of interest to all and present a stress-free opportunity to share. Here are several water cooler questions to pose for your team to discuss:

- Focus on a company announcement or policy and add "How can we be successful in supporting this (announcement/initiative/policy)?"
- Use the 1-10 Check-in tool to allow people to share how they are doing, and add, "How can we help get you to a 10?"
- Use the "Fist to Five" to ask a question and discuss the feedback.
- Have a "creativity jam" and brainstorm ideas to share around a specific goal.

- Ask team members to describe or bring an “artifact” from home that symbolizes off-hours interests or hobbies.
- Ask team members to offer a favorite book, movie, or activity.
- Ask team members to share a “fun fact” or superpower, recipe, or skill.

There are many important benefits of having “mini-breaks” like water cooler discussions; improving overall morale, promoting collaboration, and helping colleagues feel like a member of your team. Virtual water cooler discussions breaks don’t need to be lengthy, usually, 10-20 minutes will suffice.

Notes: Water Cooler Best Practices

Here are several tips to ensure success:

1. Don’t force anything

It’s important to keep everything as casual as possible. That’s what water coolers are – they’re meant to form genuine interest and bonds between team members. As such if an employee doesn’t want to participate in an activity, don’t force them.

2. Merge water cooler moments with meetings

Arrange mini-water cooler moments surrounding or within meetings can help in not only fostering innovation, but also in improving the attendees' focus and present-mindedness. Have virtual water cooler moments topics mapped out before the meeting sessions to smoothly steer the conversation.

3. Ensure Informality

Informality is the key to achieving the best digital water cooler moments. Let’s be real, none of us is concerned about our formal behavior when we are getting a coffee from the espresso machine or casually chatting while going from one department to another. Informal conversations have been found to foster creativity – modify your voice and body language to reflect an informal attitude.