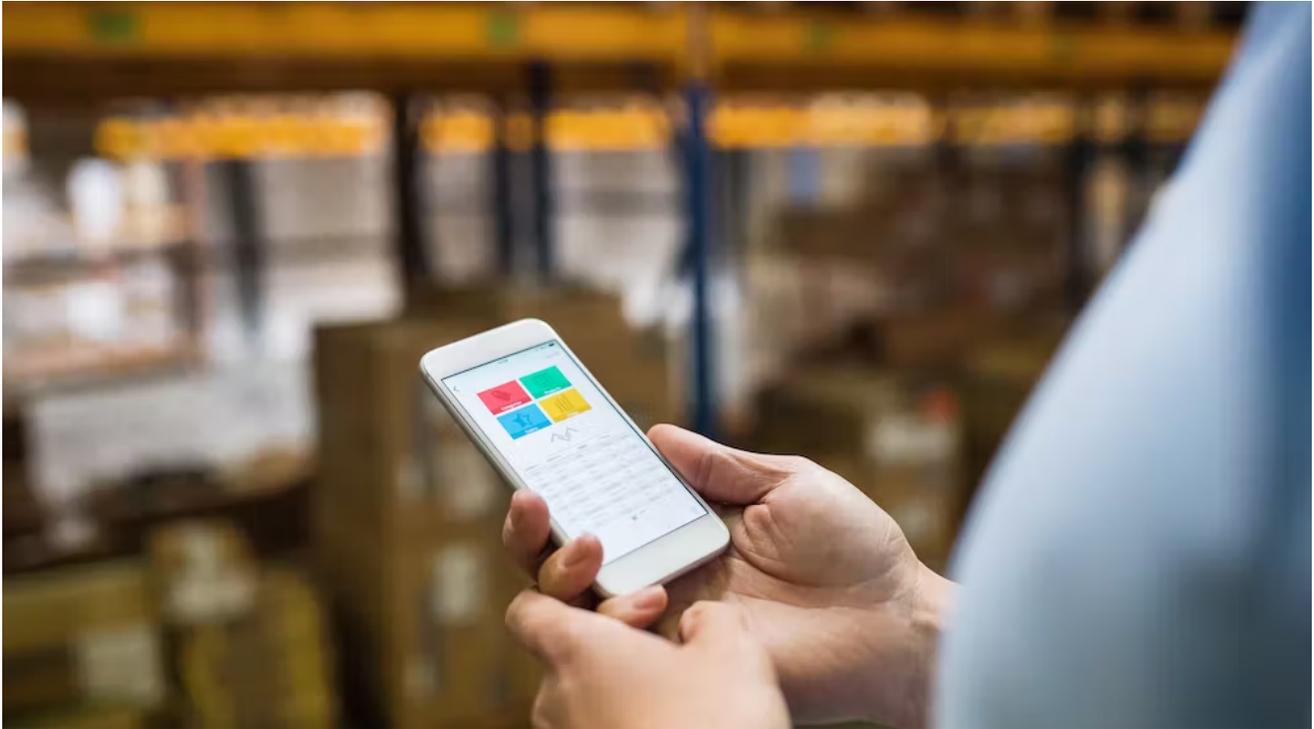


How a Fully Connected Workforce Improves Frontline Safety

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Every industry has its own set of risks that business leaders have to address and mitigate. That has long been the case, but in 2020 workplace safety emerged at the forefront as the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. Companies were forced to quickly pivot and make organizational and operational changes, which posed the question: How would companies maintain social distancing between workers to keep them safe without sacrificing productivity or increasing downtime?

This has been a huge challenge, especially for frontline workers. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a communication inequality as many frontline teams, in businesses such as food processing and manufacturing plants, navigate these changes without access to a computer or a company email account.

In the past, companies relied on traditional communication methods, such as in-person meetings or notes tacked on bulletin boards, to communicate with frontline workers. When the pandemic hit, many employees were able to seamlessly transition to working remotely, but many of the world's 2 billion frontline workers became even more disconnected. Managers had to find a way to keep their frontline workers in the loop amid changing workplace regulations and protocols.

Create a Culture of Safety with a Digitally Connected Workforce

Throughout 2020, people relied more on their mobile devices. In fact, global mobile usage jumped by 70% during the pandemic, according to [statista](#). And those devices are increasingly more common among Americans. According to [Pew Research Center](#), 85% of all U.S. adults own smartphones. Those trends have presented an opportunity for companies to create a culture of safety in the workplace through a mobile-first strategy.

COVID-19 is driving high-speed, interdepartmental efforts to digitize communication with frontline workers. In many cases, companies are piggybacking on the rise of mobile device ownership and using workplace apps that employees can access from their personal devices. Digitizing communication provides more information while also allowing all employees to follow proper protocols to ensure a compliant work environment.

When a company embraces digital transformation through a mobile-first strategy, it signals a cultural shift that prioritizes the safety and well-being of their entire workforce. A digital communication platform levels the playing field and gives everyone equal access to the same information. Workers, especially those on the frontline, can receive immediate alerts, have access to safety documents and watch safety training videos—all on their smartphone.

Improve Safety Through Two-Way Communication

Communication has traditionally followed a top-down trajectory in work environments that rely on frontline teams. But in order to establish comprehensive safety plans and protocols, leaders need a complete view of their operations.

Using a mobile platform opens up communication channels within a company, allowing information and messaging to travel top-down, bottom-up and directly between co-workers. In other words, frontline production workers can share valuable insights from their perspective that can improve workplace safety through a feedback loop that includes surveys and direct messaging.

Here are a couple examples of how two-way communication can give leaders critical information that can increase safety:

- **Incident reporting:** In 2019, there were 2.8 million nonfatal workplace incidents reported in the United States. While that's a significant figure, there are many more that go unreported. The required paperwork to record incidents alone can discourage workers from reporting incidents. A workplace app gives them a place to easily file a report straight from their phone so measures can be taken to eliminate future risk.

- **Protective equipment needs:** Most work environments currently require everyone to wear personal protective equipment (PPE), especially face masks. But according to [Gallup](#), more than a third of workers have said their companies rarely or never supply them with PPE. With a workforce app, employees can alert managers when they need PPE by simply filling out a mobile form directly on the app.

Align Everyone with a Centralized Information Hub

It can be difficult to keep employees up to date with evolving restrictions, regulations and guidelines, but companies have a responsibility to relay health and safety information to their workforce in a timely manner. In fact, many workers trust their employers more than other institutions, such as the media and government, to give them reliable information.

Using a workplace communication tool creates a centralized hub through which information can flow, helping to deliver clear, real-time messaging. Information distribution is easier and more efficient when every employee is reachable through one method. A workplace app builds consistency allows managers to send automated alerts and establishes dedicated communication streams (similar to newsfeeds) focused on COVID-19 updates and guidelines.

A single sign-on tool also allows safety information to be stored in one secure, cloud-based location for easy access. All workers can quickly pull up safety documents or upload incident reports that they can easily share with others.

A workplace app often includes features that promote inclusive communication. For example, in-line translation allows workers to select their preferred language so every message is received and read, ensuring all workers comprehend safety protocols. Workplace apps can provide workers direct access to their schedules, allowing them to update their availability, swap shifts directly with colleagues or let managers know when they need coverage. This rapid and agile shift coordination is especially crucial if workers need to call off because of COVID-19. Giving workers the tools to manage their shifts also affords them more options to find coverage and stay home when they're not feeling well, helping to stop the spread of coronavirus at work, reduce absenteeism and maintain productivity levels.

Employee health and safety will continue to be at the heart of business strategies in 2021. Organizations need to build safer spaces and prioritize the well-being of their workforce through clear, consistent, digital collaboration as the COVID-19 pandemic rages on and the world adapts to a new normal.

Daniel Sztutowojner is co-founder and chief customer officer of [Beekeeper](#), a mobile platform that helps companies communicate with their non-desk workforce.