



DistantJob
REMOTE PLACEMENT AGENCY

GAMIFICATION

THE REMOTE SOLUTION



Learn how the science behind video games can take your team to the next level, with real-world case studies and implementation techniques.

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Introduction

“Essential reading for anyone who wants to play a hand in inventing a better future.”

- Jimmy Wales, Founder of Wikipedia, on the topic of gamification

Consider James for a moment. He comes into the office every day, sits in his cubicle and manages your product and resource allocation. He goes through his workload doing the minimum possible in order to get a passable quarterly review. His greatest mark on your company and life is the way his total lack of zeal and commitment crushes your soul.

But if you were to follow James after he leaves the office, you would find that he undergoes a transformation once he gets home.

At his computer, James becomes Hrothgar, Slayer of Kings. As his powerfully built avatar sits down in his throne of skulls, his war table in front of him and his great sword by his side, he pulls up a complex menu and... Spends two hours allocating resources across his game characters, managing followers and colleagues, voraciously looking for ways to optimize his processes and immediately sharing any findings with his partners.

He's doing the same things he does at the office, he's doing them better, and he's doing them just for fun

While you might feel a bit uncomfortable about having a two-hundred pound, loincloth-wearing barbarian checking in at the office every morning, make no mistake: you would boast to your friends about him as a star player.

How is This Possible?

"Gamification increases productivity levels for 90% of workers." -
- Badgeville Survey



Less than one-third (31.5%) of U.S. workers were engaged in their jobs in 2014, according to a 2015 Gallup poll.

In the meantime, a recent survey revealed that only 31% of employees are most motivated by monetary awards, while gamification increases productivity levels for 90% of workers and increases awareness of co-workers' goals and tasks by 86%.

The top benefits of gamification, according to survey respondents, are increased engagement at work, inspiration to be more productive and increased focus and ability to stay on task (30%, 27%, and 20%, respectively).

How much would your company benefit if your employees were more like Hrothgar and less like James?

Case Study #1

Pizza Time: IT Agile Training

Brad Swanson, a senior Agile coach, developed The Kanban Pizza Game as a hands-on simulation designed to teach the core elements of a Kanban system—visualize the workflow, limit your work-in-process (WIP), manage flow, make process policies explicit, and improve collaboratively.

By playing his game, aspiring managers in charge of IT-centric teams can experience how Kanban helps eliminate bottlenecks, minimize waste, and keep up with customer demand—all while competing against other teams for the title of “Pizza King.”

At the end of the game, players trace their experience back to the software world to see how Kanban can be an evolutionary path to lean-agile development.



What is Gamification?

Gamification is the application of game-design elements and game principles in work-related context, leading to improved employee engagement, organizational productivity, flow, team building, and learning, among other things.

It does this through techniques that strive to leverage people's natural desires for competition, achievement, status, altruism, community collaboration, and many more.

How Does it Work?

An ideal gamification system re-frames typical work activities as engaging, tangible benchmarks to pursue and surpass.

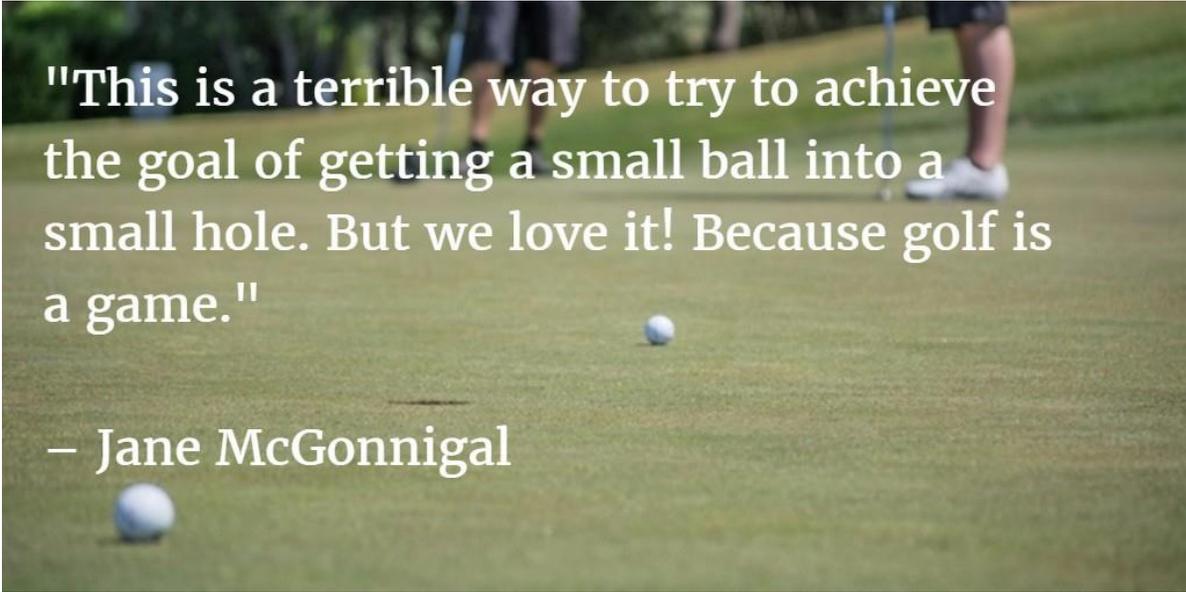
With such a system, a QA tester might “rank up” in a virtual leaderboard as he reports bugs. Or even better - each tester may be paired with a developer in order to rack up “wins” on the dev team's internal “seek and destroy” debugging contest.

Gamification could especially be about creating higher expectations for your employees. As researcher and gamification authority Jane McGonigal puts it:

“Take the game of golf, for example. The goal is to put a small ball into a small hole. If (...) you wanted to achieve this goal, you'd just walk right up to the hole and drop the ball in. Easy! But when we're playing golf the game, for some reason, we agree to stand really far away from the hole. (...) we use a stick to try to somehow get the ball from where we're standing into the hole (...) This is a terrible way to try to achieve the goal of getting a small ball into a small hole. But we love it! Because golf is a game, and games are about the art of the hard part. Games remind us that we actually have more fun when things are more difficult.”

Gamification is all about the way you structure your goals, feedback and milestones. It's about empowering your employees to do their job in a way that makes them productive, accountable high performers.

From working with and interviewing many managers, entrepreneurs and business owners, we know that one of the biggest concerns they are likely to have about a remote employee is how to make sure he or she is properly motivated and giving it their all.



"This is a terrible way to try to achieve the goal of getting a small ball into a small hole. But we love it! Because golf is a game."

– Jane McGonnigal

Traditionally, intrusive management and time-tracking software has been offered as an answer, but employees engaged with gamification techniques don't need their colleagues or bosses to look over their shoulder and keep them accountable. They will do their best because the gamified structure compels them, and their work will speak for itself.

Case Study #2

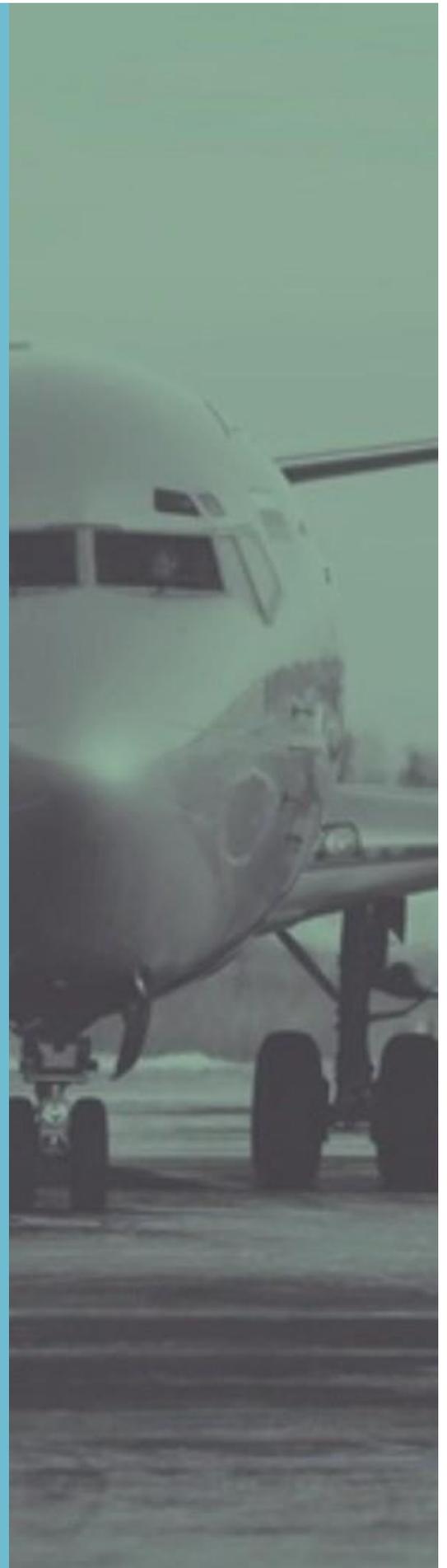
Employee Training

Delta Airlines had a project where the company on-shored their call centers and needed to find a way to get call-center employees to complete more training.

The company's campaign featured mini games, called "Ready, Set, Jet," that got Delta employees to do four years' worth of training in a single year.

Actual badges, carefully designed to relay a sophisticated idea of merit, were found to do wonders in promoting excellence throughout the organization.

Employees strove to obtain the badges that conveyed their superior skills as part of their personal-professional identity.



First Rule: Match Skill Sets to Challenges

One of the things that make games much more motivating than your usual stint at work is that the “Win Condition” is always clearly defined and at the edge of a player's ability.

“Avoid missing the ball for high score.” -Pong, 1972

Your employees should always know how they can “win the game”. And, crucially - remember McGonigal's point about golf - these goals must be challenging.

The magic of the game challenge is that, when you fail, you lose nothing but your personal investment. So, players are ready to try again, and have no fear of tackling challenging matters or trying to go beyond them and over- deliver.

Action Steps

1

Create a private note or document for each employee under your supervision.

2

List their three biggest strengths and three biggest weaknesses.

3

What are they working on at the moment? Are they outmatched and struggling? Or are they cruising along, barely interested?

4

Reassign projects as needed according to their strengths and weaknesses.

This is your most important commandment (and challenge) as the manager of remote employees: assign them work that will challenge but not overwhelm them. The best games match us against challenges at our skill level. Be that matchmaker for your employees.

Second Rule: Set Goals and Milestones

Let's say you go to a golf course where you start at one end, and that the course has a single hole - 18 miles away from your starting spot. Do you feel that would make a pleasant golfing experience?

Of course not! It's all about the hole-to-hole experience. Your employees can easily be made to have a similarly pleasant experience when working on their projects.

Your employees should always know what is expected each week - how they can "win the game" each week. And they should know how it all adds up over a project.

Games are psychologically pleasant, even thrilling to players, because they always know what the next small step to take is.

They have a comforting breadcrumb trail to follow, and get the pleasure ticking off a milestone after a quick, short burst of work.

Action Steps

1

Find a good tool that will enable you to set deadlines, and do so for each employee that you are in charge of.

2

Focus on "single-step" goals with short deadlines, such as chunks of code delivered. One large goal or deadline per project is usually hard to visualize, and therefore hard to use as a point of motivation.

3

The previous section's pointers apply: the deadlines should be challenging but manageable. Don't be afraid to communicate with your employees to see what they are comfortable with.

4

Set up a system that will congratulate them on achieving said deadlines. It can be a team-wide email or social post (we'll get to forms of reward in later sections).

The point is to make sure they enter a game-like pattern where there is a clear challenge and a short burst of work that is followed by a sense of achievement.



Third Rule: Make All Contributions Visible

"It's a wise long-term investment to create an environment where employees can manage, visualize and digitally share their performance, achievements and skills."

- Jon Shalowitz, CEO of Badgeville



In popular online games, people coordinate their efforts and skills at an expert level to beat the challenges engendered by the game designers, and consistently pull it off, playing anywhere from 4 to 12 hours per week.

They are driven to do this because these games excel at engendering social responsibility through their systems of achievement.

Each one of a player's teammates can simply glance at her avatar and see how she is equipped with the latest and greatest weapons. They can all see her skill reflected in the score table at the end of a match.

Action Steps

1

Make sure your whole team is aware of each individual's contributions to the previously set goals and milestones.

2

Use a social network platform. A lot of options are available, from customized, internal social network software to private Facebook groups.

The employee feels valued by, and values, her team members, because constant feedback is seamlessly exchanged between them.

Each employee may be from a different time zone and only meet up for a team match every once in a while, but all of them can check up on one another at any time.

Fourth Rule: Celebrate Collective and Individual Achievement

Games are never light on praise. Every correct action is rewarded, either indirectly - let's say, through an explosive visual effect or a pleasant sound effect - or directly, as is the case with in-game currency or a high-score.

You already have this in your company culture, to a point. Management will speak of the "code wizard" in the office around the corner; tales are told about the how that employee from Germany is a true "Agile master."

Action Steps	
1	Refer back to the notes on your team's strengths.
2	Identify the best ways to make team members feel aware of their value.
4	Give employees visible distinctions. For example, some companies give witty titles like "Chief Executive Dreamer." Another example is giving special badges employees can post on their team's or business' social communication channels.
5	Sometimes, even extra work can feel like a reward. A lot of people crave the chance to be visibly put in charge of a project. Can you spot someone that would feel like that and has the skills to do a great job?



This boils down to a matter of openly recognizing and generously celebrating merit, both when the team reaches key milestones and when someone reveals themselves to be a master at a certain task.

When you implement celebration, remote employees will not only feel part of the family, they will thrive on being considered valuable members and work even harder to earn further recognition.

Case Study #3

Software Development Estimates With Poker

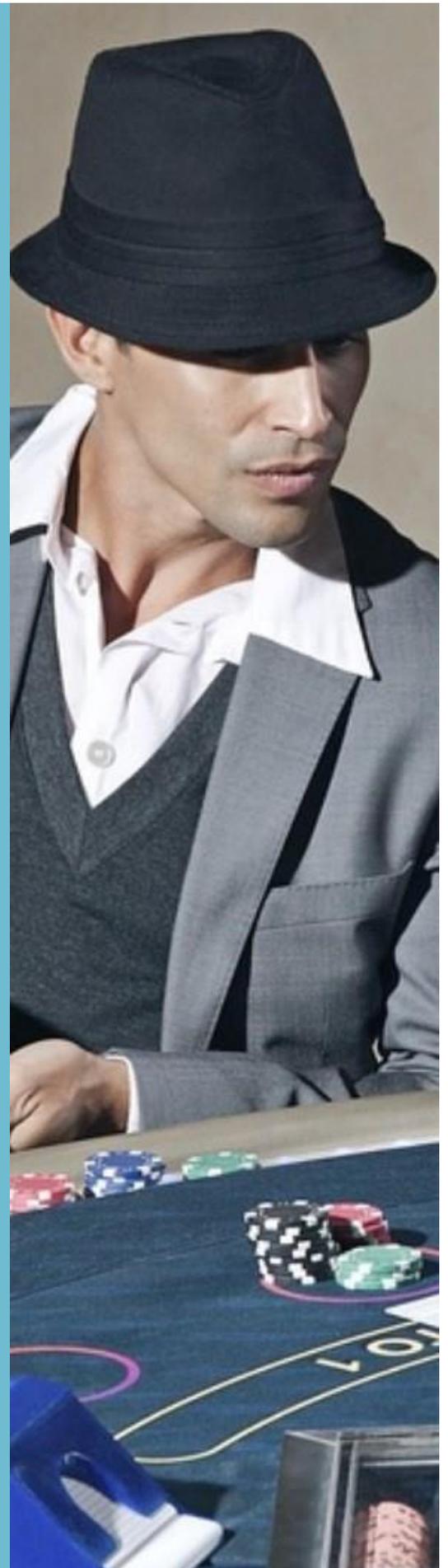
In IT teams working using the Agile methodology, the development team is responsible for estimating the level of effort required for the user stories - the feature components that are to be developed for the software project.

One of the most popular ways of estimating user stories is by playing estimation poker, a game to determine user story size and to build consensus with the development team members.

As one player exposes a user story, each of the other players selects, and holds face down, a card with a number corresponding to the level of effort they believe will take to implement it.

Once everyone has made their selection, the cards are revealed. If there is a big discrepancy between each player's values, a debate will ensue to understand why someone thinks implementing the story will take so little or so much effort. Then they replay until a consensus is reached.

Through this game, instead of each member estimating the workload in a vacuum, the whole team can present their input in a fast, streamlined way, greatly reducing the scope for error.



The Gamified Future

"To integrate gamification successfully into the employee process, it needs to be incorporated into the very core of corporate work-flow. It must become part of the organization's communication and feedback DNA, rather than some temporary, superficial supplement that sticks out like a sore thumb."

- Yoav Vilner, CEO of Ranky

Humans have been playing games since the dawn of civilization. Games are often used for distraction and escapism, but they can also be an invaluable tool for motivation and collaboration.

Over the past five years, the rise of online gaming and the e-sports arena has proven that individuals living many miles away from each other, sometimes even in different time zones, can work together and collaborate as if they all lived under the same roof. Their levels of coordination match or surpass those of even the most veteran sports teams.

A gamification approach can then work as a full framework to manage remote employees and make them excel at the tasks you wish them to perform.

The future of teamwork is here, it is remote, and it is gamified.

The Next Step: Get in Touch With Us

Let Us Know How We Can Help!

The tactics and action-points defined in this guide can boost your team's output.

But if you find yourself wanting more info about hiring and motivating a remote team, get in touch with us at contact@distantjob.com or 888.886.7343 and we will be delighted to chat with you.

www.distantjob.com