HOW OYSTER ACHIEVED RECORD-HIGH EMPLOYEE RETENTION WITH KONA

"It's valuable to know what kind of headspace people are in day to day when I'm going into a meeting with someone or when I'm checking in with the team."

Kim Rohrer
Head of Employee Experience, Oyster

Oyster's global employment platform helps companies hire and onboard people anywhere in the world. Their suite of HR tools supports companies with all their people needs: automating compliance, managing health benefits, and more.

The timing of the pandemic sky-rocketed Oyster's growth. When the global workforce was forced to work remotely, that simultaneously led companies to change their office-based policies long-term.

Oyster's employees needed support. We spoke with Kim Rohrer, Head of Employee Experience, and Mitra Moin, Employee Experience Manager, to learn what challenges arose while leading a fully remote organization through the pandemic.

TL;DR

Oyster has secured $224.2M in funding since April 2020—most recently at a valuation of $1+ billion. They've validated the importance of a forward-thinking, remote-first approach to the Future of Work.

They go the extra mile to support teams. **Oyster achieved a 98% retention rate when teams used Kona for a year.**

Challenge: Prevent burnout in a fully distributed workplace

- It's no surprise that growing a company while fully remote can trigger employee burnout. The employee experience team at Oyster knew they weren't an exception to that. The team needed to address individual burnout at scale, accounting for the loss of in-person community.

- "If you've been at the company for less than six months and the company is on a huge trajectory and it's really mission-oriented, you might be super burnt out and emotionally be having a rough time, but still be highly engaged with the company because you believe in the mission. Obviously, that's not sustainable long-term, no matter how passionate you are," explained Rohrer.

- Early in Oyster's growth, the team relied on a bi-annual survey of 50 to 60 questions and additional five-question, quarterly surveys to learn more about their people.

- **'We asked questions in surveys about workload and stress on a quarterly basis. But it's not quite as granular. Things can be missed,"** Rohrer said.

- Rohrer knew surveys weren't enough to understand engagement and avoid burnout. "Having a more consistent metric that can clue us into how things are going in between those big surveys that we do twice a year is a powerful indicator of people's experience working here," said Rohrer.

Oyster started Kona in September 2021. They've checked in every day for a year, a total of 19,000 times across 43 teams!

Morning! How are you feeling?

Nancy 💚 🤩 excited
I'm watching Top Gun: Maverick today!

Kim 💛 🤠 yeehaw
Had a rough customer call, but I'm playing country music and vibing now.
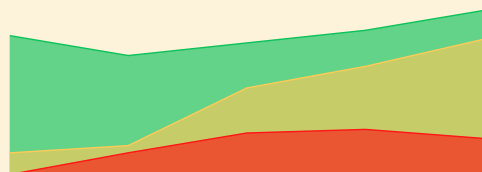
Bill ❤️ 🗑️ dumpster fire

Burnout Alert

⬆️ 40% this week

This week burnout rose across four engineering teams. Learn more.

Company   1 Month ⌄

Action: Improve the employee experience at every level

To fight burnout and take a pulse on their teams, Rohrer and Moin piloted Kona with company leaders. The goal was to create a more data-driven, empathetic employee experience strategy that includes daily emotional check-ins, access to real-time metrics, and smart nudges to trigger thoughtful conversations.

"What I find really valuable about Kona is that it does give you that daily or weekly spot check, and it puts it right there in Slack so you can easily see the emotional experience people are having," said Rohrer.

Now, Kona supports Oyster at every level of leadership.

> **"In aggregated form, it's helpful for me to see trends so that I can work with my team on how to address challenges and operationalize improvements. What do we need to act on today? What's a budding trend that we should keep an eye on?"**
>
> —Kim Rohrer, Head of Employee Experience

Employee Experience: A birds-eye view on the org

With Kona, the Employee Experience team gains an understanding of how each team across the company is engaging, where to spend their time coaching managers, and what to change at an organizational level to improve the employee experience.

Moin explained, "If I see a team struggling, I message the team lead and ask them if they've noticed any changes, internal or external, that might be contributing to that. They'll have more context and awareness since they're more connected day-to-day. It helps create intentional check-in moments."

Rohrer explained how Kona provides a company-wide view with metrics that she needs to perform her job effectively:

"In my role stewarding employee experience for the whole company, it's beneficial for me to be able to see at a glance how we're doing. In aggregated form, it's helpful for me to see trends so that I can work with my team on how to address challenges and operationalize improvements. What do we need to act on today? What's a budding trend that we should keep an eye on?" Kim says she can't get this information at scale without Kona.

Managers: The context to get ahead of burnout

We spoke with David 'DJ' Oragui, Director of Strategic Projects & GTM, to better understand how managers benefit from using Kona. For Oragui, Kona adds another layer of peer and manager support, which ultimately builds trust and transparency across his team.

"What I really like is how Kona encourages my team to support one another. As a manager, I feel like I also have a place to share my vulnerabilities and be transparent with my team," he explained.

Oragui also spoke to the value of Kona's health dashboard to tap into how his team is feeling. "I really like the trends that Kona shows me, to see that my team has been averaging more yellows and greens, with fewer reds compared to two weeks, one month ago etc."

"I love the fact that Kona just enables me, as a manager, to be in touch with my team. [It's] helping them feel more welcome in the workplace, bring their whole self to work, and foster psychological safety."

–DJ Oragui, Director Strategic Projects at Oyster

Celine Grey, former Director of Revenue Acceleration, echoed Oragui's experience. "As a fully distributed team, we have fewer opportunities for small chats and unplanned social moments. Kona flipped the morning greeting 'How are you?' to a very honest 'This is how I feel today.' It is engaging team members in deeper conversations and allows everyone to support one another," said Grey.

Grey used Kona to understand how her team members are feeling, without the observational cues inherent to synchronous work. This allowed her to make people-informed decisions she may otherwise have missed without that support.

"We encourage transparency and critical conversations at all levels. With Kona, our team members share their feelings openly — even our more introverted team members — and they get full support from other team members in return. It is helping us create deeper connections and understanding," she explained.

Managers get a deeper understanding of how their direct reports are feeling day-to-day. The line of context removes the guesswork as to why someone is acting a certain way and if they should be concerned if they're facing burnout.

Early Results: 84% of Oyster employees feel more comfortable sharing when something's not going well

- Burnout is inevitable in fast-paced startups. However, treating burnout is difficult when employees lack the psychological safety to share how they're feeling. Without that transparency, it's difficult for managers and workplace teams to pick up on issues before they worsen.

- With Kona, Oyster breaks the stigma of speaking up. Over time, employees build trust with their teams and surface personal and work stressors on a regular basis. Kona helps leaders get proactive when it comes to team well-being.

- After two weeks, we asked employees how they felt about their teams and found:

KONA'S 2-WEEK IMPACT ON TEAMS

76%
felt more
psychological safety
on their team

84%
felt better supported
by their manager
while remote

62%
felt more comfortable
asking questions &
sharing opinions

One Year Results: Kona helped reduce attrition by 6.5%

- Research shows that higher psychological safety and engagement leads to better productivity and results for retention.

- In assessing Oyster's attrition rate over the last year, we found that Kona teams have a 2% attrition rate compared to the wider org-wide attrition rate of 8.5%. That means Kona helped reduce attrition by 6.5% org-wide, saving Oyster tens of thousands of dollars in attrition costs.

- In other words, Kona helped Oyster achieve a 98% employee retention rate. This proves that supporting teammates in the moment and investing in well-being supports the bottom line.

> "Caring about how employees feel about their work at the end of the day should be a deep-rooted quality of any leadership... As a leader, it's essential to be on the pulse to measure your employees' sentiment. One of the tools we use to help us measure how our Oysters are feeling is Kona."
>
> −Tony Jamous, CEO at Oyster

Conclusion: Kona supports employee well-being at every level

Tony Jamous, CEO at Oyster agreed that Kona is an integral part of their employee experience and the primary way Oyster measures how their people are feeling. He looks at company-level Kona data every week as part of his core "company health" metrics.

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Oyster piloted Kona on the leadership team first to increase buy-in and adoption, and they experienced its immediate impact. Since then, Kona has become a daily habit for 300 Oyster employees (and growing), 43 of which are managers.
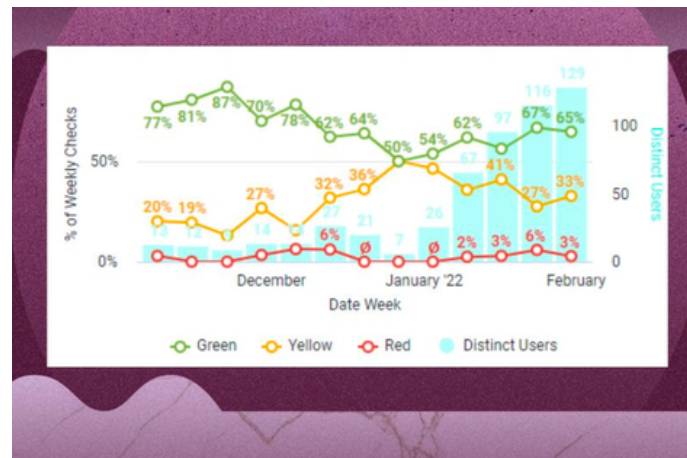
Ready to transform your culture?

Kona plays a vital role in helping teams manage stress, support well-being, and stay connected while remote.

To learn more about how Kona can transform your team, book a demo or visit heykona.com to add Kona to Slack. New teams can get started for free!