



Best Practices for Managing a Remote Workforce

March 2021
Jennifer A. Hayes
Human Resources Practice Leader

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Operations
3. Technology
4. Management
5. Mental Health
6. Culture
7. Conclusion

Introduction

Remote working allows employees to work at home, on the road, or in a satellite location. Companies need to consider the individual, the team, and the company needs when creating an environment that will allow all three entities to thrive.

As companies are creating or enhancing a remote environment, the following areas should be considered:

- The individual – What does the individual need and what are the work habits of the employee?
- Job responsibilities – Can this position be done successfully remotely?
- Technology – What does the individual and the job require? Is it different when the position is remote?
- Tax and other legal/professional implications – What payroll, insurance, federal/state laws changes need to be considered?

Operations

Employers should consider what they will provide for each position that is working from home.

Items to consider:

Technical equipment

- Computer
- Monitor and accessories (keyboard, mouse, docking station, etc)
- Printer/Scanner
- Internet
- Phone/Voiceover IP system (VoIP)/Headset

Office supplies and marketing collateral

- Basic office supplies needed for position (Pens, paper, notebook, etc)
- Heavy-duty power strip & surge protector
- Cabinet w/lock, a fire-safe box and/or paper shredder
- Marketing collateral that is appropriate (Brochures, letterhead, etc)

Office setup

- Desk
- Ergonomic Chair
- Lighting devices for video calls

Employers should offer a stipend to cover some/all of the above costs, except computer. \$200 - \$500 per new employee is standard a standard range.

Termination of employment and office equipment:

- What will the employee have to send back at the end of the employment relationship?
 - Employers will need to provide shipping packaging and a pre-paid label or expense the individual once the company has received the equipment back.

Helping your employee set up his/her office space:

What is expected from the home office?

- Dedicated workspace
 - Does the space need a lock on it?
 - The “office” should be comfortable and separate from living space.
 - Create a space for work storage.
 - Recommend your employee break up his/her workspace into zones.
 - Zone 1 – What you need at your fingertips (Computer, mouse, notebook/pen)
 - Zone 2 – What you need within an arm’s reach (Certain office supplies, phone, calculator)
 - Zone 3 – Storage space – items you use less than 1x per day.
 - Does the employer want a **Disclosure Form** required listing any individuals who would have access to the space?

- Ensure that safety is a top priority when it comes to workspace.
 - Require employees comply with the health and safety policies of your business.
 - Ensure furnishing and equipment are ergonomically designed.
 - Ensure lighting and ventilation are sufficient.
 - Be on the lookout for hazards. (Exposed extension cords, adequate fire extinguishers and smoke detectors.)

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), home offices need provide the same worker's compensation benefit and safe environment as an in-office environment.

What address do you use if you have No Headquarters?

There are many options for a permanent business address when you have no office.

- Virtual mail solutions
 - Overview – Virtual mail service receives your mail, your dedicated employee receives a notice, the mail is then scanned to you or you can view it on secure online site.
- Co-working space
 - Most co-working space offer a desk and mail services for a minimal charge.
- United States Postal Service or UPS Store
 - Use a P.O. Box

Hours:

Expectations should be outlined for what hours employees are expected to work. If the company allows for flex hours, outline productivity expectations and how it will be measured. Consider identifying appropriate responsiveness times for emails, instant message, and other forms of communication the organization uses.

Insurance:

When reviewing your general business liability insurance, a corporation will want to ensure the company is still covered at the same level and are following the laws as if you were in an office.

Questions to ask your insurance agent about business property:

- Do you want to insure employee's office equipment in their homes? Or do you want to self-insure it?
- Most homeowner's insurance/renter's insurance will only cover business property up to \$500. If you want your employee to insure the office equipment for more, s/he will need to contact their insurance company to increase the limit. You will want to consider if you cover the cost. Many homeowner's insurance policies do not cover business property.
 - Do you want to keep a copy of your employee's homeowner's/renter's insurance policy in their personnel file? Do you want to back it up with pictures of their home office?

Worker's compensation:

- Companies need to list every state where an employee lives. You do not need home addresses.

Additional insurances to discuss with your insurance agent:

- Cyber security insurance, commercial auto insurance, business income insurance.

Technology”

Technology is essential and remote workers need the right tools to complete their work. A steady internet connection is just the tip of the iceberg. Identify the minimum internet speed requirement and communicate that to employees before they join the company.

From the get-go, your company should state what they offer employees. If employees are expected to go the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) route, then you need to disclose that information.

Tools and equipment are not the only things to consider.

Cloud storage or VPN might good ways remote workers can access important files. Employees need to be aware of how to troubleshoot problems or what to do if the internet connection goes down. Consider what tech-support you plan to offer remote employees.

Put in place a process for getting employees new equipment or repairing equipment.

Ensure that all employee devices including laptops, tablets, and/or desktops are protected from intrusion. Have an IT professional set up a secure connection from the employee’s home to your company network. Connections with weak or no security leave your company open to hacking. This can put your entire business at risk. Also, insist that only employees use the company’s equipment.

In addition to hardware, security software and corporate databases have a standard communication software – email, intranet, video or audio-conferencing software, blogs, chat rooms, messaging services, or a combination of all these.

Management

Managing a remote team is not the same as managing an in-office team. There are different challenges that make work demanding. High-performing employees may experience declines in job performance and engagement when they begin working remotely, especially in the absence of preparation and training.

Consider each job and each employee individually.

Manage by objectives – set specific goals and action plans that can be tracked and measured. Increase communications – phone, email and instant messaging, video conferencing, periodic onsite meetings, and group activities.

Set clear expectations and put them in writing:

- The employee's weekly work schedule
- Expected availability during business hours.
- Overtime policy for hourly (non-exempt) employees
- What constitutes a designated office space?
- Frequency of communications between the manager and the team
- The need to report personal injuries (which might be covered under a worker's compensation plan)
- Your right to audit the employee's workspace to ensure it complies with safety standards.
- The need to protect proprietary company information.
- Employee performance expectations

Create Trust

With objectives and expectations established, lines of communication open – the next step is to trust your employees to get the job done.

With the right management, there can be many benefits to remote work environments – increased flexibility, reduction in commuting, reduced overhead for employers, increased productivity and performance, and less work-related stress.

Mental Health

It is important for managers and colleagues to be able to identify and understand triggers for mental health in remote environments.

Employers and employees should be on the watch out for social isolation, blurred boundaries between work and home, low awareness of location conditions, over and under-communication, language challenges and misunderstandings, lack of support, scheduling difficulties, lack of career progression, more home-related stress, and less influence over people and events in the workplace.

Situations that might create an environment where an employee feels too much stress:

- The inability of an individual to deal with specific types of stress in their environment.
- When there is a mismatch between a person's skills and the demands placed on them
- When there is a mismatch between a person's needs and the resources available for them
- When a person has no period without immediate tasks during which they can recuperate and stockpile for future periods of work
- When an individual faces uncertainty and lacks sufficient cues to predict an outcome
- When a person's role and responsibilities are ambiguous
- When a person is not motivated or challenged by their job
- When a person puts in high effort for low reward or outcome

Causes of stress in remote teams:

- Times zones
- Colleagues who do not participate
- Pace of decision making
- Technology issues that impact audio and visual communications
- Time required to reach decisions
- Different role expectations held by each team member
- Follow-through of team members
- Sharing bad news
- Cultural differences
- Presenting ideas during meetings
- Adhering to an agenda

What can managers do to reduce stressful environments?

Maintain Structure

When working from home, it is tempting to roll out of bed and go straight to the computer. Maintaining structure, especially in mornings, can go a long way in helping people feel calm, cool, and productive. Routine helps us physically and mentally prepare for the day. So, when the alarm goes off, encourage your employees to start the day like s/he would if s/he were physically going to the office: wake up on time, shower, and get dressed.

Have your employees schedule his/her time. Set regular working hours, including breaks and self-care practices between different tasks. Check in regularly with his/her manager and colleagues. It is also very important to continue to respect his/her limits. Resist the temptation to keep working beyond established work hours. Know and respect his/her limits to avoid burnout.



Stay connected

A top priority is maintaining relations with co-workers and managers. This is critical not only to work performance, but to emotional and mental wellness. Without the in-person social cues in an office, it is easy for the hours to pass by without taking a break from work.

Technology can offer improved communication. To alleviate feelings of isolations, some companies encourage setting virtual coffee breaks during work hours, or they organize the well-known Friday afternoon drinks to discuss the week and celebrate the successes, while also allotting time for non-work conversations.

Remind your employees that staying connected to their social networks is just as important as staying connected to their professional networks. Below are a few ideas to share with your team:

- Call or video call friends/family to check in and say hello.
- Invite people to join interactive online book clubs or discussion groups. Use Swing to watch TV together.
- Exercise with friends, either online or socially distanced. Call a friend and then go for a walk together.
- Get a dog and go to the dog park.
- Sit on your front porch, stairs, or yard and chat with neighbors as they walk by
- Check on your neighbors who live alone or are elderly.
- Volunteer

Culture

Company culture is important because it affects how employees and customers perceive you – and this greatly determines how successful your business will be. Since remote teams are physically distanced, building a culture is a bigger challenge, but the need is even greater without in-person interactions to build culture. When a company lives up to its core values, its culture will transform employees into advocates, enrich their wellbeing, and ensure the company retains its top talent.

Set a foundation of trust.

This is a big deal for any workplace – a great company culture offers a work environment characterized by trust and mutual respect. Ensure that managers and colleagues will not embarrass, reject, or punish someone for speaking up. Leaders should encourage participation and teach employees how to give feedback that avoids blame and making things personal.

Evaluate your on-boarding plans.

Consider hiring in groups, creating 30-, 60-, and 90-day plans and having a specific 1 to 2-week plan that new hires follow that includes online conversations with not only their own team but other teams and levels in the organization. Consider creating a mentor program.

Leverage remote work to encourage recognition among peers and leaders alike.

A simple first step is express gratitude by saying “thank you.” The next step is public recognition. When teams are distributed geographically, they miss the small wins. Take the opportunity to recognize these wins by broadcasting daily or weekly group updates that are dedicated to good news, gratitude, and success stories.

Ask for feedback often.

Partially and fully remote environments are fairly new and what works well today might not work for your organization in a year. Be open to the feedback and finding new ways to keep your employees engaged and building trust with one another.



Conclusion

Being thoughtful about your company's remote workforce will prevent and prepare you for obstacles that arise. Offices no longer need to be the only place employees can work productively. As an organization, you will want to consider what makes sense for your employees and business. Consider how to best utilize all corporate structures to give your employees the support and guidance they need while building a strong business that will last well into the future. Contact us if you have any questions.