

Remote Work: Making Sense of Your New Normal

Description

In March of 2020 workers across the country were instructed to pack up and prepare to work from home. This temporary solution, in response to the pending pandemic, resulted in scrambling at all levels and across all industries throughout the United States. Over a year has passed and it is estimated that 25-30% of the workforce will work from home regularly by the end of this year compared to 17% prior to Covid and 44% at the height of the pandemic (Mlitz, April 9, 2021, *Remote Work Frequency Before and After Covid-19 in the United States 2020*, Statista.com). Working from home was a temporary solution, but Remote Work (term for permanent) appears to be the preferred model for much of today's workforce and consequently your *New Normal*. The majority of employers never contemplated allowing employees to work from home and most employees never considered remote work an option. Businesses have opened their doors and vaccines are readily available, yet desks remain empty at the office. Remote Work is here to stay.

What do I need to consider as the employer?

How will I monitor and manage workflow/expectations/assigned tasks?

Am I getting my money's worth?

How can I make this a win/win for everyone?

How will I manage administrative tasks like greeting clients and answering the phone?

Will I still be able to provide a quality product or experience?

What do I need to do to comply with security and privacy standards?

Is it possible to maintain the culture I have worked so hard to create?

What do I need to consider as the employee?

How will I maintain a healthy home/work balance?

Do I need interaction to be productive and happy?

How will I learn and grow without access to mentors and colleagues?

Do I have an allocated space conducive to staying on task?

Do I have the tools I need to work effectively?

Will I achieve my career goals if I am not in the office?

Do I have the self-discipline to manage my own schedule?

These questions are just a tiny sample of what to consider prior to embracing this new normal. It is suggested that 55% of remote workers would find another job if working from home was no longer an option (*Remote Working Statistics to Look Out for Coming Into 2021*, employmenthero.com). Employers unwilling to integrate Remote Work into their company's framework will be competing for qualified workers in a challenging market.

For the Employer

Ten Ideas for Making Remote Work Work

1. Make it a priority to provide your remote workers with all of the tools required for success. Tools should include training, updated technology, security parameters, a reliable phone system, revised company policies in writing and support/strategies when they simply aren't equipped to handle a certain task from home.
2. Establish CLEAR expectations regarding work hours, availability, and time on task. Perhaps you need 8 hours per employee, but you are flexible regarding scheduling. Or, maybe it is essential that every employee is working from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. with a one hour lunch from 12-1.
3. Make it a priority to maintain your great company culture. Do you usually order pizza on Friday and eat together in the conference room? Consider a voluntary virtual lunch date on Fridays. Mail a gift card to a favorite lunch spot that delivers to your team on a monthly basis (this gets bonus points for the boss).
4. A shared calendar is a must. Use it to stagger duties like checking voicemails and returning calls. Note times when employees are not at their desk to avoid transferring calls unnecessarily. Your clients could suffer if everyone unknowingly takes lunch at the same time.
5. Make appointments for virtual staff meetings and KEEP them. Schedule one on one calls with each team member on a regular basis.
6. Ask for feedback often and be open to making changes as needed. Good leaders know that "fair" doesn't necessarily mean "same." Some employees may need more accommodations or more feedback or more check-ins to reach their full potential.
7. If you are concerned about workflow and productivity, take a pulse at regular intervals. Establish a check-in routine. Consider sending a morning e-mail and requiring a response. "What are 3 things you plan to accomplish today?" "What is one thing you want to do better today than you did yesterday?" "What is your biggest challenge today and how can I help you overcome it?" Make it fun on occasion. "What is your favorite drink from Starbucks?" "Which breakfast cereal did you prefer as a kid?" "Rollercoaster or Merry-go-round?"
8. Consider sending a "check-out" email at the end of the day (formal or informal). "What went well for you today?" "How did that dreaded call with Mrs. Smith go? I'm hopeful that she was open to your suggestions."
9. Set a schedule for employee performance reviews and complete them as promised. Give recognition when warranted and offer suggestions and constructive criticism as needed. This will be essential to employees with career advancement aspirations.
10. Find a support system. Collaborate with other employers attempting to navigate this unfamiliar territory. Find a meet-up group or start a virtual one on your preferred social media channel.

For the Employee

Ten Ideas for Making Remote Work Work

1. Secure a dedicated workspace and make it your own.

2. Upgrade your wifi and other technology as needed.
3. Establish a routine similar to your previous "get ready for work" routine. Set an alarm, shower, and get dressed prior to going to your workspace.
4. Set parameters with family, neighbors, and friends.
5. Make a realistic plan for completing tasks and projects. Hold yourself accountable.
6. Take lunch and short breaks according to your company's policy. If you choose to complete a household chore, set a timer so you don't get distracted by your personal to-do list.
7. Arrange for childcare as if you were going to the office.
8. Treat yourself to household help. Allocate the money you aren't spending on commuting to hiring someone to do a chore you dislike. NOW is the time to hire the housekeeper!
9. Invest in yourself. Now that you are saving time on your daily commute, dedicate those found hours on learning a new skill or taking a class outside of your house.
10. Ask for help when you need it. Lean on your supervisor and colleagues if you are struggling with making Remote Work work.

This model, 100% remote, may not be the perfect fit for you or your industry. Most have discovered that a Hybrid Model is a more practical solution. The September Issue of *Examiner Magazine* will offer ideas for making the Hybrid Workplace work.

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