Workplace Flexibility and Remote Work Best Practices

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This presentation will discuss the various types of remote-work options and best practices for organizations to implement successful flexible remote work programs.

The Research on Working Remote

There is a sufficient body of research about the effectiveness of remote work/work-life fit programs for employees and employers. The findings are consistent.

Companies that implement flexible remote work arrangements believe they benefit from:

- Increased productivity;
- Decreased employee turnover;
- Increased ability to attract talent;
- Decreased sick days;
- Decreased overhead;
- Reduced environmental imprint.

Employees say:

- They are more productive and get more work done.
- They appreciate the flexibility.
- They are happier because they enjoy the flexibility.
- They feel more valued than those in the office.
- They feel it is beneficial to their family and their well-being.
- They have increased job satisfaction.

Over all, when people work from home, they start earlier and take shorter breaks. Contrary to popular opinion, they do not run errands at lunch and they work until the end of the day. The new prevailing management philosophy focuses on results, on meeting goals and completing tasks on time, whether all the work is done in the office, in a combination of in-office and remote work or totally remote.

The Three Types of Remote Work Arrangements

There are basically three types of remote work.

1. <u>As-Needed/On-Demand Remote Work</u>

Every company faces a number of attendance issues. They can range from:

- Office power outage
- Inclement weather
- An employee is ill

- An employee has a sick family member
- An employee has a personal appointment or home maintenance need requiring him/her to be at home.

Today, no one – not an employee or an employer – should lose valuable time if an employee misses a day in-office for a legitimate reason. By not allowing people to work from home on an as-needed basis, employees lose personal days; staff who cover feel overwhelmed; customers do not get the service they need, and the returning employee needs to play catchup. Everyone loses.

2. Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements accommodate the needs of employees and agencies. More companies are recognizing that to keep talent, they need to accommodate the life needs of their employees. Work-life fit comes in many sizes, such as:

- Arriving later to work to see kids off to school, then working core hours at the office, returning when kids come home from school and working at the end of the day to complete the hours needed for finishing the day's work.
- Working from home one, two or three days a week to meet family and work obligations.

3. A Remote Worker

As local talent has become more difficult to find, companies have recognized that a fully remote qualified employee may be another option for recruiting talent. With the proper setup, qualified remote workers are highly productive.

There are a few reasons why an employer should consider a remote worker:

- Many employers have experienced the all-too familiar conversation with a productive employee who explains that she/he needs to resign because she/he is moving. Finding a qualified replacement and transferring the client relationship is far more difficult than setting up the employee to work from home. And for the employee, finding a new, satisfying job may be very difficult. With today's technology, no excellent employee needs to resign because she/he is moving.
- Many employers can't find the talent within driving distance to their backyard. An experienced remote worker is more effective and far less costly than settling for a revolving door of the wrong talent.

Creating a Successful Remote Work Program

An effective flexible remote work program must meet the needs of the company and the individual. A flex-work arrangement is of course not for every employee. Some people prefer only working in the office and some don't have the discipline to work from home.

These are some recommended steps management should take in determining what options might work for the organization.

1. Evaluate each of the positions and determine if an employee's physical presence is required full-time, part-time or never, except for periodic meetings.
2. Decide which remote work programs might be viable work options for you.
3. Identify which employees have sufficient institutional knowledge and experience to be considered for a flex/remote work arrangement.
4. Evaluate the different communication and collaborative tools such as Skype and GoToMeeting.
5. Develop a guide for each type of remote work option.
6. Decide on a pilot program and on a trial group of staff for the pilot. For example, the pilot program might allow a trial group to work from home one day a week, scheduling the home days on different days so that they are not all working from home on the same day.
7. Schedule a company-wide meeting to discuss flex-work arrangements and the positions and level of experience that a flex-work arrangement would be suited for. Afterwards, have managers meet with each of their eligible staff to determine the level of interest in a work-flex arrangement.
8. Train the entire staff on how to use the communication and collaborative tools.
9. Implement, monitor and evaluate the pilot program.

The Home Office

Whether an employee works at home on an as needed home-life basis, on a regular flex-schedule or a telecommuting, a home office should be setup in a separate room where the door can be closed so as not to be disturbed while working. *(see link at the end of the presentation for more information)*

Security

Security should not be left to the employees to implement on their devices. Security should be controlled and managed by the employer. *(see link at the end of the presentation for more information)*

Making it Work

The following management principles are essential to a successful flexible remote work program; they are also the qualities of good management for all employees.

- A team culture.
- Strong committed managers.
- Clear, precise and measurable goals.
- Results based performance evaluation.
- Clear expectations about work schedule availability.
- Consistent and uniform methodology for communicating regularly.

- The right tools to get the work done.

Some Helpful Tips

- Rotate days at home so that a certain percentage of staff is always in the office or schedule mandatory days in the office.
- Make sure expectations are clear.
- Check productivity and performance regularly to determine if it is not working for someone. A flexible or remote work arrangement may not be right for everyone.
- Keep remote workers in the loop just as if they were in the office.
- Establish consistent methodology for communicating.
- Have the staff add their photos to Outlook and Skype.
- Use Skype for instant messaging and video capability to talk instead of email or phone for all staff whether remote or in-office.

Some Pitfalls to Avoid

- Avoid micro managing, the #1 deterrent to productive and successful remote work.
- Not communicating on a regular basis.
- Not inviting remote staff to meetings.
- Not checking the activity reports to see productivity.
- Not spot checking the actual work being done.

Whether in the office or working from home, if you provide employees with clear expectations, realistic metrics for success based on results, and the proper tools to get the work done, they will get it done.

Summary

To keep and attract talent, all companies will need to have a policy with best practices to accommodate work flexibility.

Research has clearly shown that for most employees who have any type of remote work arrangement, they:

- Met their goals more reliably
- Were more productive
- Were happier
- Were healthier
- Experienced less stress

Businesses have benefitted greatly as well with increased productivity, talent retention and lower overhead.