

THE MOVE MINNEAPOLIS GUIDE TO REMOTE WORK

TELEWORK STRATEGIES FOR
SUCCESS ANYWHERE

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TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION

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»» INTRODUCTION

Telework has taken the world—and our office—by storm. As transportation consultants at Move Minneapolis, we believe remote work will fundamentally and sustainably reshape how people work, get around, use office space, and develop communities.

Remote work is good. It keeps teams focused on the goal, allows flexibility in scheduling, and gives people back the time they used to spend commuting. It reduces vehicle emissions and improves air quality. It opens new opportunities to individuals previously out of range of good jobs.

We're pleased to present **The Move Minneapolis Guide to Remote Work**, your handbook to all things telework. Take from it liberally, and be sure to consult your own legal, tax, and HR professionals before implementing any complex policies you see here.

We welcome your comments and contributions and will update the guide as we discover better ways to operate in remote environments. **Reach out anytime:**
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WHY TELECOMMUTE?

Savings for Employers

Telecommuters cost less. Their employers buy fewer subsidized transit passes and spend less on parking contracts. Companies that pay an in-house or a third-party administrator to handle commuter benefits with pre-tax deductions or reimbursements are relieved of that additional expense. There are also savings on leasing and real estate costs.

Savings for Employees

Telework is less expensive than car commuting, with no associated costs for vehicle fuel, maintenance, and repairs. Transit users reduce or eliminate the need to buy fares to get to work and back. There is also a hidden cost savings for car commuters—car insurance. The average driver travels about 12,000 miles in their car per year. By working from home and not putting those miles on a car, drivers could save from 5-30% on car insurance.¹



The 2018 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act eliminated the ability for employees to write off business expenses that are unreimbursed by their company. Be proactive and discuss what the costs are to work from home. From there, determine how those expenses will be divided between the employer and employee—if at all.

>> O'Brien, 2019

Increased Productivity

Many teleworkers report higher productivity working from home² due to reduced workplace distractions. In addition, use of sick leave tends to decline when employees telework. Employees are less likely to call in sick for false reasons, less likely to need time off for doctor's appointments, and less likely to need time off because of a sick child. Employees will be able to continue working even during days with severe and inclement weather.

Emergency Continuity of Operations

Not many small organizations have a thorough plan for when disaster strikes, whether that's natural or human-made. A strong telework program ensures provisions for continuity of operations during emergency events that disrupt normal operations. Data will be secure, and employees will have dispersed and uninterrupted access to information, equipment, and materials.

Results Orientation

Until now, companies were often reluctant to allow employees to work from home because of entrenched norms and policies. Those norms were tossed aside as offices emptied out this spring.

A May 2020 survey of 8,000 workers by the Adecco Group UK, an international HR solutions company, surveyed workers from the UK, USA, Japan, Germany, Italy, Spain, and France who transitioned to remote working due to the pandemic.

Sixty-nine percent reported that employee contracts should be results-based with less emphasis on the numbers of hours worked. Given preference on performance over time, employees see placing trust in staff to get the job done as the most important (85%) requirement from management. Seventy-five percent of management agrees with “results-driven work” preferences over monitoring staff hours.³

Does that mean that remote workers are more productive or happy working from home? An extensive 2015 study by Stanford University was conducted with employees at a large Chinese call center. The study found that those who worked from home were 13% more productive than employees in a control group. They were also happier and were less likely to quit their job.⁴

Work-Life Balance and Lowered Stress

According to the *State Of Remote Work 2019* annual report by Owl Labs, 83% of employees surveyed agreed that the ability to work remotely makes them happier, and 80% reported being less stressed.⁵

Balancing work and home life can be challenging for remote workers. It is important to separate the two spheres as much as possible and plan each workday to be productive, while still being able to switch into home life when the workday is done.

Employee Retention

Recruiting and training new employees can cost thousands of dollars.⁶ The sources of those expenses can include external hiring teams, internal HR support, career events, job board fees, background checks, onboarding, and training. It pays for organizations to improve their hiring processes and keep the workers they hire. A 2017 Flexjob survey of over 5,000 professionals⁷ found that nearly one third of employees have quit a job due to lack of flexibility.⁸ The survey also found that 80% of employees value having a telework option as part of their benefits.

When long commutes are factored in, remote working reduces stress, and saves money and time that had been spent in traffic. Twenty-three percent of employees

have quit a job to avoid a long commute.⁹ Remote working offers the clearest advantage over driving alone to work when comparing costs, stress levels, and time savings.

Remote work is now the preferred method of working at many large tech companies. Staff can live anywhere, even out of the country in some cases. Talent is no longer limited to easy commuting distance; job prospects can live time zones away. Companies of all sizes can seek talent globally, as well as lose talent to a competitor from across the country.

Twitter was the first major technology company to implement an indefinite remote working policy. Other companies have since followed suit.



BUILDING CAMARADERIE AMONG TELEWORKERS

Some of you might be familiar with Spirit Week from your school days. Spirit weeks encourage themed activities in a set environment to hype up team spirit or bring awareness to a specific event or cause. Re-enact this at your remote workplace! Schedule a theme-based costumed videoconference, run a charitable-giving contest and do the prize drawing live (on screen), or come up with your own fun. Giving employees the chance to be creative and break from the usual routine can keep them engaged and involved. It is also a great way for employees to express their pride and to display your organization's values.

Expanded Talent Pool

Before the advent of technologies supporting teleworking, employees were mostly tethered to their offices. Hiring searches, with rare exceptions, focused on those living within reasonable commuting distance or with a willingness to relocate.

Fast forward to today when the pandemic has severed the ties to the office. For many organizations remote working has been the only way to stay in business. Even reluctant executives have learned that employees can still be connected and get work done, not just from home but wherever they are located. The new mindset includes the freedom to work anywhere—reflective of a digital nomad lifestyle.¹⁰

If geographic boundaries have melted away, it means that the talent pool expands beyond state lines and time zones. Interviewing via videoconferencing and virtual on-boarding do not require in-person meetings. Perfect candidates with hard-to-find skill sets are much easier to match if they no longer have to live within a half hour commute.

While casting a wider net can bring in more fish, there are some new challenges to consider. Recruiting out of state often means adjusting to different income tax laws. Job certifications and licensure requirements might be different for employees living elsewhere. Working with staff in different time zones complicates scheduling virtual meetings and other time-sensitive deadlines.

Flexibility Pays Off

Company feedback and scientific studies show that remote work increases productivity.¹¹ In statistics compiled by Global Workplace Analytics, JD Edwards teleworkers were shown to be 20-25% more productive than their in-office colleagues.¹² In the same analysis, American Express employees who worked from home were 43% more productive than workers in the office.

Employees are unsurprisingly happier and healthier when they have some control over their work lives. They thrive when they can listen to their internal body clocks and are not entirely governed by the office clock. Work-life balance works best when one has built-in flexibility. And while telecommuting is not a substitute for childcare, it provides greater flexibility in scheduling family activities with less stress.

Real Estate Savings

It's expensive to house employees in a traditional office. Telework saves money in real estate costs over the short- and long-term. Depending on how many employees regularly telework, companies may completely eliminate the need for a fixed physical headquarters, instead leasing flexible coworking space or meeting space as needed.

The average real estate savings with full-time telework is estimated to be \$10,000 per employee per year.¹³ Even partial telework can deliver real estate savings by instituting an office hoteling program. Additionally, telework may offer an inexpensive ADA compliance solution to include more workers with disabilities.

Furthermore, being located in an in-demand, high-skilled, high-cost urban area is more affordable for an employer when telework allows them to consume fewer square feet per worker,¹⁴ reducing land and energy consumption.

Finally, the economies of neighborhoods and communities outside traditional work centers enjoy increased stimulus from workers telecommuting from "third places" such as coffee shops and coworking spaces. Telework could mean the rebirth of traditional downtowns.



In February 2020, Species360 was poised to expand their offices in Bloomington, Minnesota. When the pandemic hit, they instead instituted telework for their staff of 25. Their organizational continuity plan ensured the staff performed the same as if they were in the office and they delivered uninterrupted support to over 1,200 institutional members in 100 countries. Now instead of expanding their office, Species 360 plans to let their office lease expire.

Reduced Community Costs

Telework saves communities money on infrastructure costs because it decreases the demand for more highway lanes, extensions, and transit-related projects.

Local governments maintain about 77% of all roadway miles, state highway agencies are responsible for about 19%, and the federal government owns about 4%, mainly in national parks, military bases, and on American Indian reservations.¹⁵ Telework puts less strain on local government road maintenance budgets by reducing the overall amount of travel and thus the damage to the roads caused by commuters.



"On Dec. 9, 1968, a new 11-mile segment of Interstate 94, linking downtown Minneapolis with downtown St. Paul, opened for the first time. The Minneapolis Tribune reported 'It had taken 10 years, 20,816 tons of steel, 321,00 cubic yards of concrete and nearly \$80 million to complete.'" Nothing has changed: highway and road infrastructure remains a taxpayer albatross and government budget-drainer.

» Nathanson, 2014

US highways are the country's largest infrastructure-related expenditure and these costs fall on taxpayers whether or not they drive. With telework taking off in popularity, this is an ideal time to reevaluate those costs, while considering everything on the balance sheet from improved access to better-paying jobs to long-term health and safety impacts. If teleworkers switched to more local lifestyles—living and working, traveling and spending money in their own neighborhoods—communities could save billions overall.

Here in Minnesota, the annual costs of maintaining and repairing state roads is staggering. In 2019, MnDOT allocated \$133 million dollars to winter maintenance alone. This large sum was primarily used for snow and ice operations, which include materials, labor, equipment, and other expenditures.

Those winter costs pale in comparison to summertime construction and maintenance work. On average, to construct a new 6-lane interstate highway the bill will be about \$7 million per mile in rural areas and \$11 million or more per mile in urban areas. Simply resurfacing a 4-lane road (technically a mill and overlay) is about \$1.25 million per mile. The cost to expand an interstate highway from four lanes to six lanes is roughly \$4 million per mile.¹⁶

Working remotely can eliminate the need to drive every morning and evening. Putting less stress and traffic on roads is the most efficient and cheapest way to lengthen the lifespan of existing roadway infrastructure and save local communities millions of taxpayer dollars.

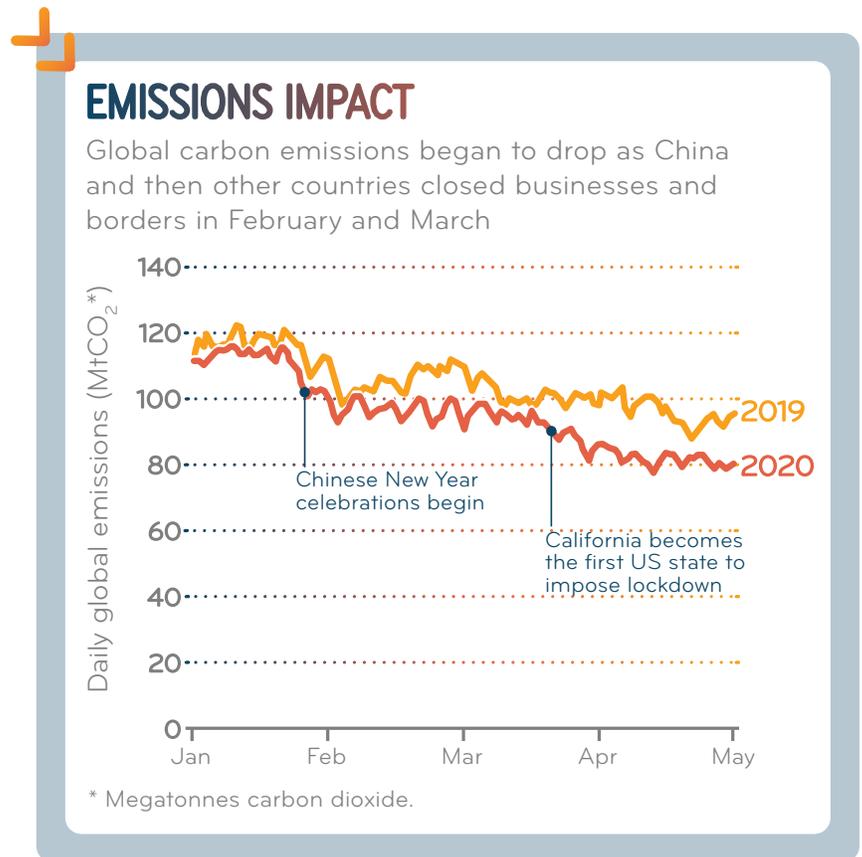
Environmental Benefits

Promoting telework is a sustainability best practice. Car commuting has a particularly dire impact on climate and air quality via greenhouse gasses and other noxious emissions. By keeping unnecessary commuters off the road, remote work contributes to a cleaner, brighter future for everyone.

The rapid rise in remote work resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a glimpse into this cleaner future. From January to April 2020, driving rates dropped by 50%. As a result, data accumulated from over 400 cities across the globe found that CO₂ emissions fell by more than one billion metric tonnes in the first four months of the year compared with the same period in 2019. 2020 will likely see the largest drop in annual emissions since World War II.¹⁷

Furthermore, air quality improved dramatically. With fewer cars on the road, toxins like smog, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter from tire and brake wear sharply declined. During the stay at home order, Twin Cities residents experienced the cleanest air in decades. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency estimates that rates of the toxin nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) decreased 30-35% in suburbs including Blaine and Lakeville and 15% in Minneapolis.¹⁸ Common health impacts from nitrogen dioxide include lung irritation, coughing, wheezing, and difficulty breathing.

Scientists have warned that this progress can quickly disappear if people resume their previous transportation habits. Widespread adoption of teleworking policies and practices is necessary for lasting emissions reductions, quieter streets, and healthier air. A robust remote work policy is one of the easiest ways that employers can reduce their carbon footprint. Making telework a core component of the workplace is a major way to be a sustainability leader in any industry.



>> after Tollefson, 2020 © Nature



READ MORE

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- >> Nathanson, I. (2014, June 13). Linking the Twin Cities: In 1968 the attention was on I-94. MinnPost
- >> Tollefson, J. (2020, May 20). How the coronavirus pandemic slashed carbon emissions — in five graphs

COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT REMOTE WORK



Some leaders are unconvinced that remote work should be a permanent part of their organizations. Here we take their objections head-on. If your concern does not appear here, please see the US Office of Personnel Management's excellent Telework.gov website.

CONCERN:

Some employees are not suited to telework.

"This person already struggles to be productive in the office. How will I know they are working at home?"

RESPONSE:

This concern can be alleviated quickly by shifting management priorities to outcomes. **The most important measurement of productivity is results, not how many hours a person appears to be working.** By managing the results, not the person, an employee's productivity or lack thereof will be fully apparent. That information can be acted upon.

CONCERN:

Telework will squelch innovation.

"Impromptu conversations in the hallway and break room are critical for creativity and innovation."

RESPONSE:

Workplace banter is given far too much credit for innovation. Most innovators strike gold in their own heads on their own time—something they may have more of as productive teleworkers. The reality is that office conversations are often non-work-related and even harmful, as is the case with office gossip. Technology has made virtual collaboration easy and convenient and remote teams can build amazing camaraderie on text channels and videoconferences. **Results follow regardless of physical proximity when managers foster cultures of inclusion, collaboration, and creativity.**

CONCERN:

Lack of face-to-face contact hinders clear communication.

"It's often the things that are left unsaid that represent the most critical part of a message." "Telephones and e-mail are good for communicating facts, but nuances are lost." "If I can't see someone's face and body language, and they can't see mine, we are missing out on 60 to 80 percent of the communication channel."

RESPONSE:

Such concerns are a distraction at best and at worst a sign of weak management.

Sure, some nonverbal cues are lost when using the phone, email or even video calls. However, a manager shouldn't be relying on nonverbal cues for communication. This is work, not a personal relationship. Things that need to be communicated should be said out loud and not left for interpretation.

CONCERN:

Managers should not telework.

"Telework is fine for some employees but managers and higher-level employees should be in the office."

RESPONSE:

Managers and supervisors must commit to using telework to the fullest extent possible if a company's telework program is to succeed. Research in the work/life field bears out that supervisors, managers, and senior executives who model workplace flexibility, such as telework, serve as key drivers in effecting positive cultural change in that organization. This is especially so if the organization's climate and culture reflect a skeptical or even hostile view of telework.

The research also suggests that employees model supervisor behavior. Non-participating supervisors send a non-verbal message of disapproval of telework. They may unintentionally signal that advancing in the organization depends on the employee's physical presence at the worksite. Managers and supervisors who use remote work demonstrate that proximity should not be required for success.

CONCERN:

Employees are distracted at home.

"I'm not paying these people to watch their kids and post to social media!"

RESPONSE:

Distractions are normal. Manage to outcomes and don't worry about it.

We encourage you to allow your employees some grace to deal with life's interruptions, especially now. Ultimately, though, the success or failure of telework rests with management strategies. If your team is not showing up, if they let their teammates down, and if they are failing to deliver on results, it is time for a supervisory heart-to-heart. In all truth it is easy to confirm that an employee is failing when their clearly defined and communicated workplan goes undone. Make sure you have trained and supported your employees to do the work you are requesting, and if results do not follow make the decisions you must.

CONCERN:

Telework increases security concerns.

"My business deals with confidential information and I can't ensure it will remain safe if it leaves the office with teleworkers."

RESPONSE:

Information security is a serious concern. As described in the **TECHNOLOGY** section, strong security measures are a must for teleworkers who harbor sensitive information. However, when structured properly, **telework should not create a significantly greater concern than is currently the case in the office.** First and foremost, employees are required to take responsibility for the security of the data and other information they handle while teleworking. These risks can be minimized by creating strong remote security policies, clearly communicating expectations to employees, issuing employer-owned equipment and investing in the necessary technological infrastructure to protect equipment and information.

CONCERN:

Telework will decrease productivity.

"Workers are most productive within the confines of the office."

RESPONSE:

Most experts agree that in reality, remote work maintains and often increases productivity. Remote working eliminates the commute, a time-consuming and stress-inducing daily event that often constrains productivity by establishing inflexible work hours. Shifts in management technique will motivate employees to deliver work products quickly rather than putzing around their remote offices. Additionally, teleworkers tend to be happier, which has its own productivity benefits.

CONCERN:

Remote workers are difficult to reach.

"If an immediate need arises, how do I know I will be able to reach the remote worker?"

RESPONSE:

Clear rules of engagement and a simple and proper use of technology provides an effective fix. Clear rules of engagement mean remote workers are available when needed. Managers and teleworkers should create an individual telework agreement (see [CREATE AND SIGN A TELEWORK AGREEMENT](#)) that clearly outlines the specific terms of the work arrangement and the expectations of both the manager and employee as they relate to maintaining the integrity of the work group, ensuring proper coverage, and what will be done to meet contingencies. Set core hours during which all employees are expected to be at their "desks" and immediately available. Establish norms for technology and response times. For instance, what is your preferred "call" method and what is the expected response time if teleworkers are not immediately available? Enforce calendar use and sharing. Require communications app availability status changes. Together these steps provide certainty that collaboration will go unimpeded during the busiest part of the workday, while allowing employees the flexibility to structure the rest of their hours.

CONCERN:

Teleworkers aren't valued as much as office employees.

"Teleworkers will lose out on promotions, career advancement opportunities and good assignments."

RESPONSE:

There is no documented evidence that teleworkers are promoted less often than non-teleworkers. The responsibility lies with managers to ensure that everyone has a fair shake at advancement. Make sure to host all team meetings virtually. During a promotion process, make sure the process is identical for all applicants. See more in the [MANAGING TELEWORKERS](#) section.

CONCERN:

Teleworkers are difficult to manage.

"I need my employees in the office or our productivity will suffer."

RESPONSE:

Again, telework does not create management problems, it simply makes existing problems more apparent and will reveal both worker and manager deficiencies. **These problems can be avoided by managing employees via clear and measurable goals rather than time and attendance.** Managers of remote workers will discover that checklists are their best friends. Find and use personnel and project management tools that are intuitive, easy to update, and shareable.



READ MORE

- » US Office of Personnel Management (2020). Telework.gov
- » Monroe, J. S. (2010, September 09). 4 reasons why managers resist telework—and why they might be wrong
- » Mautz, S. (2018, April 02). A 2-Year Stanford Study Shows the Astonishing Productivity Boost of Working From Home

GETTING STARTED



Lay the groundwork for your effective long-term telework program. Even after addressing the common concerns outlined in the previous section, big questions may remain. “What legal considerations should my company be aware of?” “What equipment do teleworkers need?” “How do I know my company’s telework policy is sufficient?” This chapter outlines the initial steps in setting up a successful, sustainable telework program.

Organizational Policies and Practices

Every employer will want to establish a detailed, written remote work policy. This is the document that standardizes your organization’s expectations, values, benefits, standards, and even attitudes.

Find a sample remote work policy from the SHRM website.

Source:

>> SHRM (2020, March 24). Telecommuting Policy and Procedure

Who Can Successfully Telework?

Put simply, if an employee can access the necessary tools and materials from home and effectively perform their job without in-person contact, that job should be considered for telework. That being said, remote work isn’t practical in every situation. Some roles might be well-suited for a transition to full-time telework. Others may require spending a day or two per week in the office. This section will identify things to consider when deciding if remote work is right for you and your workplace.

Identify which tasks can be performed remotely. Begin by identifying the functions, equipment, and accommodations this role requires.

What equipment is required to perform the job?

Are the main tools for this role a computer and supporting software?

Does an employee need to be in the office to access these programs and apps?

Chances are these tools are cloud-based, allow for remote collaboration, and—with proper security precautions—can be operated anywhere. Some required equipment may be too large or expensive to issue to remote workers. In that situation, the role likely requires access to a traditional office. If possible, try to group these tasks into specified office days to allow for part-time remote work.

Do employees in this role have the equipment they need to telework?

If not, can they be provided with employer-owned equipment?

For more on equipment for remote workers, see the [TECHNOLOGY](#) section.

Employee input is important. Seek out feedback from employees in this role or in related positions. Ask how well they think this position's responsibilities will translate to telework. *Do they want to telework? What do they feel is needed to make remote working in this role successful?*

Determine what percentage of the role's typical work week can be conducted remotely. After reviewing this information, envision a teleworking plan for that position.



Here are some examples of in-office work that can be easily accomplished by remote workers with little disruption:

- » In-person meetings
- » Marketing, advertising, and social media
- » Phone support
- » Accounting and bookkeeping
- » Updating and preparing written materials
- » Analyzing documents and studies, memoranda, reports, and other correspondence
- » Administrative support
- » Email and other forms of electronic communication

Create and Sign a Telework Agreement

All personnel who telework should sign a written Telework Agreement and do so each time the fundamental parameters of their positions change, such as being promoted to new duties. According to the US Office of Personnel Management's *Guide to Telework in the Federal Government*, "Telework agreements should be well-written, jargon-free, practical, and clear regarding responsibilities, roles and expectations." The Agreement should include, at a minimum:

- The telework schedule, e.g. full-time, part-time, or episodic
- The term of the agreement: most often a one-year renewable agreement
- Expectations: clarify any assumptions around work location (e.g., if expected to work only from home) and frequency and methods of communication (e.g., email vs. telephone, core hours for contact, speed for returning calls). See [COMMUNICATION](#)
- A list of equipment or technology that will be used by the teleworker, and outlines which expenses will be covered by the employer, employee, or shared
- Summarized data security procedures
- A self-certification safety checklist to telework employees as a guide when preparing the alternative work location for telework
- A statement that the agreement can be terminated or modified by the employer at will

Adapted from the *Guide to Telework in the Federal Government*
US Office of Personnel Management (2011)

Model remote work agreements:

- » Denver Regional Council of Governments (n.d.). Sample Teleworker Agreement
- » Think HR Corporation (n.d.). Sample Telecommuting Agreement

Legal Considerations

Let's not quibble on this point: every employer should run their telework policies by an attorney, a benefits/compliance consultant, an insurance broker, and a CPA. Telework adds complexity to all kinds of dispersed-workforce labor issues; for instance, paid parental leave is treated quite differently in different states. Watch for variances in overtime laws, international worker requirements, even required sexual harassment training for managers. When employing teleworkers outside of your state, it is especially important to be aware of the applicable labor and tax laws in that employee's place of residency.

We're not lawyers and we won't play one here. Use a professional!

Pertinent legal and liability resources:

- » Skaljic, S. (2020, March 30). Working Remotely Amidst Covid-19: Reducing Liability Risks Through a Sound Policy and Communication
- » Weltman, B. (2019, June 6). Remote Workers: 3 Hidden Liability Issues for Employers to Consider
- » Bowman, N., JD (n.d.). Remote Work and the Law: Legal Issues that Remote Leaders Must Know

Insurance and Liability

Remote employees may receive full company benefits, including health insurance, disability, and worker's compensation in the case of an on-the-job accident. But employees tend to be safer at home, eliminating the risk of getting hurt or even dying en route to work. Driving is dangerous—40,000 people a year are killed in car crashes across the United States. And that doesn't count the number who are seriously injured. In the event that an employee is injured in a car crash, hospitalization and follow up medical costs can be extremely expensive, draining the employee's savings and driving up the employer's insurance risk rating.

In most cases, employees are unable to collect workers' compensation benefits for a car crash that occurred while simply commuting to or from work. However, there are exceptions to this rule. For example, if an employee stopped while on the way to work to pick up supplies for the office, and then was involved in a car crash, that person may be eligible for workers' compensation claims.

Companies that transition to remote work should conduct a thorough review of their insurance. Insurance specialists may advise obtaining management liability insurance to cover legal expenses that can arise from having work-from-home employees.

- » In some cases, the employer could be liable only for injuries suffered in a predefined workspace during work hours only.
- » A preventative practice for employers is to conduct scheduled, mandatory inspections to ensure their employees' home workspaces are adequate and safe.
- » Employees are responsible for promptly notifying their supervisors of an equipment malfunction or failure of either employer-owned or employee-owned equipment needed to do assigned work. If the malfunction prevents the teleworker from performing assigned tasks, the teleworker must notify their supervisor immediately.
- » Generally, only equipment owned by the employer and on loan to the employee is covered by the company's insurer. All other equipment is to be covered by the employee's personal insurance provider or the company may choose to provide maintenance and repair of employee-owned equipment, hardware, and software used for telework in situations where the employer does not provide the employee with alternative equipment.

Sources:

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- » Minnesota Management and Budget (2020, January 21). Telework Policy [PDF]

Health and Safety

With workers out of the office's familiar and controlled environment, you may be concerned that your company would be liable should an accident occur. *What happens if an employee trips over their home office rug while on the clock?* These are legitimate concerns. However, they can be avoided by implementing proper policies, equipment, remote work agreements, and training.

Remember that just because remote workers are not physically present at one central workplace, it does not mean that your organization does not have to comply with health and safety legislation. It is up to the employer to identify any potential hazards that may come with remote work.

You may be liable for injuries on the job even if they occur at a remote worksite. It is therefore important to ensure that teleworkers' remote worksites are safe and suitable for a productive workday. Employees who are responsible for setting up their own worksites may fail to anticipate safety hazards or may not be concerned about safety risks. This could result in worksite arrangements that are prone to injury, including fire hazards and non-ergonomic workstations. Employers should review

hazards with employees to ensure that risks and control measures are adequate. They should also establish a system for reporting and investigating injuries, illness, or other incidents that can occur because of work activities.

Establish clear remote worksite health and safety guidelines in your remote work policies and remote work agreement that define your expectations of employee worksite set up and maintenance. Remote workers are responsible for taking care of their own health and safety by complying with the policies set forth by the employer. Additionally, teleworkers should report any hazards or issues as soon as possible according to the employer's reporting procedures. Ask your managers to conduct periodic check-ins with employees to ascertain whether they are in need of any equipment or support to comply with these expectations and effectively perform their job. If policy violations are discovered, you can correct the violations and, if necessary, impose discipline to deter future infractions.

Source:

- » Skaljic, S. (2020, March 30). Working Remotely Amidst Covid-19: Reducing Liability Risks Through a Sound Policy and Communication

Payroll Tax Considerations

Now that you've hired staff from across the country and several continents, you'd best know how to pay them and their employment taxes. The majority of US states apportion employment income to where the employee, or taxpayer, works. A minority of states apportion the taxpayer's income entirely within the state where the employer is located. Many states have interstate reciprocity agreements that gift employees with lower tax rates depending on the state where work is conducted.

Foreign workers at US companies are generally subject to a US withholding tax of 30%, less so if there is a "tax treaty" between the US and the foreign person's country of residence. In most cases, a foreign person is subject to US tax on its US income.

Employers and employees need to stay up-to-date on the shifting sands of payroll taxes and reciprocity agreements. Employers will surely want a CPA to assist with tax issues for internationally-based employees.

Sources:

- » Paille, J. CPP (2016 October 12). State-by-State Income Tax Reciprocity Agreements
- » US Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service (2020, February 11). Withholding of Tax on Nonresident Aliens and Foreign Entities

Remote Hourly Employees

Many hourly, non-exempt positions are well suited for telework. Any concerns stem largely from the fear that non-exempt employees will collect overtime for substandard work. As mentioned elsewhere in this guide, concerns about productivity can be alleviated by managing to the project. Clear expectations, regular communication, and a dose of trust will benefit both productivity and workforce morale.

After incorporating performance management techniques, determine whether time-tracking systems can be accessed remotely. If employees log in to a particular software program, determine whether that program can be safely accessed remotely. If not, other time tracking options that provide remote accessibility are available.

Micromanaging remote workers is discouraged; it is detrimental to the culture of the workplace. Still, it is important to maintain accurate timekeeping of non-exempt remote workers. Employers should audit employee time records regularly to confirm compliance and accuracy and to ensure employees are routinely verifying the accuracy of the records.



Reduce liability and unauthorized overtime for non-exempt teleworkers with these recommendations:

- » Have a solid overtime policy in place that prohibits working more than 40 hours in a given workweek without advance written authorization.
- » Have a written policy that prohibits working "off the clock" and underreporting or overreporting hours worked.
- » Have employees sign and date the written policies.
- » If an employee fails to obtain prior approval for any overtime hours that they report, remedial action may be required but the reported overtime should be paid.
- » Management should not make demands of remote workers during off hours.
- » Ensure agreement on what constitutes hours worked and make certain that company policies provide clear guidance to employees.
- » Hourly employees should understand the expectations associated with tracking their compensable worktime, including that paid and unpaid breaks and mealtimes must be properly tracked.

Sources:

- » Smith, A. (2019, October 29). 4 Tips for Allowing Nonexempt Employees to Telecommute
- » Lipin, I. A. (2010, February 01). A Practitioner's Guide to the Taxation of Telecommuting
- » Eversheds, S., LLP (2020, April 21). COVID-19 telework triggers state tax withholding guidance

Setting Up a Remote Office

Determine Start-Up Costs

Costs associated with a telework program start-up will vary. Assessing your company's existing technology and equipment will help determine your initial start-up expenditures.

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED:

COMPUTER EQUIPMENT

Is it employer-issued, or will employees need to provide their own equipment? We strongly recommend issuing employer-owned equipment. More information on why can be found in the TECHNOLOGY section.

ACCESSORY EQUIPMENT

Will an employee need a phone, printer, fax machine, webcam, scanner, etc. to complete work tasks?

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Software, email system, digital needs, security precautions, etc.

TRAINING

While there is free training available online, a company may want to invest in on-site training for employees and managers.

LABOR ASSOCIATED WITH PROGRAM SET-UP

To configure systems to ensure that telework is seamless for both internal and external customers and to review computer/software requirements, notification to participants/employees, HR revisions to employee manuals, development of policies and procedures (including the TELEWORK AGREEMENT) associated with the telework program, retraining of managers to support remote work, etc.

TELEWORK OFFICE MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

ROOM REQUIREMENTS:

- Desk
- Chair
- File box/file cabinet
- Tabletop space
- Lighting
- Fresh air
- Heating/cooling/portable fan
- Printer
- Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors
- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit with radio/batteries/bandages
- Access to a restroom
- Evacuation plan

OFFICE MATERIALS CONSIDERATIONS:

- Pens, pencils, markers
- Paper/notepad/post-its
- Envelopes and postage
- Paper clips
- Scissors
- Stapler/staples
- Working files (*paper/digital*)
- Calculator
- Calendar
- Business cards
- Printer
- Office mail distribution plan

OFFICE EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS:

- Business telephone
- Modem
- Laptop with business and communications software
- Camera for video meetings
- Router
- Power strip with built in surge protector
- Headset
- Keyboard and mouse
- Extra monitor
- Cable management box (*to reduce tripping hazards and possible workers comp claims*)

Source:
TeleworkVA (n.d.). Telework Costs and Savings.

Accessing Special Tools and Equipment

Your home office is probably not outfitted with a large format printer. You may not have needed document handling software—until now. **Do not hesitate to identify your functional challenges and enlist your team and manager in finding solutions.**

- » Look into leasing office equipment. If you coordinate complex printing or mailing jobs it might make sense to have these capabilities at home.
- » Alternatively, send your work out to a full-service print shop or mail house via upload.
- » Now's the time to invest in document management software—including remote signing capability. Give it to everyone who might need to manage documents or make it someone's job to support the task.
- » If you left something important at the office, or if you need minor supplies or equipment, put in a supply order and don't take 'no' for an answer. Your productivity should be first on your organization's mind.
- » Can you share items within your team? If you only need equipment occasionally, how about arranging a socially-distant drop at a local park?

In the end you may still need something at the office. Consider your and your co-workers' health above all and follow all current safety recommendations, from wearing your mask to staying out of long-unused bathrooms to time-on-site limits. **Print, collate, staple, and run!**

Technology

Technology is a critical component of an effective remote work environment. If an organization lacks the infrastructure to provide employees with secure, reliable access to their work files from home, the prospects for telework are limited.

Tech Support

If you have teleworked before, you have likely experienced the need for capable and responsive tech support. Your Tuesday morning has flown by as you check item after item off your to-do list. This comes to a screeching halt when you are met with a message that the network is unreachable or you've been kicked off your shared videoconference application license. A remote work program's technology is only as strong as the IT services that support it.

While built-in tech support and free third-party options are available, we recommend hiring professional help to manage the technology needs of your remote workforce. It is important that teleworkers can contact tech support and resolve issues efficiently, without assistance from other employees. IT support teams can access employee's workstations remotely, resolving issues just as they would if it were an in-person consultation. The support tech will talk the employee through the possible issues and gather the information necessary to address the problem. While some companies choose to contract with an IT support provider on a case-by-case basis, agreements that provide 24/7 availability for employees are preferred. After all, your remote workers may just be working after "hours."

Source:

» Zolkos, G. (2019, June 7). 4 Ways to Ensure Your Remote Staff has the Right IT Support

Wireless Network

It goes without saying that a strong internet connection is essential for remote work. As many have likely experienced during the pandemic, a slow internet connection can make work infuriating and render some tasks, like videoconferencing and large file uploads, practically impossible. Test employee's home wireless connection when setting them up for telework. It may take some troubleshooting, but employees should be expected to have a strong home wireless network. To support this expectation, we encourage employers to provide stipends to employees to ensure that necessary equipment and service upgrades are not a burden.

Virtual Private Networks (VPNs)

Virtual Private Networks create private networks on public internet connections using encrypted connections to allow safe, remote access to the materials and information stored on the office network. Because the data is encrypted from end-to-end, it cannot be accessed and read by those who do not have permission to do so. This keeps data safe even if the remote worker chooses to work from a coffee shop or hotel on an unsecured internet connection. **VPNs are a best practice in cyber security and a necessary investment for remote work programs.**

Sources:

» Symanovich, S. (n.d.). What is a VPN?

There are several VPN providers available. Determining the right fit will depend on the size and security needs of your business. Check the links below to help you select the right VPN for your organization:

» Edwards, L. (2020, August 5). The Best Business VPN Services 2020

» vpnMentor (2020, September 7). What's a VPN? And Why you Really Need One in 2020

Connections to Each Other

Remote work should not have a negative impact on communication. On the contrary, the abundance of available remote communication options may enhance connectivity between employees. Use all the tools—do not rely solely on phone calls and emails between remote workers. Different conversations merit different communication modes. A direct message does not serve the same function as a video call or email.

When selecting your suite of communications software, opt for a combination of tools that are easy to use, cover core functions, are cloud-based, and easily integrate with each other.

Instant messaging

Instant messaging is an essential tool for all employees, particularly those working remotely. Faster and less formal than emails, instant messages allow for quick communication between employees for subjects that do not merit a longer video or phone call. Status icons indicating an employee's real-time availability are a helpful feature.

Videoconferencing (both 1:1 and group conferencing)

Video calls are a great way to interact remotely while maintaining the benefits of face-to-face conversation. While remote work requires clear communication that does not rely on body language or other subtle messaging, video calls enhance conversation by displaying the smiles, eye rolls and other facial expressions that accompany in-person conversations. Video adds depth to conversations that phone calls cannot provide. Unexpected cameos from family members and pets during video calls can add a needed dose of humor and humanity to the workday. In the event of a poor internet connection or an exceptionally bad hair day, videoconferencing platforms typically support audio calls as well.

File sharing and live collaboration

Instant file sharing allows employees to transfer documents, pdfs, and presentations without attaching them in an email. Live collaboration enables multiple employees to work together on the same document, presentation, or other project in real-time. Instead of passing drafts back and forth, all collaborators can view the editing process as it occurs. This encourages teamwork and boosts efficiency. This feature is also useful for taking and sharing meeting notes.

Channel organization

The ability to sort conversations and create customizable channels is an important feature of digital communication platforms. Channels can be created specific to a job function or project. Unlike email chains, team members can join and leave channels as needed. This keeps communication targeted and spares employees from having to sort through information that isn't relevant to them.

Source:

» Kashyap, V. (2020, March 28). 25 Remote Work Tools for Happy and Productive Employees

Remote Work Communication Platforms

SLACK

Slack provides a digital space for employees to share ideas and feedback in real time. This collaboration occurs within channels, which provide a space for messaging, file sharing, and other tools. Channels can be sorted by team, project, client, or any other criteria that is relevant to your organization. Content can be searched. This keeps work organized and easy to monitor. Slack supports instant audio and video calls. It also easily integrates with other work software, including Google Drive, Microsoft Outlook, Zoom, and Workday.

KEY FEATURES:

- » Instant messaging
- » Videoconferencing
- » File sharing and live collaboration
- » Channel organization

G SUITE

G Suite provides premium access to the many services Google provides including Gmail, Drive, Docs, Calendar, Meet, and Chat. Many of these features are free for individuals, however G Suite provides admin controls in addition to eliminating ads, enhanced security and storage, and other premium features. Live collaboration on documents and presentations with G Suite is particularly easy in Docs and Slides and Drive makes cloud storage seamless.

KEY FEATURES:

- » Instant messaging
- » Videoconferencing
- » File sharing and live collaboration

MICROSOFT 365

Similar to G Suite, Microsoft 365 for Business offers a package of their popular software offerings with premium features. This includes Word, PowerPoint, Outlook, and Excel. It also includes Teams, which enables instant messaging, videoconferencing, and channel organization. SharePoint and OneDrive provide file sharing and cloud storage.

KEY FEATURES:

- » Instant messaging
- » Videoconferencing
- » File sharing and live collaboration
- » Channel organization

MICROSOFT TEAMS

A communication and collaboration platform that integrates instant messaging, videoconferencing, file sharing, and other features.

KEY FEATURES:

- » Instant messaging
- » Videoconferencing
- » File sharing and live collaboration
- » Channel organization

Videoconferencing Software

ZOOM

The word “zoom” has quickly become synonymous with videoconferencing. Following the mass adoption of remote work at the onset of the pandemic, Zoom experienced security issues that included unwanted attendees “zoom-bombing” meetings. Through a series of updates and enhanced security protocols, Zoom appears to have largely resolved these issues. Zoom is user-friendly and easily integrates with most devices.

KEY FEATURES:

- » Chat room
- » Waiting room
- » Join-by-phone capability
- » Virtual background
- » Annotation
- » Live polling
- » Screen share
- » Background noise reduction

CISCO WEBEX MEETINGS

Webex offers another simple, scalable videoconferencing platform. Webex is popular among larger organizations and is the choice of 95% of Fortune 500 companies. Its features are similar to other leading applications.

GOTOMEETING

Videoconferencing software that supports a variety of virtual meeting types, from one-click meetings to large webinars.

Project Management Platforms

Throughout this handbook, we have emphasized the importance of incorporating performance management strategies into your remote work program. Project management platforms make that transition easier by providing a virtual space to assign tasks and monitor productivity.

Source:

>> Senior, K. (2020, June 10). Remote Team Collaboration: 15 of the Best Tools

TRELLO

Trello focuses on giving teams a way to stay organized and on top of work. First a project "board" is created, then team members are invited. Next steps are created to define the workplan. Cards are a primary feature of Trello. They define the tasks that make up the workplan. Users can add comments, attachments, due dates, checklists, and more to them. When a task is completed, the card is marked as complete, signaling that it is time to start the next task. Card movement is updated in real time for viewing by all other members, making it easy to track the status of a project.

ASANA

Asana is a flexible work management platform that allows users to create and adjust a visual representation of pending and completed tasks based on the view they desire: to-do lists, cards, or timelines. Users can assign and prioritize tasks, set deadlines, comment on task threads and check workloads by "seeing" each team members' current capacity.

FAVRO

The Favro project planning and collaboration application shows progress via Kanban, timeline, and sheet, allowing departments, teams, and individuals to work in different ways. Users can pre-set cards so that desired actions occur automatically as conditions are met.

BASECAMP

Basecamp project management features message boards, documents, tasks, group chats, and even automatic check-ins—a useful remote management tool when you want to hear from your team about specific activities or thoughts at pre-set times.

Security

Protect your customer and proprietary information by establishing remote work protocols that keep sensitive information locked down tight. Download the **Telework and Small Office Network Security Guide** from the Center for Internet Security:

SECURITY CHECKLIST

- VPN
- Comprehensive training program
- Multi-Factor Authentication
- Regular updates and security patches
- IT Support
- Strong password policies
- Anti-virus software
- Hardware firewalls
- Least privileges
- Administrator access
- Session locking
- Encryption
- Cyber security insurance

Other Recommended Practices

Issue employer-owned equipment. We recommend issuing employer-owned equipment, especially for laptops. This allows the employer more control over the device's use and security. If employees have to use their personal computers, have them create separate, password-protected user profiles that are used exclusively for remote connecting to the office network. Employers should clearly communicate that they will monitor employees' use of the equipment.

MANAGING TELEWORKERS

In this section, we'll address managerial strategies that work—as well as some that don't—so that you have the tools to be confident and successful in any telework environment.

The Basics

Managing telework is different than managing people face-to-face. It's more science than interpersonal art. That suits many of us just fine. Here are the tools:

Establish telework protocols.

Identify your organizational norms and telework practices. Set your team's core hours and communication methods. Include employees in these decisions and reach consensus on what "teleworking as a team" looks like in your work environment.

Build transparent work plans.

Set your team's project goals, performance indicators, and a timeline in consultation with members. Communicate, monitor the indicators, hold members accountable to their tasks, and openly, honestly, and honorably problem-solve any barriers to success alongside employees. Update the plans as necessary.

Monitor performance.

Telework quickly exposes deficiencies. Hold employees accountable for their work fairly and promptly. See our section on [NOTES AND SHARED HISTORY](#) for ideas on how to positively measure employee output and plan progress during staff meetings.

Stay connected.

Ensure all team members know the best and expected vehicles for



THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE

Need to focus? Try this 25 minutes-on and 5 minutes-off technique using a timer to instill a sense of urgency. Instead of squandering time on distractions, set 25 minutes to make as much progress on a task as possible. Take a five-minute break to get up from your desk and stretch or do a quick non-work task. Then repeat. Do this sequence four times (two hours) then take a longer break of 20 minutes.

»» Boogaard, (n.d.).

communication. Commit together to an acceptable response period. Understand that workstyles or workloads affect employees' need for uninterrupted time differently. For instance, writers may need long blocks of unbroken time; salespeople may need none. Help your employees be aware and respectful of others' workloads.

Be transparent.

Encourage use of shared calendars, instant messenger, email out-of-office messages, and other transparent communication vehicles to inform teammates of work status. If you show as available, be available within your team's communications norms. If you need seven hours of uninterrupted time, make it your status and put it on your calendar.

Manage by results, not by physical presence.

Does it really matter when and where your employees work? It shouldn't! If your team finds that core hours need adjustment or are even unnecessary for success, make the change. As always, keep setting goals and monitoring.

Expect varied workstyles.

Your employees will work at different speeds, with different gifts and in different homes or other remote environments. They will test new remote working strategies all the time. A skilled supervisor will allow experimentation and find ways to create a cohesive, high-powered team from diverse individuals who share commitment to the work and their colleagues. That said, this supervisor should not hesitate to remove workers who "disappear," who are unaccountable to their assignments, or who otherwise consistently fail their teams.

Build a trusting environment.

Foster trust among team members and between employees and management. Rigid monitoring of employees' daily activities hinders productivity and creates an environment of distrust, while established and agreed-upon metrics for productivity and output ensure long-term team success.

Source:

- » US General Services Administration (2020, March 19). Resources for Managing Teleworkers
- » Neeley, T. (2020, March 16). 15 Questions About Remote Work, Answered

Outcomes as a Management Metric

A manager's goal is the same wherever people are located: motivating employees to respond to organizational needs, do good work, and deliver it on time. **Here is the big secret to telework success: manage via outcomes.**

Help your direct reports understand what success looks like by setting them up with clear expectations. Provide unambiguous, detailed direction when assigning a new task. Of course, with a clear task before them some employees will not need much, or even any direction, and as a manager you can read the room, so to speak. *For everyone else, answer the following questions, preferably in both a verbal presentation with written backup.*

- What's the **goal** of the project?
- What **form** does the outcome take? Is it a report, a spreadsheet, a policy, a campaign? What sections or headings should it include? Approximately how many pages should it be?
- What is the **deadline**? What are the consequences of missing it?
- Where does the project sit within the employee's other assigned **priorities**?
- What's the **budget**?
- Who are the **decision-makers and teammate(s)** on the project and how should they be consulted and included?
- What's the definition of "done"?**

Source:

» Robison, J. (2020, March 12). Covid-19 Has My Teams Working Remotely: a Guide for Leaders

Core Hours and Flex Schedules

Remote teams thrive with predictability and knowing your coworkers are available at given times of day is very helpful.

Establish **core hours**, the base hours during which the entire team is available. For example, your organization's base hours could be from 10:00AM to 3:00PM, Monday through Friday.

Once core hours are established, allow employees to set their own **flex schedules**, which could be the same each day or variable throughout the week. Your night owls might start their days at 10:00AM and

BURSTINESS!

Get more done by organizing your day around uninterrupted stretches of productive activity followed by scheduled moments of video or chat collaboration with teammates. Protect your uninterrupted time from chatty coworkers and unnecessarily long meetings. Block out your own projects in your calendar to guard against intrusions. Set boundaries, deliver great work, and thrive.

work until 6:30 or 7:00PM; early birds might check in at 6AM and stay on task until 3:00PM. Flex schedules should be indicated on employees' calendars. Flexing and core hours may need occasional adjustment or renegotiation. As in so many other aspects of remote work, communication and honesty are essential.

Communication

Clear communication is key to establishing trusting and productive work relationships.

- » Establish how your telework team will communicate, including frequency and methods across teams and between managers and employees.
- » Know the communications channels available to you, including group and individual chats, private text messages, email, intranet, and other means.
- » Triage the need to communicate before communicating. Does your news or question merit an interruption in someone else's workflow? Or could it be delivered via a less urgent email or Teams post without a callout?
- » Tell your coworkers where you are on your calendar or via your office status button.
- » If you pop offline for a break during core hours (anyone who is still available to answer a call or text is considered online) change your office status button to "out of office" in your main internal communication method, such as Microsoft Teams, or post a note in your group chat (without a callout so as not to interrupt teammates).

Sources:

- » Half, R. (2018, December 6). 5 Ways to Effectively Manage a Team of Telecommuters
- » Matos, K. (2015, November). Workflex and Telework Guide. When Work Works

Establish communication "rules of engagement"

Telework interruptions can get out of control and video meetings can go far too long.

Managers should set expectations for the frequency, means, length, and ideal timing of communication for their teams.

For example, "We use videoconferencing for scheduled daily check-in meetings, but we use IM when something is urgent." Set up a channel or two for interesting but potentially distracting work and social chatter. Finally, keep an eye on communication among team members to ensure that they are sharing information fairly and appropriately.



YOUR COMMUNICATION CHARTER

The company Trello created an organization-wide "communication charter," a living, breathing set of expectations that they update regularly and post accessibly. The broad charter establishes project management requirements, the location of information, and even addresses norms around staff behavior and mental health.

» Ryder, (2020)

Source:

- » Larson, B. Z. (2020, August 14). A Guide to Managing Your (Newly) Remote Workers

Communication Protips

Turn your video on.

Remote meetings are so much better when you can see people's facial expressions. Hiding behind a black screen can be interpreted as a sign of disengagement or disrespect for others.

Add context to your messages.

Imagine the stress that a cryptic, unexpected meeting request can cause your coworker. Lay out the reasons for meeting requests.

Take time to check in.

You know it and so do we: in-office culture includes a lot of slacking off and socializing. It takes away from time on projects but builds connections and morale. Lacking casual encounters at the water cooler, it's important to make time to build relationships and connect with your employees. Schedule reasonably frequent check-ins and build brief, freeflowing social time into routine meetings.

Be human.

Whether you're the boss or the worker bee, working remotely during an unsettling pandemic means you should take extra care with your own physical and mental health and that of your teammates. Ask your coworkers how they're doing and really listen to their answers.

CONSIDER THESE COMMUNICATION TOOLS:

- Phone (cell phone, office phone, audio-conferencing, etc.)
- Email (email client, web browser, phone, tablet, etc.)
- Group messaging tools (Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams, etc.)
- Videoconferencing software (Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams, Go-To Meeting, Zoom etc.)
- File sharing (Dropbox, etc.)

This is our chance to build workplace humanity—let's not waste it.

Onboarding New Employees

Onboarding in a remote environment looks a little different but all the same principals apply. It can be a challenge, especially when integrating someone new onto an existing team. Approach the onboarding experience systematically to ensure a smooth new hire experience.

Ensure the remote office works.

Attach your **EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST** to the new hire's offer letter. Establish what the company will provide in terms of hardware, software, and office supplies. It's crucial that your new hire has WiFi. State clearly what you will provide, what you expect the employee to provide, and who will pay for what.

Put together a communication cheat sheet.

New employees working remotely don't benefit from the informal interaction among coworkers that helps people figure out company players and protocols. Describe how to use essential communication tools, online meeting solutions, and file sharing applications. Include an org chart with personnel titles, contact information, lines of authority, and headshots.

Make onboarding materials remote-friendly.

Don't make your new hires search for key information. Post the company handbook, their job description, holiday calendars, process docs (e.g. how to ask for and track PTO), appraisal process expectations, and other internal company documents in shared, easy-to-find locations.

Force essential relationships.

Set up a Relationship Action Plan. In it, list up to ten internal people who will be key to your new hire's success and direct them to build a relationship with each of these individuals in their first two weeks. Alert their targets with a brief note.



Prominently display your IT help desk contact information in your remote worker onboarding materials. If your "help desk" doesn't exist, explain clearly how employees are to approach technical problems, including who to contact.

Sources:

- » University of Pittsburgh Office of Human Resources (2020, September 10). Covid-19 Pandemic: Onboarding and Managing New Hires Remotely
- » Neeley, T. (2020, March 16). 15 Questions About Remote Work, Answered
- » Czerwinski, L. (2020, June 2). Onboarding for Remote Employees During Covid-19

Workplans and Timelines

A workplan represents the formal roadmap for a project. **An effective workplan serves as a guiding document, from start to finish, that enables a desired outcome through efficient team collaboration.** Of all the management documents we work with, Move Minneapolis loves our workplans. They enable us to:

- » establish goals
- » articulate steps to achieve goals by setting concrete objectives and deliverables
- » establish team member responsibilities
- » incorporate beginning, interim, and final due dates
- » encourage iterative revisions based on feedback

The exact format of your workplan is less important than the communications around it. It can be as straightforward as a simple spreadsheet or as complex as a fully loaded Trello board. Use the approaches in the **COMMUNICATION** section to ensure team focus, knowledge, and accountability around the plan and don't forget to revisit and revise it frequently.

Tracking Project Progress

Your workplan establishes specific goals. Your job as a manager is to move the project forward along the plan by coordinating team progress. Unless starting a new project, remote employees should know what their next tasks are for the day or work week. Try the following to keep employees connected and on-task:

- » Schedule daily, weekly, or as-needed project-specific team meetings and follow up when necessary via individual employee check-ins
- » Update the project workplan together, on-screen during meetings
- » Pass around responsibility for taking notes during meetings. (*See the next section for specific methods of note-taking and accountability.*)

Notes and Shared History

Little is more crucial to the success of your remote team than really great written documentation—a shared, preferably searchable history of meetings and conversations. Make sure your whole team has access to team notes and knows where they are. Refer back to your notes frequently!

Note-taking may seem like a burden, but taking the time to document conversations, assignments, commitments, and outcomes is well worth it. You don't want to get lost in the details, but you do want to portray major action items, decisions, and assignments. Note-taking should not be assigned as a low-level task: it's essential and not at all easy. Pass around the responsibility, be patient with folks who may struggle with it, and don't let the boss off the hook.

At a minimum, capture the following types of information:

- **Who Was in the Room.** Take note of who participated and who was invited but didn't show up.
- **Action Items.** These are your tasks or to-do items. Check them off when complete and make sure to revisit often to note deficiencies and work through roadblocks.
- **Decisions.** After you've had time to talk about an idea or a project, take the time to write down what you decided or the outcome of your conversation.
- **Requirements/Specifications.** A good example of this is a style guide to be followed or a specification for a file type or "wet ink" signature.
- **Opinions and Debates.** Document discussion around questions that arise, even when they are left unanswered. Note the sense of the room on specific topics.
- **Brainstorms.** These types of notes often get into the details and can be very visual (as opposed to textual)—consider virtual whiteboard software for capturing notes from brainstorming meetings. See options here.

As we said, **note-taking is an art**. Here are four note-taking tips from the Move Minneapolis team:

- » **Use checkboxes.** Name the task and the person assigned to do it.
- » Make note of any **unanswered or unanswerable questions** that come up.
- » **Prioritize work** by showcasing the most important items with stars, color highlights, etc.
- » **Copy unfinished checkbox items and unanswered questions** to the next meeting's agenda. This prevents you from forgetting tasks and ensures accountability. Checking off those unfinished tasks on a shared screen is excellent feedback!

Sources:

- » Cooper, B. B. (2017, March 17). How to Finally Stop Taking Useless Notes at Work
- » Edgerton, A. (2017, March 16). How to Take Notes that Don't Suck – Note Taking Strategies

Training

Bet you're not an administrative pro, and a spreadsheet guru, and a graphic design whiz, and a survey geek, and an online accounting specialist, and a coding queen, and a Zoom god. At least not all at once. **But you could be.**

Managers! Now is a great time to train your team. Investigate online training offerings from local colleges (including community colleges—truly among the best, commonly-overlooked resources) and nonprofits and enroll your staff.

Of course, the same holds true for professional development. Are there recurring or special online certifications required of or available to your team? Invest the time and money now and reap the benefits today and long after the pandemic concludes.

Working while Sick

COVID-19 and remote work have completely altered the concept of working while sick. Got a runny nose? Coughing and sneezing but still feeling mentally productive? In days of yore you might have ground out your day at the office in a haze of Dayquil and tissues. This was seen as commitment but was actually ill-advised and probably made necessary because of your employer's limited sick time or PTO benefits. In the era of COVID-19, don't even think of subjecting your coworkers to possible infection by going into the office.

Fix this now. As a manager you can:

- >> **Nurture a company culture that offers enough paid time off for illness and then trusts employees to make good choices.** If paid sick time is inadequate of course your team will work sick. Instead, provide better benefits, trust them to make good choices and live up to your productivity expectations.
- >> **Prioritize physical and mental well-being.** Bring up and normalize the topic during all-hands meetings with onsite as well as remote workers. Very few people are mentally healthy right now because of the pandemic—acknowledge it. In benefits materials and handouts, address the importance of taking time off for physical or mental ailments that prevent high quality deliverables.
- >> **Make sure managers and executives take sick days themselves.** When the boss shows up sniffing and coughing they send the clear message that work is too important to be interrupted by illness. That leaves their subordinates feeling guilty if they take sick days. Leading by example goes a long way towards limiting the toxic, "always-on" side effect that can come from working from home.

- >> **Take that midday break or quick afternoon nap** even when you're healthy. Communicate the importance of breaks and reinforce how they're important for well-being and productivity. Building in regular exercise—a bike ride, a walk with the dog, an online yoga or weightlifting class—helps keep workers fit and happy.
- >> **Alter your PTO policy** so people don't have to take a whole or half day off for short appointments. It's 2020 and that's just silly.

Sources:

- >> Wilkie, D. (2019, February 6). With the Advent of Remote Work, is the Sick Day Becoming Passé?
- >> Chan, A. (2020, March 17). I'm Sick, but I Work Remotely

Difficult Conversations

Supervisors are responsible for challenging tasks. Among these are helping workers improve their performance, handling tough teams, and dismissing employees. Doing all of this remotely can definitely be tricky.

Remote Performance Improvement Plans

In many ways, effectively managing a remote employee's performance is no different than one who is working from the office. The big picture issues are the same: Is the employee productive? Are they producing quality work? Do they contribute to the organization? Are they a positive team player?

Sometimes the answer is no. Most telework policies from the pre-COVID-19 era specify that working from home is a benefit that can be taken away. They frequently say that staff on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), a formal management tool that gives an employee with performance deficiencies the opportunity to succeed, are not eligible to telework. Now, with offices closed and vast swaths of Americans already working from home, that's no longer applicable. It's high time to update those policies.

Performance development plans for remote employees need to address one crucial difference between their work situations and those of onsite office employees: remote employees work in physical isolation. A PIP for a remote worker needs to consider that some of their performance problems may be due to lack of connectivity to the organization.

Sources:

- >> Fentress, K. (2018, April 26). A Holistic Process for Managing the Performance of Remote Employees
- >> SHRM (2020, February 19). How to Establish a Performance Improvement Plan

Remote Terminations

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn have resulted in vast job losses, requiring new ways to handle layoffs, some of which have made the news for their dramatic insensitivity.

Telework requires a new set of ways to release employees:

- » Follow your organization's normal procedures for determining cause, tracking employee deficiencies, or deciding which employees will be laid off. Don't let remote work status reduce your HR due diligence.
- » If mass layoffs or furloughs are planned, alert your workforce via mass announcement prior to scheduling individual consultations.
- » Create back-up copies of employee files stored on company servers.
- » Prepare COBRA information, benefits rollover instructions, etc. for use in a post-termination email.
- » Write a script that you can follow during the layoff videoconference. Prepare written answers to questions your employee may ask. Stick to the script.
- » Set up a brief, one-to-one videoconference with your employee and conduct the layoff/termination following your company's normal process. The in-office practice of scheduling this meeting at day's end no longer applies.
- » Consider including an HR official or coworker from another department on the video call as a witness.
- » Consider recording the video call—especially if there will be no others to witness—but make sure to inform the employee that you'll be recording prior to pressing the record button.
- » Immediately after the meeting, disconnect the employee's access to company servers and documents. *(Reminder to leaders: do your remote employees know not to save any important personal items on company equipment? Do they risk losing not just their jobs, but their family vacation photos?)*
- » Send the released employee an email (receipt requested) including their name, position title, date of termination, salary at point of termination, and information about

health insurance continuation options (COBRA), PTO balance payouts, company-sponsored retirement plans with rollover options, re-employment services, or severance pay. Request receipts for any outstanding expenses for reimbursement. Set due dates for all of these actions.

- »» Collect company-owned technology, equipment, office keys, and security fobs. Hire a third-party courier to pick up the equipment from the employee's home at a mutually agreeable time.
- »» Deliver any personal items the employee may have left at the office to their home, via USPS, courier, or other third party.
- »» Inform remaining team members as appropriate, with sensitivity and discretion.

What NOT to do in a remote termination:

- »» Don't enter the termination videoconference without having prepared. Don't ramble off-script. Check all the boxes.
- »» Don't send a lengthy mass email to thousands of employees, only talking about termination in the 11th paragraph and not disclosing whom the managers will fire (which happened in 2014 at Microsoft).
- »» Don't do a mass Zoom call with multiple employees to tell them the bad news (as Weight Watchers did in May 2020).

Sources:

- »» Creswell, J. (2020, May 22). Mass Firing on Zoom Is Latest Sign of Weight Watchers Unrest
- »» Shah, S. (2020, June 2). Coronavirus: What's it like to be laid off over Zoom?
- »» Nagele-Piazza, L. J. (2019, October 29). 5 Tips for Terminating Remote Workers
- »» Rampton, J. (2018, November 9). The Step-by-Step Guide to Firing a Remote Employee

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Managers and staff alike can relate to the need for remote socializing, the urge to hit the open road, and the intrusion of home “office” surprises and unforeseen circumstances that come up while teleworking. Electrical storms do not care if you're a CFO or a line worker—they will take out everyone's internet connection. Children (and roommates!) certainly will not respect your title if they're hungry and need a snack. And just because we're at work remotely doesn't mean we can't have fun.

Staying Socially Connected while Distant

Office workers throw birthday parties and baby showers and do happy hours all the time. Most people benefit from these celebratory demonstrations of concern for one another's personal wellbeing. Remote teams must work to include fun in their interactions. But how do we accomplish this when we can never get closer than six feet to one another?

Here are some strategies:

Use the USPS. Send handwritten birthday cards and ship small tokens of appreciation to one another. Remember that you can purchase stamps online, and that at least some mailboxes are still on the street. Give your team a birthday card budget and distribute teammates' birthdates (month and day only, please). Please don't assign this task to the admin. This is a group lift!

Gather for socially-distanced team meetings. Enjoy a catered lunch from a great restaurant in a local park. Wear your masks and be serious about staying safe and apart. It's really nice to see each other in the flesh now and then. Don't let the winter stop you, because ice skates and bonfires.

Sing together on a videoconference. Really. Can any of you accompany on an instrument?

Create group rituals for Fridays. Or Mondays. Or paydays. Perhaps you eat toast during your online staff meeting.

Establish a regular social team meeting but don't make alcohol part of it. You likely do not know who suffers from alcoholism on your team, or who may be pushed in that direction through inebriant workplace norms during an extremely stressful time. Mail teammates a pound of extremely good, locally roasted, fair-trade organic coffee to enjoy instead.

Children

The Coronavirus pandemic has caused employers everywhere to reconsider what is normal for their employees who are raising children. Schools and daycares are closed or providing limited service. Concerns (plus unknowns!) regarding virus health impacts and transmission are legion. Many parents will be teleworking into the foreseeable future with their children nearby.

Some tips for teleworking with children:

Flex your schedule—a lot. Start your workday hours before your children wake up, getting in a block of concentrated, uninterrupted work. Take time off mid-day to prepare lunch and settle your kids into an independent activity. Enjoy a cup of strong coffee after dinner and power through to the wee hours after dark. Don't forget weekends—some of us love to finish our work on Saturday or Sunday if it frees up some excellent child-time during the week.

Take advantage of your roommate(s). Teleworkers with partners, grandparents, or even older children in their households or COVID-pods may share childcare duties. Beware the gender trap—fight against insidious cultural expectations that women and girls do the bulk of home-based childcare and emotional labor to the detriment of their careers or educations.

Be ok with home-based disruptions and establish that precedent with your work team. Children benefit from seeing you engaged at your job. We've all seen social media curmudgeons hating on parents who allow their children to bomb work meetings—ignore the trolls. Managers should establish that children are a welcome and hopeful presence on videocalls. All within reason, of course, but even the concept of what's reasonable must flex with the times.

Keep your meetings brief and establish the expectation that you may need to take breaks to attend to your children. Kids' attention spans are short! Do not beat yourself up for having to excuse yourself in the middle of a call. Drop a quick "BRB" in the chat—no further explanation needed.

Create a list of particularly fun activities that your kids can pick from when you need them quiet and focused. From a box of new games or special art projects to treats of the sugar variety, use novelty and rewards to buy time.

When all hell breaks loose, make peace with the electronic babysitter. Kids, especially young kids, need meaningful adult support and they'll make sure you know it. Don't hesitate to hand over the iPad or turn on the TV when you're the one presenting the webinar or you really need to concentrate.



FAMILIES FIRST CORONAVIRUS RELIEF ACT (FFCRA)

There's a federal program for people responsible for children that may reimburse their employers for wages paid during special childcare leave when their children's school or childcare facilities are closed due to the pandemic. The FFCRA paid leave provisions were effective on April 1, 2020, and apply to leave taken between April 1, 2020, and December 31, 2020.

Employers, parents, and caregivers can find answers to common questions on eligibility and benefits at the US Department of Labor website.

» Families First Coronavirus Response Act: Questions and Answers. (n.d.)

Elders and Other Loved Ones

Tens of millions of employed Americans also care for other adults without being paid for it. Sometimes this is a formal arrangement, but mostly likely the caregiver provides a breadth of more casual care, from personal tasks and housework to shopping or accompanying their charge to medical appointments. The pandemic has challenged these caregivers as much or more than parents of school-age children. For instance, it may have led to your paid PCA being unable to visit your adult child with a serious disability, or for your mother's adult daycare dementia respite program to be cancelled due to concerns over the virus.

Telework may provide you with more time to conduct these tasks while staying on top of work. Or your situation may mean you cannot focus on work at all. It is well documented that caring for vulnerable adults can lead to isolation and serious depression even in the best of times. If available, now would be the time to seek out the support of others—paid or unpaid—to assist you in your caregiving tasks.

Source:

- » Family Caregiver Alliance (2019, April 17). Caregiver Statistics: Demographics
- » Anxiety and Depression Association of America (n.d.). Caregiver Mental Health

Pets

Pets take well to telework. They usually appreciate the extra daytime company and they're generally easier to care for than kids! Welcome pets onto your team video calls as long as they behave, but don't welcome them to formal meetings unless by popular demand. Watch out for disruptions from dogs that bark and cats that lie inert and heavy on keyboards. Befriend your mute button and get some good headphones to manage ambient howls. Beware any animal, human included, that could cause an accidental spill on your company-owned devices.

Roommates and Partners

Working remotely with a roomie? Coworker noise and disruptions are real problems. Establish quiet spaces for days of dueling conference calls. That may mean setting up office spaces and temporary laptop retreats in bedrooms, kitchens, basements, or even outside. Some people swear by working in their parked cars. Consider the value of a room with closing windows and doors. In an apartment, that might be a bathroom, at least temporarily and as long as you're strategic with your camera. Use your headphones to help concentrate when others are making noise around you. It's not all bad—many of us are quarantining alone and that can get old fast.

Ensure when teleworking with roommates that you have a high quality internet connection. Multiple people streaming video calls and downloading documents from servers is internet-intensive work. It could mean you need to upgrade your service, get a new modem, or get a WiFi extender. Start by **checking your internet speed**.

Working on the Road

Telework has made the allure of the open road even stronger. After all, if you can work from your front porch you can work from a national park, right?

Plan the details of your remote-remote work adventure long before proposing it to your manager and certainly well before packing your bags. Make sure your destination has strong, reliable internet, a compatible power source, and a dry, comfortable place for you to work. Check time zones to maintain easy connections to your key customers and coworkers. Analyze the fundamentals. For instance, can you even take your computer out of the country? **Let's go deeper:**

Get approval. Although we're saying it, it goes without saying: assemble a solid proposal and check with your manager at least two months before buying any tickets, terminating your lease, or buying a camper because they'll want to review all your plans and may choose to deny them. It's very likely that your request will need to be elevated to top management, a very scary and potentially time-consuming prospect indeed.

Understand internal company policies prior to planning your world adventure. Certain companies have geographic rules related to data and equipment security. This could mean your dreams of working from the beach in Thailand are crushed but working from the beach in Florida would be A-OK as long as you keep the sand out of your keyboard. Don't jeopardize your income by inadvertently breaking a company rule or being forced to buy an expensive plane ticket to return for that mandatory in-person staff meeting.

Plan for your internet and data connection. If your work requires consistent high-speed internet, which most office jobs do these days, you want to make sure you're prepared. Check in with your Airbnb host about the connection, and then have a Plan B and a Plan C. Working from a café or library are options (less so while COVID-19 is raging) but the best alternative is to buy extra data and set up a mobile hotspot. And yes, that expense is probably on you, not your employer, so don't even ask. Read the room, traveler!

Minimize your tech gear. Chances are you've got a fair amount of company-paid gear, from a laptop to mouse, keyboard tray, headphones, and more. See what opportunities there are for downsizing. You don't want to lug pounds of equipment through multiple airports. Again, these are expenses related to your discretionary travel and will be your responsibility.

Get a backup IT plan. What happens if something breaks or gets damaged (beach sand in your keyboard—you know I'm talking to you!)? Are you responsible? Will the company's insurance plan cover it? And how will you continue to work if you're thousands of miles away from a replacement device? Make sure you're equipped with these details so that when the unfortunate happens, you've got a recovery plan that doesn't break the bank or eat up your precious vacation days. Again, do the legwork for your employer and inform them of your plans in advance so they know you're prepared.



TIP!

Many apps allow you to turn pictures into PDFs. Download one or find one on your phone.

Separate your workdays and vacation days. Give work your all on workdays and be consistently available to your teammates. That might mean you skip the whale watching cruise with the family. On weekends and on your official vacation days, take advantage of your well-deserved time off. As always, communicate your availability and intent on your calendar and apps.

Carry a small notebook or folder for work documents and paper notes. This staging place can serve you during moments of brilliance when your phone battery is low or you're electronics-lite. This works well for recording phone numbers, contacts, project ideas, and receipts of work-related expenses. When you're back at your hotel room, promptly transfer records into a digital history, preferably with cloud backup.

Use your schedule like you've never used it before. Ad hoc meetings with fellow team members work a lot better when you're in your home office. But if you've decamped for the mountains, coverage can be spotty when you're on that spontaneous morning hike. Be intentional with your team check-ins. Overcommunicating your plans shows your teammates that yes, while you may be peering over the rim of the Grand Canyon, you're still the industrious team member that you were back in your home office.

Bring one set of nice clothes, at least waist-up. If you get that once-in-a-lifetime sales opportunity or video meeting with the CEO, you'll be glad that you look the pro.

Ultimately, unless you have an employment contract that explicitly states the flexible terms of your work location, working on the road is a benefit. Be aware that you could be called back to the office at some point and that cost is on you.

Sources:

- » Rosen, L. (2020) 10 Tips for Working on the Road
- » Bram, T. (n.d.) 10 Steps to Working on the Road
- » Zander, R. (2019, March 19). 13 Tips for Working on the Road as a Digital Nomad