Everything You Need to Know About Going Remote (Long form guide for employers)

Today, remote work is all the rage. Sure, part of this is due to the pandemic, a situation that isn't going to last forever. But even as it resolves, the working from home craze isn't going to disappear. It's part of the landscape, for one. For another, as many companies are noticing, it comes with a lot of benefits.

If you are thinking about going remote but have yet to take the leap, you probably have a lot of questions on your mind. Luckily, we have answers. Come with us as we explore the rise of remote work, as well as what you need to know about going remote.

The Rise of Remote Work

Remote work isn't something companies have the luxury of ignoring. Why? Well, telecommuting was increasingly popular pre-pandemic, with 5 million professionals working remotely at least part-time in 2018, marking a 173 percent increase over a 13 year period. That's a crazy amount of growth.

But, once COVID-19 struck, and shelter-in-place orders became the norm, the growth rate exploded. In what felt like no-time-flat, 66 percent of employees in the United States began working from home at least part-time.

Plus, a startling 44 percent of employees are telecommuting five or more days a week. Before the pandemic, only 17 percent were working from home that frequently. That's nearly a 160 percent increase in a matter of months.

In some cases, the increase was born of pure necessity. However, even in a post-pandemic world, remote work isn't going to go away.

Companies and employees are experiencing the benefits of working remotely. Often, there are productivity boosts and significant cost-savings that come with the arrangement. Plus, you can lower your carbon footprint, eliminate commutes, and much more.

However, if you want to experience the benefits and bypass the potential drawbacks, you need to learn about telecommuting's nuances.

What You Need to Know About Going Remote

The Business Case Is Ridiculously Strong

Before digging into some of the nitty-gritty, let's pause for a moment and talk about the business case. After all, understanding the benefits of remote work, from a company perspective, is a must. Otherwise, why make the effort?

Well, one of the biggest boons for businesses is the cost savings. Employers reduce hard costs such as office supplies, cleaning expenses, rent, etc... and save an average of [$11,000](#) per half-time remote worker per year. That's what you gain even if that worker still comes into the office the other half of the time. For full-time remote employees, the savings can be much higher.

Next, there are the productivity boosts. Overall, professionals report being [77 percent](#) more productive when telecommuting. That's huge. Plus, telecommuters usually work [five to seven hours](#) more each week than employees going to the office. Maybe the lack of commute is benefiting everyone?

Speaking of commutes, say goodbye to a massive carbon footprint. When employees don't have to drive in, that's taking vehicles off the road. Plus, the company can also have an easier time going green. If you don't have as many people in the office, you can downsize. Your utility draw will fall, you'll do less on-site printing, and may even reduce telecommunications needs.

Overall, companies have a lot to gain by going remote, so much so that it can make any necessary investments totally worthwhile.

Collaboration Tools Are a Must

If you think that your company can rely on email to keep remote workers in touch, you're wrong. Overall, [33 percent](#) of remote workers admit that collaboration gets harder when telecommuting.

Think about it; when employees work together in an office, they can simply pop over to a colleague's desk if they have a question. That's super simple. But that option doesn't exist when working remotely. Or, it doesn't unless you embrace the right tools.

With collaboration software, you can tackle communication woes. Solutions like Slack, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Asana, Trello, and a slew of other options make a difference.

Now, each solution does have a unique set of capabilities, so you need to select software that's right for each team. In some cases, a combination approach is best. For example, you might want project management software to track group tasks and couple it with a communication suite.

A shared calendar is also a surprisingly powerful tool. It lets employees know who is available when. That way, team members don't think they're being ignored if a colleague doesn't answer right away. They'll be able to check and see that their coworker is busy; that alone can prevent a lot of tension.

While this can be a significant investment, it's worth it. Your employees will be able to connect, coordinate group deliverables, and more, all with greater ease.

Security Needs to Be a Priority

Now, if you go remote, that doesn't mean you can just send employees home to rely on their own devices. Not only is that often unreasonable, but it also might not be safe.

Generally speaking, companies should supply any critical technology that an employee will use. Why? Because it keeps you in control.

Consider this; if an employee is using their own computer, you can't tell them that they can't go to certain websites or download different kinds of software. And while most people try to be safe online, people make mistakes. If a worker happens to download a virus or other form of malicious software and then connects to your company resources, that could spell trouble.

When going remote, it's better to provide the right technologies. That way, you can enforce certain policies, block unsafe activities, and otherwise keep your assets secure.

Usually, this means providing the worker with a laptop equipped with all of the software they would need or able to connect to a remote desktop. Also, security tools – including everything from antivirus to VPN – are crucial. Embracing multifactor authentication is also wise.

Be Ready to Talk a Lot More Than Usual

Another one of the challenges around remote work involves managers being able to keep an eye on their team. Again, you aren't together in a physical space, so casual drop-ins for status updates might not be an option.

Ideally, managers need to have one-on-ones with each employee, giving them a chance to outline their expectations in a clear manner. Additionally, they should schedule regular video call check-ins. Not only does this help managers track progress, but it also keeps the working relationship strong.

Plus, frequent communication creates an opportunity to monitor an employee's mindset. While many professionals thrive when telecommuting, others may struggle. For 21 percent of remote workers, loneliness is the biggest challenge they face. That shouldn't be ignored.

This is especially true while the stress of the pandemic is still hanging over everyone's heads. People may not just be lonely in their professional lives but in their entire lives. So, managers should reach out regularly, even if it's just to say hello. That way, if a worker needs support, they are there to give it.

Also, frequent check-ins give managers a chance to provide feedback. Remember, a simple "thank you" or "great job" can go a long way when it comes to boosting morale. Everyone likes to hear that they're nailing it and wants to know that their efforts are seen. By reaching out regularly, you can make sure everyone feels valued.

Promote Wellness by Setting Boundaries

One of the trickiest things about working remotely is stepping away from work. Simply put, if you work from home, your office is almost always just a few steps away. That can cause problems.

Why? Because it can create an always-on mindset. That can lead to a lot of stress. If an employee feels like they can never put work down, it will wear on them; that's guaranteed.

At times, the always-available mentality is spurred by the employee. For example, they may think, What's the harm in checking my email one more time before bed?" Next, they see a message and decide to respond or tackle an associated task. Then, they are back in work mode and may get stuck there for a little while.

However, managers can also play a role. If they expect their remote employees to be constantly available since they are so close to their office, that stops employees from ever having any real downtime. They essentially can't log off and walk away. After a while, that gets pretty draining.

Ideally, managers and employees need to have a conversation about boundaries. In some cases, the simplest thing to do is to create set work hours. Managers can then reassure their team that, outside of those times, they aren't expected to do anything.

Take Care of Your Company Culture

There's a good chance your company has worked hard to carefully craft its culture. The trick is, the culture may be based on the in-person experience. Now, this doesn't mean you can't carry it over into a remote landscape; you just need to be proactive about it.

A great culture helps everyone come together and create bonds. But it goes beyond aligning everyone's effort with a broader mission and set of values (though that does help). Engagement is often a big part of the equation, along with collaboration, growth, and development.

As you prepare to go remote, look for opportunities to offer the in-office experience online. You may want to start with a robust e-learning program or connect employees with mentors who can help guide them as they shift into the new paradigm.

Additionally, find reasons to gather for some fun. For example, why not have a team lunch? You could send each employee a gift card to a local restaurant that offers delivery and then get together for a group video chat while everyone enjoys their meal. Some companies hold cocktail hours, game nights, movie nights, and similar events to ensure that teams can simply enjoy each other's company from time to time. These types of gatherings not only bolster your company's culture, you're also supporting local small businesses at a time when they need it most.

Yes, caring for your culture will look different when you go remote. But, if you approach it proactively, you can make sure your culture stays amazing.

You Don't Have to Jump in with Both Feet

Even if you're ready to explore remote work at your company, the idea of transitioning might be, in a word, scary. It's a big switch, so being nervous is normal.

What's important to remember is, you don't have to jump in with both feet. Instead, you can gradually shift, essentially dipping a toe in the water before getting in deeper.

One of the easiest ways to start is to focus on positions that are best equipped to be remote. For some, this may be certain tech teams, administrative departments, or accounting and finance groups. If the vast majority of an employee's work is handled on a computer, they may be a great option.

Next, start slow. Get the chosen team the right tools and equipment. Then, have them work remotely one or two days a week. Keep an eye on their productivity. Gather feedback from them. Note any troubles they experience along the way. Find solutions to those issues before you expand the program.

By using a strategic approach, you can figure out what parts of the remote work program are working and what parts aren't. That's a big deal. You're learning before the program becomes too cumbersome. That keeps the issues fairly small and manageable.

Plus, it allows your company to start exploring the ROI. Monitor KPIs to track gains or cost savings over time. See how they shift as you expand the program. That way, you'll be able to see first-hand how the change is making a positive difference, something that can be incredibly motivating.

Remote Work Is Part of the New Normal

Ultimately, remote work isn't going anywhere. It's part of the new normal; it really is that simple. By embracing it now, you are preparing your company for the future. Yes, it can be a tricky road to walk, but it's a journey worth taking.

If you'd like to find out more about how you can successfully transition, head over to TrendsWithBenefits.org. We've got all of the resources handy, so you can make the switch fearlessly, allowing you to enjoy all of the benefits a remote workforce has to offer.

If you're asking yourself, "Why is Walking Mountains recommending remote work?" the answer is quite simple: We are on a mission to combat climate change. We aim to reduce local carbon pollution by 50% before 2030. The more people who work remotely, the more we reduce our carbon footprint, and the sooner we achieve that goal. Yep, we are protectors of Mother Nature; she is our kind of people.

> *Did you know that on average American workers commute 20 miles for work each day? Meanwhile, Eagle County residents average 40 miles getting to their jobs. Let's go from being laggards to leaders. Drive less, save on gas, and start working remotely today. #trendswithbenefits #makingremotework*