



Company's Guide to a productive Work from Home environment

A recent report from StatsCan shows that a huge number of Canadians had shifted to working from home. During the last week of March 2020, the government claimed that an additional 4.7 million people who didn't normally work from home started to do so. When they added employees that were previously working from home, the number rose to 6.8 million or roughly 40% of the overall labour force. A later 2020 ADP Canada study found that now 45% of working Canadians would still prefer to work remotely at least part time go forward.

It is now clear that employees want to choose how and where they work. Companies may have to stop thinking about allowing work from home from a cost savings perspective and now factor in employee engagement to ensure their retention productivity and a positive culture. Despite the growing demand for flexible work options and its many benefits, many companies still haven't fully embraced the concept of remote work.

As today and tomorrow's workforce becomes increasingly diverse and more and more companies begin to embrace telecommuting, it's critical for companies and employees to make sure they have the right tools in place to get work done in a remote environment. Transitioning to a remote work from home environment is more than giving your employees a mobile phone and a laptop.

This guide will offer some helpful advice for building an effective remote work culture and ensure that your company works as well virtually as it would with everyone working in the office.



1. Communicate- often and with variety

Good communication is an important for the successful of any organization, but even more important if your team is remote. Have a strategy a plan on how everyone will communicate. Simply using email is not enough. Emails are too static and much gets lost in translation. Video calls, Instant messaging and old fashion phone or conference calls each bring their own advantages and allow to ensure clearer communication. Multiple options for the team accommodate different needs- send a quick message if for a simple question and video for a more in-depth conversation where it is important and where seeing body language adds value.

Regularly scheduled meetings with all workers to update them on company, project, and success updates keeps everyone in the loop, engaged and rowing in the same direction. This goes for not only company-to-employee communication but also employee-to-employee communication. Employees should be encouraged to have regular meetings with each other to not only keep each other updated about projects but also to engage in general “water-cooler” banter that was commonplace in the office.

Constant communication of all kind is pivotal in maintaining employee morale and company culture.



2. Define remote work policies

When moving your employees to a remote work environment it is important outline your expectations with them verbally and in writing and share updates as required.

Specifically, a remote policy should cover;

Availability: Define what business hours they need to be online to deal with clients and other employees or can they set their schedules.

Productivity: Establish work plan or project objectives specific to each role, how and when results will be measured and what will be used to track tasks and results.

Tools: Standardizing (or integrating multiple) the tools used for communication and collaboration can help with productivity. It eliminates the need for employees to learn and deal with multiple platforms and minimizes IT’s support requirements.

Data management: The same holds true for the tools will the team use to organize and share documents and information. More importantly by specifying which tools are used will ensure that your data is handled securely.

Security: Going remote means many team members could be working anywhere- home, coffee shop, or waiting at a car repair shop waiting area. It is critical to have an information security policy in place. Ensure your sensitive information is stored in a secure cloud storage platform and implement a virtual private network (VPN) for users when they are connecting to public WiFi networks.



3. Be Flexible

Even with well defined work plans and schedules, things can happen, especially if employees are working in different time zone as it may be harder to coordinate meetings or to stay on top of deadlines.

Build buffer into your plans but try to keep your team on track by setting, provide many reminders, track changes to timelines, and ensure your customers are informed of any changes or delays.



4. Did we mention tools?

Having a remote workforce has unique challenges, but there are many cloud-based solutions tools that are designed to keep your team connected- anywhere, any time.

Unified Communications as a Service solutions (aka UCaaS or cloud-based phone systems) now combine multiple commonly used communication tools in an all-in-one application. Some solutions come with off-the shelf integration with other commonly used stand-alone collaboration applications - such as Teams or Slack, allowing workers to access all tools from one screen.



5. Train, Trust and let go

Remote work arrangements succeed when they are built on trust. Not to mention that Micro-management is tedious, time consuming for leaders and most often a huge employee

demotivator. The right tools can allow you to assign work as well as track results and accomplishments as a part of normal workflow .

Measuring results is more meaningful than checking up on time in front of a laptop.

Encouraged lines of open communication provides you insight into what is getting done and by who with out the need for constant checking. Managing remote workers is new for many managers as well. Set aside time to train managers on how you want them to deal with remote workers and perhaps develop a short manual so that your managers have a set of guidelines they know what to look out for when they're managing remote employees.

In the end to build trust simply provide clear instructions and expectations, offer regular feedback or schedule touchpoint meetings, and then let go to let your team do their thing.



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