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1.0 Introduction

In light of the COVID-19 crisis and the need to adapt local working conditions, this document has been created by consolidating information from multiple resources* to offer our local companies with guidelines and best practices to facilitate remote workers.

* for a full list of resources please see Appendix 1

2.0 Determine Eligibility & Resource Requirements

Establish which positions can be conducted remotely, and under what conditions. For example, if the majority of the employees’ job requires a network connection and a phone, this may be a good candidate for remote work. However, if the employee’s job description requires the use of resources available on employer’s site, i.e., manufacturing/production line worker, hospital, or food services employees.

If employee is eligible for remote, determine resource requirements. Laptop, network connection, VPN software, telephone, business software applications, etc.

3.0 Telephone

Most office telephone systems will have features that employees should take advantage of when working remotely. Options to consider:

- Call Forward your office number to an alternate number
- Call Forward your office number to voicemail and check your voicemail frequently
- Utilize your telephone systems VOIP portal to configure your options – some include a simultaneous ring to your office number and an alternate number, or voicemails will be sent to an email, etc.

4.0 Responsiveness

It is recommended that organizations implement a specific rule on response time. Define whether or not a remote employee is expected to respond to a coworker immediately or within 2-3 hours, etc., and also specify what modes of communication should be used, for example telephone, instant messaging, email, etc. Establishing clear expectations around communication creates a healthy
relationship between employees, their colleagues, supervisors, and internal customers. Establishing these at the onset will likely minimize any productivity concerns.

5.0 Productivity Measures

If you are transitioning to the concept of remote workers, you should establish policies for how you will measure or assess an employee’s productivity. Productivity can be measured in a number of ways, whether it be time spent working on a project deliverable, the number of cases resolved, daily updates on progress, etc. It is important to set these expectations up front to ensure employee’s success. A key element of success is to ensure that you can measure outcomes, as opposed to something like the number of hours.

6.0 Security

One of the major considerations when establishing remote workers is security. When an employee is working at employer site and utilizing employer’s resources, security is accomplished through the employers established policies. Employers should establish Security Policies when employees work remotely either from home or in public place. Employees must understand what information is considered sensitive, confidential, etc. If the employer does not want employees working in public places utilizing public Wi-Fi, these policies should be explicitly stated.
7.0  Collaboration Software Considerations

7.1  Collaboration Tools for Meetings, Training or Webinars

7.1.1  MS Teams

If the employer is utilizing the Microsoft Office suite of products, employees will likely have access to Microsoft Teams collaboration software. This is an effective method for team meetings that enable audio, video and data sharing capabilities. Employees must have a computer equipped with camera and microphone and sufficient broadband capability to enable these features. Consult your IT organization to determine what licenses the employer has and whether there is enough to scale for additional users.

7.1.2  Zoom

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Collaboration Software companies have offered free versions of their software. Zoom is one of those that is offering a free service. Similar to MS Teams, Zoom is a collaboration software service that enable audio, video and data sharing capabilities. Employees must have a computer equipped with camera and microphone and sufficient broadband capability to enable these features. Zoom also provides services to support Webinars. Consult your IT organization to determine what collaboration software they are recommending and supporting.

7.1.3  Cisco WebEX

Cisco Webex is also offering a free version of their collaboration software during the COVID-19 pandemic. Webex is a similar tool to MS Teams and Zoom that offers video enabled meetings and webinars. Similar to MS Teams, Webex is a collaboration software service that enables audio, video and data sharing capabilities. Employees must have a computer equipped with camera and microphone and sufficient broadband capability to enable these features. Cisco also provides services to support Webinars. Consult your IT organization to determine what collaboration software they are recommending and supporting.
7.1.4 Other

The above list of collaboration tools reflects the more commonly used tools. Each IT organization should investigate options that best suit their unique requirements.

7.2 Best Practices for use of video and Collaboration software

7.2.1 Make use of the Video capability

The new video capability with collaboration tools is an excellent way to engage your team. You can now easily tell whether your colleague, manager, direct report, etc. is engaged, confused, or may just need some extra attention. As you begin the remote worker experience, managers, supervisors, and team leads should lead by example and always be on video. This behavior will likely influence others to as well. Encourage the use of video by using language such as “we’d love to see your smiling face, please turn on your video”.

7.2.2 Don’t overthink it

Life happens -- Don’t turn off your camera for fear that the dog might walk across the background, or that your workspace is crammed into the corner of your kitchen. It’s ok if the background is your dining room. Don’t over think it. As a leader, take a moment to acknowledge these new working conditions and that as a team, each team member can make the best of it while maintaining productivity.

7.2.3 Take advantage of all the functionality

All of the Collaboration Software out there have well developed supporting functionality – in addition to the basic video, audio and sharing of data. There are also whiteboard features for brainstorming, polling, and chat capability. Research and test out the options and determine what features might work best for your teams.

7.2.4 Test it out

Schedule a few introductory meetings with no agenda - just give your team a chance to test out the new software and ask questions about its use. This way any
problems with logging in or downloading software can be handled before your meetings when you need to accomplish an objective.

8.0 IT Support

In addition to the equipment requirements, employers will need to specify if any tech support is offered to remote workers. Outline what remote employees are expected to do when having technical difficulties.

8.1 IT Considerations for Remote Workers

With the rapid expansion and the need for remote workers resulting from the current health situations, IT departments may not be adequately prepared for remote workers in such a large amount.

8.2 IT resource requirements for remote workers

In addition to the obvious need for a laptop computer, there are other resource requirements:

- Remote access to the company network (ie. VPN)
- VPN Gateway capacity may need to be increased (licenses)
- Internet Connection with defined upload/download speeds
- Collaboration Software
- Others?

8.3 IT staff will have to enact all the policies

It will be the task of the IT department in most organizations to work through the steps. The first is to evaluate the existing tools and confirm that they will work in the remote communications environment. Will employees be able to use Zoom or WebEx even if they don’t have a fast internet connection?

While the IT staff is confirming whether the tools will work, how about the infrastructure? Some companies issue employees a laptop and a cell phone that should work for working remotely, since one assumes that was confirmed when they were purchased. But other companies let employees provide their own, and
those need to be checked for remote work. Some companies simply don’t provide for working remotely, so their employees have nothing, and they need to be considered when establishing policies for remote work.

8.4 Communication will be critical during this time

While transitioning and broadening the scope of your remote workers, it is critical to ensure effective communications. It’s important to remember that the IT department will likely be significantly over-committed. A massive increase in service calls, setting up new levels of support for your communications and collaboration software, and testing and checking infrastructure will be far beyond what they deal with on a daily basis.
9.0 Best Practices for Managing Remote Teams

Source: Tech Republic - The following sections are excerpts from Tech Republics – “IT PRO’S ROAD MAP TO WORKING REMOTELY” which provides guidance on working remotely that may be useful for organizations deploying broad scale remote workers as a result of COVID-19 crisis.

9.1 PROVIDE EMPLOYEES WITH THE BEST EQUIPMENT AND TOOLS

“The biggest best practice is to have effective communications technology available and ready,” said Michelle Labbe, vice president of people at the all-remote Toptal. “Once you have the right technology in place, communication run[s] smoothly. Between Slack and Zoom, employees can constantly be in touch, for messaging or video calls.” Labbe warned supervisors should be wary of employees who isolate, because “A [successful] remote company is a very collaborative, over-communicative culture and if someone is not, that’s a red flag.” Provide your remote employees with tools “to do great work no matter where the person is located,” said Lynee Luque, vice president and head of people at Envoy, a workplace technology company. “That includes providing high-quality monitors and headphones, ensuring meetings are setup for participation no matter the person’s location,” and that those in office have rooms for optimal video-conferencing collaboration, cameras adjusted to capture the whole room, and the best experience for virtual attendees.”

9.2 HAVE A PROVEN, ESTABLISHED SYSTEM

Luque added “We don’t wait for it to become a problem. It’s important to constantly check- in with our distributed employees and iterate on our tools, systems, and processes based on feedback. We do this through roundtable discussions, weekly pulse checks, and an engagement survey every six months.” Torben Christiansen, director of technology, a global audio specialist at Sennheiser agreed. “Organizations need to ensure employees can seamlessly connect wherever they are, to focus on the work and not equipment. Headsets and portable conference speakerphones play an important role, as well
as cloud-based software so employees can access the tools they need anywhere, anytime,” Christiansen said.

9.3 ENCOURAGE REMOTE EMPLOYEES TO CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER

Supervisors, Labbe said, should “connect the like interests of employees from both a work and social stand-point,” Labbe said. Even though remote, “employees [should] connect with each other on different levels outside of the virtual workplace,” and managers should encourage this. Total keeps a community events calendar to introduce those who live near each other or have similar interests and encourages get togethers, if not in person, then via Zoom. Nearly all remote supervisors interviewed agreed communication is imperative. “Effectively managing remote and flex time employees starts with managers and employees on the same page for expectations and goals,” said Dania Shaheen, vice president strategy and people operations at Kazoo.

9.4 FOSTER TEAM BUILDING

“Our greatest concern regarding managing remote employees,” said Tim Abdu, head of human resources at The Corporate Connoisseur, “continues to be team building and rapport,” and added, “we focus heavily on team structure and intra-departmental relationships. The best practice for managing remote employees is communication. Management, and staff need to be in constant communication and discuss expectations and needs. Our most successful staff and managers are the ones who know how to communicate and how to do so effectively.”

9.5 VALUE EMPLOYEES AND SET EXPECTATIONS

“To create a better work environment, organizations must ensure all employees are engaged and feel valued by leadership and management,” Shaheen said. Start with over-communication from managers, set clear expectations for remote and flex-time employees
for work assignments, how and when work will be completed, and how their role within the team and organization are crucial to ensuring they are engaged in, and enjoy their work. “It’s important for managers to regularly check-in with remote workers to make sure these expectations are being laid out clearly for employees and to ensure employees are on target to hit their goals,” Shaheen said.

9.6 GET REGULAR FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYEES

Shaheen continued, “Employee feedback is one of the most under-utilized tools, yet it can provide business leaders and HR professionals with a wealth of knowledge around what will keep their employees engaged and enable their business to thrive.”

9.7 ESTABLISH AN ONLINE OFFICE

“Remote work won’t work if you don’t have an office online,” said Adrienne Cooper, chief people officer FitSmallBusiness.com “Our greatest tool is our online office.” Staff can “meet” and chat online. “We primarily use Slack, with Zoom for video conversations and meetings.” You need a system that stores and shares documents so people can work together no matter where they are sitting and no matter the time of day,” Cooper said. “Include remote employees in our social activities. People trust each other and work better together when they know each other. Casual socializing really helps people get to know each other on a personal basis. Schedule video lunches and coffees. Encourage our remote employees to shut off all communications during virtual meetings.”

9.8 SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS, NIX EMPLOYEE-MONITORING SOFTWARE

“Generally, the best way to supervise remote employees is through an outcomes-based approach,” Teresa Douglas, co-author of Working Remotely: Secrets to Success for Employees on Distributed Teams said. “Set clear expectations, give your employee a reasonable workload, and schedule regular check-ins to see if they need any resources to complete
the work. This is how you catch things before they become problems, without the added expense or privacy concerns that surround employee monitoring software.”

9.9 BE FLEXIBLE WITH YOUR FLEX EMPLOYEES

“The secret to success involves a combination of research, experimentation, and the willingness to pivot,” Douglas stressed. “Hiring remote workers gives a business the ability to hire from the world-wide talent pool, instead of being limited to the workers in a given area. With planning and a good communication plan, these workers can drive excellent results, to the benefit of a company’s bottom line.”

9.10 MANAGERS SHOULD BE “PEOPLE-PEOPLE”

“The best managers in this situation are people managers,” Abdu said. “These are the managers who have equal parts empathy [and] knowledge in their subject matter. People managers are able to communicate effectively and understand the needs of all of their employees.” Avoid conventional “supervision,” and instead focus on completed work. “We tend to discourage super-vision, per-se, rather we like to see projects and tasks fulfilled on-time,” Abdu said. “We expect the remote employee to join meetings on-time and to be an active participant and we like to see all our staff active and engaged on Slack assisting their fellow colleagues.”

9.11 SCHEDULE ONLINE CHECK-INS

In addition to staying in touch, there are other ways companies supervise their remote employees. “We have weekly calls, monthly meetings and are all connected via Slack on a daily basis,” said Suburban Jungle founder and president Alison Bernstein, whose staff is completely remote. “Slack allows us to keep an ongoing conversation--whether it be about our latest blog post or press hit, to share our accomplishments, congratulate each other and more. Our monthly breakfast in-person team meetings serve as a sensational way to brainstorm, reconnect and all come together to powwow.”
9.12 ESTABLISH A REMOTE ON-BOARDING SYSTEM

For other companies, an established program is in place for right after the hire of a new remote employee. “Successfully managing remote and flex employees starts with effective on-boarding, which typically hinges on extending your organization’s culture beyond the four walls and through a screen,” said Gayle Wiley, chief people officer, Lifesize (a video-conferencing solution company). Wiley recommends “ditching email almost entirely in the first few weeks and get video involved from the start to spend as much face-to-face time as possible,” arrange meetings with key stakeholders via video to promote a sense of self-sufficiency and ensure the employee feels connected to the broader community.” At Lifesize, a “New Hire Buddy Program,” pairs an established employee with a new one. Volunteer “buddies” connect frequently early on, then less frequently over time. “These relationships go a long way towards answering organizational questions, along with serving as a liaison to others in the organization. “Clarify guidelines and ensure flexible work arrangements are grounded in your corporate values, Wiley said. “For example, when working remotely, are your employees ‘Leading with Integrity,’ as in ‘doing the right thing’ when no one else is watching. Foundational values help establish the expectations regarding appropriate work behaviors along with how work gets done.”

9.13 NEVER MICROMANAGE AND BE RESULTS-ORIENTED

Focus on the quality and timeliness of a remote employee’s work. As for remote office culture, “In general, it’s best to take a relaxed managerial style, especially if the employee is completing their work on time,” said Calloway Cook, president of Illuminate Labs. Also, “Hire people with a high level of discipline and a high internal motivation and a propensity to be driven for results,” said Business Coach’s Stacy Capro.
Appendix 1: List of Sources used to create this document


2. https://blog.google/inside-google/working-google/working-together-when-were-not-together/
