

## Implementing Work-From-Home

In times of crisis, working from home can save the day. Companies can avoid or mitigate the need to layoff staff by having a work from home or telecommuting policy and technology in place. It can easily allow employees to continue to do business.

Working from home is not new. In fact, it is estimated that as many as 64 million U.S. employees (just under 50 percent of the workforce) hold a job that is compatible with telework. And, on average, teleworkers are 15 to 20 percent more productive than their counterparts in the office.

Here are some tips to get you started on your employees working from home:

- Identify the positions that can telework. Look at the tasks that employees accomplish as part of their job rather than the position as a whole. For example, while it might seem counterintuitive to think that someone serving in a customer service or administrative assistant function could telework, these employees might be able to perform select tasks more effectively and efficiently, such as required paperwork, while teleworking. (If there are multiple employees serving in customer service/administrative positions, it might be possible to rotate schedules and the timing of tasks to accommodate telework one day per week.)
- Ensure those employees have a designated work area. They can easily use personal computers and mobile devices in a pinch and companies can look at reimbursing expenses.
- Decide which company services are essential and what employees will perform them; then, create a plan, so that these employees can work remotely.
- Provide training related to workstation setup and safety measures. Show them how to log in remotely to a company's e-mail or file sharing system.
- Come up with standard operating procedure for establishing a work from home program so individuals and managers know exactly what to expect.
- Consider using cloud-based systems, such as Google Docs to store company documents and allow employees to access them.
- Give these remote employees access to technology such as laptop computers, e-mail, SharePoint sites, communities of practice, LiveMeeting capability, and other technology tools allow teleworkers to communicate and share information with colleagues.
- Use a variety of multimedia techniques to build credibility and increase trust during this time of change and uncertainty. Acknowledge openly that the organization is undergoing a transformation and that there will be challenges along the way.
- Set up a plan to guarantee key people in the company can communicate effectively.
- Consider a cloud-based communications service such as Ring Central, which allows companies to forward calls to employees' mobile or home phones if the phones at the home office are shut down due to a power outage or natural disaster. Make sure that IT can support and can equip teleworkers by expanding the technological environment to include video conferencing and virtual meetings.

- Designate a senior member of the leadership team as a strategic work-from-home coordinator.
- Always be concerned about the welfare of the staff and their families during a crisis, even if employees are able to work remotely. When possible, give employees the flexibility to deal with personal matters during disasters.
- Don't just focus on technology. Some experts advised making sure employees take home paper documents they may need to do their work.
- Set fixed work hours and if possible meal and rest periods for staff. (Doing so can help establish whether an injury was "in the course of" employment for worker's compensation purposes.)

To smoothly, efficiently, and successfully integrate a work from home policy, there needs to be support from management and leadership. Equally as important is a clear work from home policy that provides an overarching framework with parameters, standards, definitions, rules and clear expectations for employees and supervisors.

No two companies or positions within a company are the same, so every company must evaluate work from home policies based on how it will affect its customers, employees and bottom line.