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Remote Work: Six Guiding Principles

What does it take to make remote working work?

By Eric Hammons

Today's Environment

Remote work is not only growing; it's also changing. What began as an alternative for the few has become a way of life for millions. In study after study and across Point B's diverse client base, the trend is clear: more people are working remotely at more companies for a growing part of their work week – with more full-time remote workers every year.

As technology makes remote work possible across more types of work and industries, companies have good reasons to embrace it. A remote workforce can help stem the high costs of office space, parking and other on-site infrastructure challenges. Forward-thinking companies can plan ahead to grow their workforces and venture into new markets without the time and expense of expanding their physical footprints. Remote work is a compelling way to recruit and retain great employees. Talented self-starters are drawn to companies that offer flexible working arrangements. Employees may work harder to keep the trust they've been given to work off-site. Research shows that people who want to work remotely report feeling happier and more productive when they do.

Of course, it's not all blue sky. Employees may be surprised to find that working remotely doesn't offer as much flexibility as they expected. Sometimes remote workers can't stay in sync with the daily pulse of on-site

work. Remote workers might miss the social benefits of a team. Managers may not know how to manage remote workers. Communications can suffer. On the bottom line, organizations typically don't realize near-term cost savings from remote work. But these challenges can be overcome with the right upfront investment in tools and resources.

Point B's Perspective

Point B has helped many organizations and their employees make winning transitions to remote working. In fact, we believe remote working is so important that we've made it a core focus of our Future of Work practice.

Does your company know what it takes to make remote working work? What follows are six guiding principles we use to help ensure that a remote workplace transformation will succeed. All of them are interdependent, which means that none can be ignored.

1. Reliable tools

There's a preconception that solo work, such as programming, does well remotely but that team-based work, such as creative collaboration, does not. The fact is that many types of work can now be done remotely if people have the right tools. Design your systems for efficient searching and indexing, and invest time teaching teams to optimize virtual collaboration tools.

Unencumbering system security and mobile access are table stakes.

2. Equitable policies

Remote working may bring up issues of fairness, especially if it is viewed as a perk. Policies perceived as unfair or inconsistent quickly affect morale and camaraderie.

We find that most organizations don't have remote working policies. Clearly define participation rules and guidelines for remote workers, including expectations and etiquette around remote meetings. Make remote workers feel part of the team. Invite them to social events and support their travel costs as appropriate. Give them digital access to publications and business information that others have or may share onsite. Keeping remote workers in the loop builds team camaraderie.

3. Responsive support

You wouldn't let your onsite employees' computers stay down for a day. Likewise, a remote workforce needs the same degree of attention to IT performance, security and support. Create a support infrastructure that prioritizes remote worker requests, and maintain the tools to handle issues remotely. Your company should also be prepared to make "house calls" and deliver on fast shipping support if remote hardware issues arise.

4. Investment

Remote work can drive efficiencies that reduce costs in the long run. However, as mentioned earlier, it takes an upfront investment to see savings later on. Put the right tools and resources in the hands of remote workers. A transformation to remote working is not the time to cut corners on support. Be flexible and generous, and see the results.

5. Change management

Remote work is an organizational change that affects everyone – those working both on-site and off.

Unplanned, unstructured transitions can lead to massive workflow disruptions, stalled projects, dissatisfaction, and lack of trust. Manage the change that comes with remote working by simply thinking and planning ahead. Define user profiles and align change activities to each user's needs. Develop training and communicate with leaders and colleagues to help them adjust to the new work environment. Show trust in remote workers. Keep listening and communicating. Never underestimate the emotional aspects of this change; ignoring them results in real productivity dips.

6. Intentional culture

A lack of well-defined purpose can erode the value of remote work and make it tough to measure success. What is the intent of remote work for your company? How can you share this intent in ways that gain understanding and support? Consider offering social programs and cultural events specific to remote workers. Encourage co-located small group connections and cover expenses for outings that bring virtual teams together. And put the spotlight on remote workers in internal news. If you've paid attention to these six guiding principles for success, you'll have plenty of good news to share.

The Bottom Line

Great organizations are becoming less about where employees work and more about the talent, energy and commitment they bring *to* their work – wherever they do it. A healthy remote workforce can attract and keep high-caliber people. Improve productivity. Lower costs. Boost morale. And make it more cost-effective and flexible for your organization to grow. Not only will you reap all these benefits now; you'll also be positioned to attract the digital natives who make up an increasing portion of the workforce – employees for whom the ability to work anytime, anywhere seems only natural.

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