

TITLE

(17) Establishing Work from Home Policies: What Employers Need to Know

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Remote work continues to grow in popularity, both with employees—who love the flexibility—and employers, who want to attract top talent. Having the option to work from home can retain your best staff long-term. For a small business on a tight budget, it can also mean saving on overhead and space.

When setting up a work from home policy for the first time, there are some key questions to ask yourself to ensure the option works out well for you and your staff:

Which employees will have access to this option?

It is important to determine criteria that identify which employees are able to take part in the remote work option. Some staff roles may require on-site availability, while others may have more flexibility. Employees need to know which roles offer remote work opportunities and why. Keep in mind, too, that roles alone might not determine who is eligible for the work from home option. You'll want to assess the current productivity level of the employee, ensuring they are already maintaining deadlines and quality performance before they are offered the option of working out of the office. Setting clear, transparent standards and articulating expectations will show you are being consistent in your decisions about who gets to work from home.

What is the communication policy?

What arrangements are in place to ensure work from home employees are able to participate in in-office meetings? Will they be calling in? Will someone be taking notes and forwarding them? How often should remote employees be checking in, and with

whom? Should communication happen via email every day or over the phone once a week? Whatever you decide, the policy in place should be clear and easy to implement for every remote worker.

Who provides work equipment?

When your employee was hired, they either provided their own laptop and equipment, or you did. Now that they are switching to work from home, will this need to change? If they are using a work computer, will they be allowed to take it off-site? Do you prefer they use a company computer at home for confidentiality reasons? Will you be providing them a budget for a printer, phone, scanner, and other equipment they might require?

Are there any health and safety issues?

Employers are responsible for the health and safety of employees even if those employees are working from home. Before allowing a work from home agreement to be implemented, it is a good idea to visit their home office and ensure it adheres to your workplace health and safety policy.

How will confidentiality be maintained?

Depending on the employee's role, different levels of confidentiality may be required. No matter the role, they should continue to ensure data security is maintained at the level it is while in the office. You may require their home office to be in a private area where doors can be locked and documents can be secured.

In addition to answering the above questions, it is recommended that employers introducing remote work policies do the following:

Check in with legal counsel.

It is always a smart idea to check with your legal counsel anytime a new workplace policy is being created. They may want to add a clause to the employee contract that focuses on employee duties should they choose to work from home.

Conduct ongoing reviews.

Ensuring business needs are met and productivity is maintained at the level you require will mean regular reviews of how the work from home option is being handled by each individual remote worker. The initial agreement should state how often these reviews will happen, and note that this privilege can be revoked at any time if performance

levels begin to drop. Having a signed agreement ensures the employee fully understand the expectations that need to be maintained, and allows room for the option to disappear should company needs and requirements change.

Include remote workers in team building activities.

One of the few drawbacks of remote work is the lack of opportunities to bond with co-workers. There isn't the daily camaraderie and face-to-face communication that builds and unites a team, so ensuring your remote workers are included in all team building activities is key. Don't just invite them to the yearly staff party—try to include them in regular lunch outings and office activities.

Draw up a formal agreement.

Now that you know all the variables to consider, the most important step is drawing up the formal agreement that will need to be signed by all involved parties. It should lay out all the answers to the questions posed above, and go into specific detail about the exact expectations a work from home employee will have. How often the employee needs to be in office for meetings should be set out here. The timeline for evaluations should be in place, so the employee knows the initial stage will be a trial to see if it is something that could work out long term.

Offering employees the opportunity to work remotely can be a boon to all involved. Following these tips can ensure that everyone maximizes the opportunity for business success.

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