




QUARTERLY SPECIAL REPORT

# 8 KEYS TO MANAGING REMOTE AND HYBRID WORK TEAMS

# HUMAN RESOURCES





Being a manager is never easy. When employees are working remotely all or some of the time it adds a new layer of challenges to managers' duties. This Quarterly Special Report will look at eight keys to being a successful manager when teams are remote or hybrid.

# REMOTE WORK

Working remotely, also known as working from home or telecommuting, is performing work at a location other than an “official duty station.” With laptop computers, high-speed internet, and smartphones, many employees can work almost anywhere at least some of the time.

Working remotely provides benefits for both employers and employees. Research shows that remote work can improve both work/life balance and job performance. It can provide a distraction-free environment for reading, thinking, and writing. Studies have also found remote work can improve employee retention and productivity.

Employing remote workers creates flexibility in hiring. If a company is not restricted by location, it can hire the best and brightest individuals from just about anywhere.



# HYBRID WORK

Hybrid work means employees sometimes report to an employer's facility or "official duty station" and sometimes work remotely, usually from home.

Hybrid schedules may be fixed, meaning the organization sets the days and times employees are allowed to work remotely and when they must come into the office. Other employers allow flexible hybrid scheduling, meaning employees choose whether to work at home or in the office based on the day's tasks and priorities. With a flexible hybrid work model, some employees will likely work remotely most of the time with occasional visits to the office for collaboration or training, while other workers will choose to be onsite most days but have the flexibility to work from home occasionally for individual reasons.

Whether fixed or flexible, hybrid work arrangements seem to be here to stay. In a survey of 5,000 U.S. workers, the Harvard Business Review (HBR) found that three days in the office and two at home is an emerging norm. This particular hybrid schedule cuts time spent in the office by 30 percent. The data from HBR also shows that although employees are on site less, office space itself has decreased only one or two percent. The HBR survey noted that while employees appreciate less crowded facilities, employers still want to create "inviting social spaces that encourage face-to-face collaboration and creativity and serendipitous interactions." Ideally, those spaces should be both onsite and online.

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# BUILDING A REMOTE OR HYBRID WORK TEAM

Not every job can be done remotely, and not every worker is cut out for remote work.  
Make sure you:

## Select the right jobs.

Jobs that are best suited for remote work are those that require independent work, need little face-to-face interaction, and can be managed by results, not time.

## Pick the right employees.

The best candidates for working remotely are those who need little direct supervision, work well on their own, take initiative, and communicate well.

# 8 KEYS TO MANAGING REMOTE AND HYBRID WORK TEAMS

Managing an all remote or hybrid team of employees is different from managing a team whose members you interact with in person every day. Here are eight keys to success:

# KEY #1 – STRIVE FOR GOOD COMMUNICATION

Managing teams of remote or hybrid workers pose unique challenges. For example, how does the company make sure remote workers are on task, on schedule, and performing up to par? These types of issues almost always come down to communication.

Before allowing employees to work remotely, there are a number of communication questions to consider, such as:

- ▶ How will they contact supervisors and coworkers?
- ▶ How frequently should such communication occur?
- ▶ When are remote workers expected to be available?
- ▶ When contacted, how quickly are remote workers expected to respond?





Addressing these questions at the start of a remote or hybrid relationship will ensure everyone is on the same page.

Since remote workers may be in different time zones, everyone may need to be flexible about meeting times. Establishing a routine for communicating with remote workers can help. For example, a weekly virtual conference may keep everyone in sync, even if it's just to check in.

Initially, the company may set up frequent times for new remote employees to check in but reduce this frequency as individuals prove they can stay on task without handholding. If the company can't trust an employee with some freedom, that individual may not be a good candidate for remote work and will likely spend a lot of work time reporting in rather than doing the work.



## KEY #2 - HAVE CLEAR POLICIES

Remote work should not be implemented casually. If the company wants to reap the benefits it offers, the first step is to put a policy in place. Needless to say, top management support is critical. Before drafting a remote work policy, consider the following:

- ▶ **Which positions are suitable?** Both exempt and nonexempt positions may be appropriate for remote working. The best potential positions are those that require individuals to work independently, have little need for face-to-face interaction, entail concentration, and can be managed by output, not time spent on the job.
- ▶ **Who is eligible?** Policies often dictate how long employees must be in a job before becoming eligible, as well as how well they must perform to maintain the privilege of working remotely.
- ▶ **How will employees be selected?** If a number of individuals express interest in working remotely but only a limited number can be accommodated, the policy should outline the selection criteria, taking into account laws banning discrimination such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. Instead, consider making selections based on seniority or another job-related determination.



▶ **What kind of schedule will remote employees keep?**

Some policies allow for remote working only on certain days of the week and require employees to be available during core business hours.

▶ **How will timekeeping be done?** The requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act (as it pertains to overtime, for example) apply to nonexempt workers. Be sure to have a plan in place to track the hours a nonexempt employee works.

▶ **Who will provide equipment?** The policy should address whether the company will provide a laptop computer, for example, or pay for internet service, and how will technology support be provided. It's important to know that some states, like California, require an employer to pay for all work-related expenses.

▶ **How will the employee safeguard company information?** Security — electronic and physical (locked filing cabinets) — is critical for any off-site location.



# KEY #3 - USE TECHNOLOGY TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

To make sure all employees can be equally effective, make sure those working from home long term have the same equipment as in-house employees.

If you have a mix of onsite and remote workers or hybrid workers, it can be a challenge to manage worktime and spaces for the maximum benefit of the entire team. It helps if all workers keep an up-to-date online shared calendar. Keeping everyone's hours in sync may be more difficult if you have employees in different time zones, however. In many instances, technology can help. Space management software, for example, can:



1

Provide real-time space mapping, so everyone knows who is working in the office at any given time and where they are located.

2

Accommodate requests for equipment and resources, so employees have what they need to be successful at home, in the office, or both.

3

Manage hoteling stations, where employees can reserve a desk for the day(s) when they are in the office. You may be able to use the same application used for booking meeting rooms.

# KEY #4 - SELECT EFFECTIVE MANAGERS

An often-overlooked facet of the hybrid or remote workplace is the selection of managers. Not every supervisor makes a good remote manager. A micromanager, for example, probably would not be a good candidate to supervise remote workers, and it may be necessary to have a remote worker report to a different manager, or at least clarify the expectations to the original manager. Look for managers who:

- ▶ Trust their employees,
- ▶ Delegate responsibilities,
- ▶ Communicate well, and
- ▶ Manage by results rather than details.

Once the company has identified eligible job criteria and potential supervisors, be sure to train supervisors so that they understand the remote working policy and how to put it into practice. With a good policy in place and properly selected and trained supervisors, both employees and the company can start enjoying the benefits of remote work.





## KEY #5 – HIRE CANDIDATES SUITED TO REMOTE WORKING

It's up to company leadership whether workers will need to reside in a location which enables them to come into the office on a regular basis, on an as-needed basis for meetings and other special activities, or if visiting is rarely or never required.

In general, remote work is feasible for tasks that require:

- ▶ **Thinking and writing** - such as data analysis, reviewing grants or cases, writing decisions or reports.
- ▶ **Telephone-intensive tasks** - such as sales calls, obtaining information, or following up on participants in a study.
- ▶ **Computer-oriented tasks** - such as programming, web page design, data entry, and word processing.

Remote work is not suitable for employees who need to be in the office to learn the organization, who require in-person on-the-job training, who need close supervision, or who thrive on interaction with coworkers and would suffer from the isolation of working alone.

To be a successful remote employee an individual must be organized, disciplined, and a conscientious self-starter who requires minimal supervision.

Remote working should not adversely affect either the employee's own performance or that of coworkers. Thus, if a job involves frequent interaction with coworkers or customers, remote workers must be expected to be available via email, telephone, or instant messenger at the same times as they would otherwise be at work for this interaction.

Although remote work would give some employees more time for their family responsibilities, work duty time must not be used for providing dependent care or any purpose other than official job duties. If a company allows remote work, it must ensure that the offsite workplace is free from interruptions and provides the necessary level of security and protection for company property.



# KEY # 6 - KEEP EMPLOYEES SAFE WHEREVER THEY WORK

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Long before remote work became as prevalent as it is today, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a policy on home offices. The policy indicates that employers are not responsible for inspecting an employee's home to be sure it is safe, that employers aren't liable for employees' home offices, and that OSHA will not inspect home offices. However, employers are still responsible for the safety of employees who work at home, and it is possible that an employee will sustain a recordable injury in the home office that arises out of employment.

For workers' compensation purposes, a home office is considered a satellite worksite, and courts look at certain factors to determine whether an injury occurred while the employee was actually engaged in work. Those factors include:

- ▶ Whether there is business equipment at the home office,
- ▶ How regularly the employee performs work there,
- ▶ Whether the injury occurred in the specific area of the home designated as the home office, and
- ▶ If it occurred during the employee's normal work hours.



# KEY #7 - ADOPT A SUCCESS MINDSET

Help your remote and hybrid employees become successful by encouraging them to:

- ▶ **Establish a routine:** Once employees start working remotely, they will have 24-hour access to work. They may be tempted to work longer hours. However, working too much can cause stress and stress-related illnesses. Knowing when to stop is essential for effective performance. One way to get around overwork is to implement specific business hours. Set firm starting and stopping times and communicate these to managers. At the office, there are routines that structure workers' time. If workers are at home, it may help to establish their own routine, so they don't overwork.
- ▶ **Set goals:** Ensure employees develop a list of goals and assignments for the days they work. Have them report their progress on these goals at reasonable intervals.
- ▶ **Meet deadlines:** Follow the same rules for deadlines as if workers were in the office.
- ▶ **Avoid distractions:** If possible, encourage remote employees to take time off or work onsite on days when there may be distractions at home. If workers have an elderly family member, an infant, or a toddler needing care, it may be difficult to complete any work. Working from home is not a substitute for childcare or eldercare.





# KEY #8 – INFORM REMOTE AND HYBRID WORKERS OF THEIR RIGHTS

Generally, workers who rarely or never come into the office have the same protections as those who do. Thus, they must be able to view employment law posters that pertain to them. Here's how to keep remote and hybrid employees informed of their rights, depending on the situation.

**All employees who work remotely 100 percent of the time:**  
Electronic posting alone meets posting requirements if:

- ▶ Employees usually get information from the employer electronically.
- ▶ Employees have readily available access to electronic postings at all times.

**Some workers who are remote some or all of the time:**  
When a business has some employees who work remotely and some who work in an office:

- ▶ The U.S. Department of Labor encourages employers to use electronic postings for remote workers.
- ▶ Hard-copy posters must be displayed in an employer's physical locations, even when electronic postings are available.



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

With more employees working remotely either some or all of the time, it's important to understand these best practices of managing them:

1

Strive for good communication

2

Have clear policies

3

Use technology to your advantage

4

Select effective managers

5

Hire candidates suited to remote working

6

Keep employees safe, wherever they work

7

Adopt a success mindset

8

Inform remote and hybrid workers of their rights



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Judy Kneiszel is an Editor on the Human Resources Content Team at J. J. Keller & Associates, Inc. She conducts research and creates content on a wide array of HR topics, from communication and employee discipline to background checks; discrimination; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and policies. Judy is responsible for the content of the *Employment Law Regulatory Alert* newsletter and the *Employee Relations Management Today* newsletter. She also specializes in employment law posters.



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