

Bosses' top fears when managing work-from-home staff

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With businesses re-opening and adjusting to a new COVID-19 normal, many compliance leaders tell us that they expect that an expanded work-from-home (WFH) workforce is here to stay.

Cross-industry surveys consistently report the same trend.¹

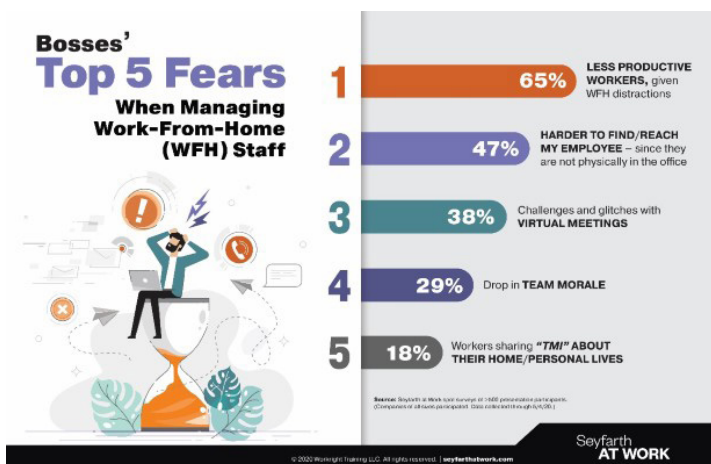
WFH arrangements provide clear safety advantages given pandemic exposure risks and reduce overhead costs — all at a time when companies continue to balance critical health and profit priorities.

However, and perhaps not surprisingly, many bosses calling us are expressing discomfort as they manage through this new WFH era.

As illustrated on the attached infographic, over 60% of bosses we surveyed reported fearing that (longer-term) WFH workers will be less productive and accountable than they were when working 'on-site'.

Close to 1/2 the bosses surveyed shared worries that remote employees won't be reachable when needed ASAP.

Given these and other concerns, we continue to experience an increase in calls from leaders seeking training and support on managing newly remote workforces.



MANAGER MYTHS DISPELLED:

What is notable is that the scope/impact of the virus are serving to address (and possibly debunk) two long-held myths regarding WFH workers:

Long-held Manager Myth #1: WFH employees will spend work time engaging in personal or recreational activities. Friends, chores, kids, tv, and the beckoning fridge, among other distractions, will hurt productivity.

Businesses are recognizing that a remote worker's ability to take breaks in their own "comfortable space" makes them more enthusiastic about their work.

COVID-era Reality-Check: Managers who are trained in WFH supervisory techniques are increasingly accepting what a host of studies (such as 2019's State of Remote Worker Report²) have already made clear: effectively supervised WFH arrangements can boost productivity, morale and loyalty.

For example, business leaders are recognizing that a remote worker's ability to take breaks in his/her own "comfortable space" makes them more enthusiastic about their work.

Long-held Manager-held Myth #2: Staff needs to physically be in the office so the boss can best respond to their needs, catch mistakes and call on them in ASAP situations.

COVID-era Reality-Check: Managers tell us that they are often surprised and relieved at the efficiency of remote employee interactions, once they are effectively trained.

They are finding that reaching staff by email, text and cell is effectively as fast (if not faster) than searching through brick and mortar corridors for someone who is chatting with a co-worker outside the shipping dock.

Moreover, virtual group and one-on-one meeting conversations are often pre-planned and an agenda is created in advance. They have less of an impromptu chat than live interactions.

Therefore, productive time on the phone or video with a WFH staff member is more often maximized.

While socializing still does occur remotely, the customary 1/2 hour historically spent daily gabbing together at the water cooler is no longer draining on company time or resources.

Of course, managing remote/WFH teams is not without its unique requirements and expectations.

We refer to meeting these requirements as maintaining “TACT,” or:

- T – TEAM COHESION
- A – ACCOUNTABILITY
- C – CLARITY
- T – TRUST

It is critical that employers provide managers with practical strategies and tools to effectively supervise WFH team members.

To maintain TACT, we recommend the training of all those managers who are responsible for remote/WFH workers in such areas as:

- Prioritizing TEAM COHESION/commitment through a variety of creative methods. These should include regular/weekly (even, if brief) telephonic or video team “huddles” in which all group members provide updates.
- Establishing ACCOUNTABILITY and the importance of communication follow-up. (Employees must understand that they can no longer expect to simply “run into” one-another in the hallway or an elevator or have other natural opportunities when they can informally check-in on project progress or deliverables. Of course, close-quarter hallway and elevator conversations would be inadvisable in the age of COVID, in any case.)
- CLARITY in terms of setting short and longer-term performance expectations for all remote staff.

- Providing daily feedback and relevant praise to establish and build TRUST. Employees are in particular need of such “supervisory back-forth” when they lack a manager’s physical presence/proximity.

In sum, it is critical that employers provide managers with practical strategies and tools to effectively supervise WFH team members.

Beyond maintaining TACT, our clients have found value in training their managers in such specific skills areas as: knowing how and when to check-in remotely, effective management of video team meetings; redirecting team conference call chatter from family matters to work product; diplomatically responding to voiced employee frustrations regarding competing obligations; etc.

COVID-19 has created a watershed, both in terms of the dramatic growth in WFH employee numbers as well the increasing acceptance of remote supervision, especially by those managers who are both well-equipped and adaptable.

Notes

¹ See: <https://bit.ly/37zrapK>, <https://prn.to/3e9oP7n> & <https://cnb.cx/2USR5DI>

² See: <https://bit.ly/3eb3wm1>

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