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Nine Ways to Create a Productive and Healthy Remote Work Culture

The trend toward remote work has been steadily increasing for some years, thanks in part to technology innovation and increasing requests from employees for more flexible work options.

Although the technology of the modern business landscape allows for these new arrangements, remote work isn't without challenges. How are leaders to navigate this changing landscape while maintaining productivity and employee satisfaction?

Contrary to concerns, remote work doesn't translate into lost productivity. In fact, a two-year study by Stanford University professor Nicholas Bloom followed 500 employees from the Chinese travel company CTrip. Bloom split the employees into two groups—a control group, which continued to work in the office, and a work-from-home group. Among remote workers, productivity increased 13%.

Interestingly, however, half of the remote workers asked to return to the office at the end of the experiment, reporting loneliness as the single largest factor in their decision. While managers worried that employees would be happier but less productive working from home, it turned out that the exact opposite was true.

Despite the results of the CTrip experiment, surveys of employees and job seekers consistently suggest that they want some flexibility in their work settings. A 2016 survey by job search site Flexjobs found that 84% of parents cite "work flexibility" as the "most important" factor in a job, while the 2018 Global Talent Trends study from Mercer reported that 51% of employees wished their companies offered more flexible work options. As people contemplate returning to the office under continuing public health concerns, managers and executives will have to position their companies for productivity while encouraging employee satisfaction in challenging circumstances.

It is possible to create a productive and healthy remote work culture. Below are nine ways to position your company and employees for success.

Practical Steps

1 **Group employees by function and need:** Start by grouping employees by function, role and needs. Your sales team may be used to working remotely and may not need the same level of support as your C-suite or accounting department. This level of analysis will help you get a better look at where you need to improve remote work options and support.

2 **Assess equipment and device needs:** Many companies still operate with desktop PCs, which can be a limiting factor for employees who need to work from home. Make sure employees have the equipment necessary for remote work, whether that means a laptop, tablet, cell phone or other devices that can function from any location. With modern unified communication and collaboration solutions, it's easier than ever to equip employees to stay connected anywhere.

3 **Don't forget more traditional office equipment:** Workers who haven't regularly worked from home before may need phones, desks, chairs, printers or other equipment that would normally come with the office. Look for ways to help employees create a basic workspace at home. Do you have spare phones, desks or chairs? Can you offer financial assistance for employees who need these items?

4 **Consider connection options:** As you plan for remote work, be sure you look at connection options for your remote workers. Do your critical team members have adequate Internet access at home? If workers travel, do they need a mobile hot spot to maintain productivity if public Wi-Fi is weak?

5 **Migrate crucial functions to the cloud:** From shared drives to CRM apps to phones/business communications, having your mission critical services in the cloud will make it easy for employees to pivot in a moment. For example, modern unified cloud communications solutions give employees the ability to connect anywhere, anytime, with any device, while keeping your data secure and your communication software up-to-date.

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Five reasons why moving your communications now could be the best investment you make

For more details, download our e-book "The Case for Cloud."

Employee Considerations

6 **Survey your employees:** Remote work brings new distractions and challenges for employees. One way to minimize such challenges is to ask employees what they need to have a consistent work experience and maintain—or improve—productivity. Some employees may simply ask for a phone to plug in at home, while others may want a full array of device options for working in airports, hotels or other non-traditional environments. Helping your employees recreate a work environment that maximizes productivity can help your company maintain consistent performance despite disruptions.

7 **Create policies around remote work:** Clear communication is an essential ingredient in creating a healthy remote work culture. Written policies can eliminate confusion, clarify expectations and set standards. Good communication from the top down allows everyone to pivot to remote work as necessary without affecting company performance. And don't forget to address work-life balance; written policies can give employees permission to turn off the phone and close the computer.

8 **Encourage socialization and work/life balance:** Leaders should encourage, plan or even subsidize opportunities for remote workers to gather outside of work. Be sure to include all roles and functions and encourage employees to simply socialize. Leaders should also transparently model good work/life balance behaviors and habits. Let remote workers know that they are not expected to work more hours than they do in the office.

9 **Consider hybrid models:** There are many unquantifiable benefits of having employees in the same physical space. Collaboration, innovation and connections are built in hallways and breakrooms. Employers who ask employees to work in the office some portion of the week while also allowing the flexibility of working offsite may encourage both the subjective benefits of office work and employee satisfaction and overall wellness.

Remote work doesn't have to mean lost revenue or unhappy employees. In fact, when executed thoughtfully and carefully, remote work can mean improved productivity and more satisfied workers. As you make long-term plans for your company, include your Allstream® representative in your conversations. Allstream's Unified Communications (UC) Cloud Voice offers the flexible design options you need to set up your employees for maximum productivity from anywhere in the world. For more information, contact us.

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