



Work from home (WFH) is a growing trend in today's work environment, in which employees can easily be plugged in from anywhere they are. It is also regarded as a key negotiating point for new employees looking to maximize flexibility in their new roles. A work from home policy is simply an agreement that defines the expectations, responsibilities, eligibility, and other work from home guidelines. In short, it ensures that all employees understand what is required of them when they choose to work from home.

While some companies have a regular option of remote working, most implement this as an emergency business continuity strategy. For example, the Coronavirus pandemic compelled businesses to adapt the work from home scenario to survive. As the fear and uncertainty of Covid-19 continues to spread, many employers have already considered the home office set up quite as a viable long term business model. Top companies like Google and Microsoft have arranged for enhanced teleconferencing tools to make work from home more comfortable than ever.

Whatever the circumstances, companies need a defined work from home policy to promote consistent performance measures as well as ensuring business objectives are being met.

So how can a work from home arrangement become a win-win for everyone?

Let's first understand the employer's point of view.

1. Reduced or Eliminated Office Space

Office space rental/ownership is a significant overhead expense for most small and medium-sized companies.

2. Hire the Best, Globally

Employers can hire the best talent to work with, no matter their geographical location. Technology and the internet are making it easier to recruit, review and hire great candidates around the world.

3. Higher Retention

Work-from-home opportunities play a significant role in the decision of an employee to quit a job, and companies that offer it see a significantly less turnover than those who do not.

4. Decreased Absenteeism

Working from home is the best viable option for decreasing employee absenteeism. It allows your employees to take care of themselves and still get the work done.

5. Maximized Productivity

People who WFH waste less time commuting and are more likely to begin their workday earlier as a result. It saves money, energy, and acts as a great morale booster.

Now, let's look at the employee's point of view.

1. Flexible Work Schedule

A work from home policy allows you to adjust the days and hours of work. Employees can balance personal errands easily, take breaks anytime they want and can manage a perfect work-life balance.

2. Increased Productivity

Overcoming previous beliefs that productivity is decreased for WFH employees is difficult. However, a study by Stanford University of over 16,000 workers over 9 months showed that working from home increased productivity by 13%.

3. No More Crowds and Traffic

Peak hour traffic congestion is the biggest challenge that employees face every day. Indeed, WFH is the best practical solution to deal with it.

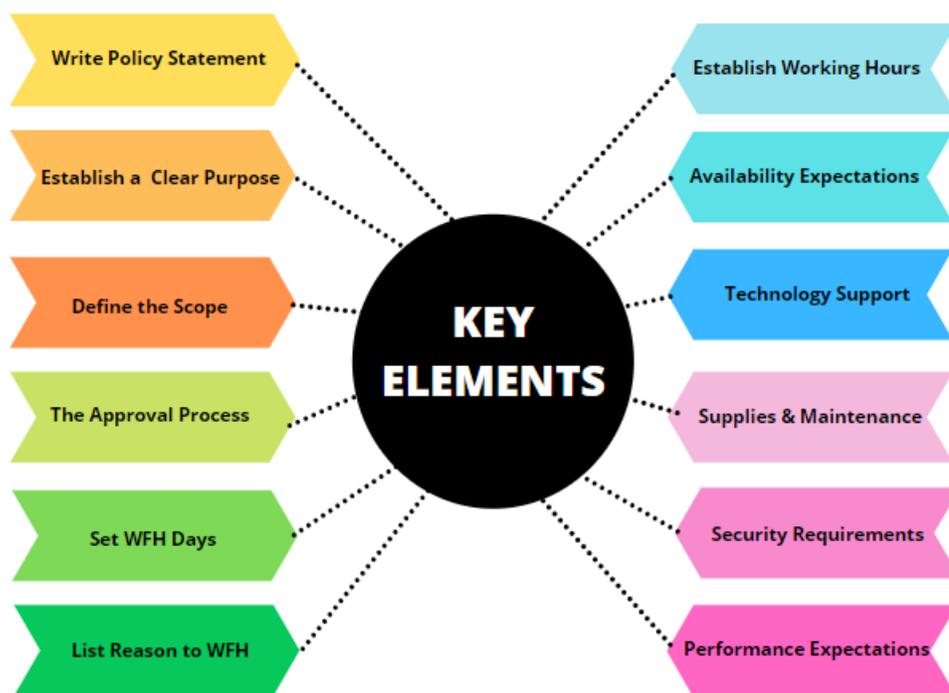
4. Reduced Stress Level

At your home office, there are hardly any office distractions. The intermittent coworker conversations, office politics and distractions are eliminated.

5. Healthier Body & Mind

WFH allows you to divert extra time each day towards healthy exercises such as meditation and physical activities. These well-being investments usually take a back seat when we are pressed for time.

How to Write a Work from Home Policy



More employers are offering remote work opportunities to enhance their company culture, and employees are loving it. In fact, 37% of employees would change jobs for one that offers remote work. It's become such a popular practice that more than one-third of full-time employees are expected to work remotely within the next 10 years.

While remote work — also called telecommuting or telework — is on the rise, few employers are creating formal policies to manage and monitor the process; 57% of employers with remote staff do not have a policy in place. Failing to provide employees with specific work-from-home (WFH) guidelines is problematic and can cause confusion.

The more information you provide employees, the better the experience will be for everyone. Read on to learn what to include in a work-from-home policy statement and how you can best prepare your team for success.

1. Write a Work-From-Home Policy Statement

Before you put a plan into action, clearly outline your expectations for every employee. Include your work-from-home policy prominently within your employee handbook, and make sure every team member understands individual as well as team responsibilities.

Use the following guidelines of what to include in your policy statement to get started. Remember, as with any aspect of your company culture, your work-from-home policy should be thoughtfully adapted to your distinct workforce.

2. Establish a Clear Purpose

Clearly state what the purpose of this policy is, both in terms of the document itself and what you hope to accomplish by offering work-from-home opportunities. Ultimately, your work-from-home policy should improve your employee value proposition (EVP), enhance your team members' experience at your company and align with your core values. Convey the value of the policy as well as how the statement will be utilized going forward.

3. Define the Scope

Outline which roles within your organization are eligible for remote work. Consider client-facing responsibilities, software limitations and cybersecurity risks. Clearly stipulate all role restrictions as to mitigate unnecessary WFH requests and prevent frustration.

Additionally, if you'd like to have more of a selective acceptance process based on individual suitability, describe the type of employee that is eligible to work from home: reliable, disciplined, autonomous, highly organized, etc. Finally, stipulate any tenure that's required for employees to take advantage of the work-from-home policy, whether that's three months or a full year.

4. Explain the Approval Process

Explain who will be approving work-from-home requests and what each request will be evaluated on. Will requests be reviewed by individual managers, or will HR oversee the process? Individuals should use their best judgement in determining whether an employee would be successful working from home or not. However, they should also consider the following:

- Does the employee need to interact with client to complete their job?
- Is the employee privy to private information and data that, if accessed outside the office could jeopardize our business or clients?
- Is the employee's home office environment distracting?
- Will having the employee work remotely jeopardize our team's success or make it difficult to communicate, collaborate or accomplish our objectives?
- Does the employee need additional software or resources to complete their tasks outside of the office? If so, what are the associated costs?

Before you assume answers, talk with employees, and allow them to address each question individually. If you know an employee has several children at home or has mentioned construction going on in their building, ask them how they will ensure they're still productive in a different working environment. Doing so will give everyone a fair evaluation and prevent unfair work-from-home limitations based on preconceived notions and unconscious biases.

5. Set Admissible Work from Home Days

In this section, explain when employees will be allowed to take advantage of the work-from-home policy. Will you provide weekly "WFH Wednesdays," or will employees be able to work remotely as needed? If there are certain days of the year in which remote work is not permissible — for example, during the last week of the month for sales representatives or during all-hands meetings — state that clearly within the policy so there's no confusion when the dates roll around

6. List Acceptable Reasons to Work from Home

Provide examples of acceptable reasons for a work-from-home request. Make it clear that the reasons listed do not guarantee approval; employees must still submit a request.

Possible reasons an employee may need to work from home include:

- Parenting responsibilities
- An illness
- Work – Life Balance
- Appointments during the workday
- Commuter delays
- Unsafe weather conditions
- Home / personal emergencies
- Other reasons discussed with and approved by supervisors

7. Designate Specific Working Hours

State whether employees are expected to be online during a specific time (for example, between 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.) and if time zones will impact working hours.

Alternatively, set the expectation that employees and managers will determine working hours on a case-by-case basis given the employee's responsibilities and manager's preference.

8. Outline Communication, Responsiveness and Availability Expectations

If employees are only occasionally working remotely, it's likely for non-work-related reasons, such as parenting, illness or work-life balance. As a result, their attention may be split between job responsibilities and outside factors.

To ensure everything gets accomplished that needs to consider setting communication guidelines. Are employees expected to be online and available over the course of the entire workday, or just during predetermined core hours? How do you expect WFH employees to handle their meeting schedule when out of the office? Set clear expectations so employees can better coordinate their personal matters alongside their work responsibilities and be more productive throughout the day.

Set particular guidelines for responsiveness and preferred modes of communication. Doing so holds remote workers accountable and sets expectations for in-office employees. If WFH employees aren't expected to respond immediately to requests from their colleagues, in-office team members will know not to contact remote coworkers regarding time-sensitive matters.

9. Set Technology Support and Requirements

In some cases, employers may require that employees have access to specific technologies — software, internet speed, personal computers — to be eligible for remote work. Within your work-from-home policy, outline any prerequisites so employees can coordinate their tech needs ahead of time.

Additionally, outline the procedure in case an employee is experiencing technical difficulties while working from home. You likely have tech support onsite, but if a computer stalls or a program won't run, how do you expect WFH employees to respond when they can't readily access your support team? Consider investing in remote desktop sharing software so tech support representatives can access an employee's computer remotely.

10. Note Office Supplies and Maintenance Requirements

Apart from supplying employees' technology and devices, explain whether or not you will furnish their home workspace with supplies or other amenities. From a legal standpoint, it's important to stipulate the employee's maintenance responsibilities and which responsibilities you, as an employer, will assume. For example, employees are most likely expected to maintain their office cleanliness and ensure it's well-furnished as a constructive working environment. You may agree to supply team members with common office items, such as pens, notebooks, and a stapler, in which case a monthly "office supply" stipend is a great perk.

11. Define Security Requirements

Because you can't guarantee what kind of network your employees have access to at home, it's vital you clearly outline security expectations, such as no working in public settings or on public Wi-Fi networks. Additionally, to make working from home a reality for your employees, you may need to offer security resources, such as a Virtual Private Network (VPN), to protect your people and business.

Specifically outline expectations for employees in client-facing roles. Do they need to make calls from a private line? Are they allowed to work in public settings where private information can be overheard? Will you reimburse employees for voice and/or data charges incurred when making work-related calls? If you don't explain how employees are supposed to conduct themselves when working on client projects, you can't manage nor guarantee the security of your business.

12. Set Productivity and Performance Expectations

Employers are often wary of offering remote work opportunities for fear that employees will take advantage of the policy. However, 65% of employees think they would be more productive at home than in the office. Manage expectations and reiterate that the work-from-home policy is truly a benefit by outlining productivity and performance standards.

Additionally, determine how you'll track productivity. While time logs are the obvious choice, they're less indicative of performance than time spent on a task. Determine the specific metrics that are more relevant to your business and track those. Consider relying on managers to gauge productivity by tracking completed tasks or utilizing a task-management platform to make work progress visible.

Once you are ready to roll out your new work-from-home policy, use the following five tips to ensure your team is set up for success.



1. Make Communication A Priority

It's no secret that things can get lost in translation over email or instant messaging. To ensure tasks are completed efficiently and accurately while employees are working from home, set communication expectations between managers and direct reports.

For example, consider having WFH employees start the day with a 15-minute call with their managers. This provides a more direct and clear communication channel where employees can get specific questions answered before diving into work and managers can adjust the individual's priorities or deadlines without creating unnecessary confusion.

Additionally, invest in tools that can smooth out indirect communication over the course of the workday. Slack and Google Hangouts are excellent tools for instant messaging, while Skype and Zoom enable face-to-face communication to bring WFH employees into the fold. To keep track of assignments and monitor productivity, consider implementing a task-management platform like Monday.com or Asana.

2. Educate All Employees About the Policy

Even if not every employee is eligible for your work-from-home policy, clearly explain the rules and expectations to every team member before implementing it. This is vital to your team's success. While WFH employees hold most of the responsibility for accomplishing work in a timely manner, in-office employees need to be aware of what is expected of their remote colleagues as well as their own responsibilities for keeping WFH workers in the loop.

Take extra time to review the policy with managers. Because some of their reports may be working from home more often, it's imperative that they understand the policy and how to uphold it.

3. Ask Your Employees for Their Input

We've laid out standard guidelines and practices for creating a work-from-home policy, but it's important that you develop a plan that's specifically tailored to your team and organization. Before finalizing the policy, poll your people for their thoughts on what a fair remote-work policy should look like.

Then, ask a few of your long-term employees to weigh in on your plan thus far. Gather their feedback on your productivity and performance metrics, communication expectations and approval process to determine what may be unrealistic for your current workforce.

4. Evaluate Your Policy Regularly

To ensure your work-from-home policy is as successful as can be, check in with your team and managers regularly after implementing the program. Has productivity increased, or worse, are there major project delays? Are managers finding it difficult to keep tabs on their reports and direct their team now that several employees are remote? Additionally, how do in-office employees feel about the policy — has it created any unforeseen obstacles to their success?

5. Lead with Trust

It is tempting to switch into micromanaging mode when several employees are working from home but doing so will only create problems for your team. If you are implementing a work-from-home policy, you simply must trust your employees. If you don't trust them, don't implement the policy. You also may want to up your recruiting efforts to hire more trustworthy team members, but that is a separate issue.

For your work-from-home policy to be effective, senior, and middle management need to trust their direct reports to uphold expectations and adhere to the rules. If employees fail to do so, act accordingly, whether that means adjusting the policy or addressing employees individually.

Attempting to micromanage from afar will aggravate employees and drive them away. Remote work is a huge perk that can significantly boost employee engagement levels when executed well. Trust your employees as much as you value them, and they will reward you with their loyalty.

A work-from-home policy is extremely attractive to job seekers. Not only does it reinforce work-life balance, but it also conveys to employees that they're truly valued as individuals. It demonstrates flexibility and empathy on behalf of the employer, two characteristics that will entice top talent and keep them around.

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