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Tips on Managing a COVID-19 Remote Workforce

As businesses across the nation pivot from a traditional office workforce to a dedicated remote team of employees, there are often more questions than answers. While COVID-19 may have been the catalyst for many regarding teleworking (aka telecommuting or cybercommuting), there are several benefits to telework under any circumstances. In fact, many millennials place a premium on the ability to telework at least part of the week when considering potential employers. However, the abrupt shift to a remote workforce has left many business leaders reeling as they attempt to adjust to the new business as normal.

For many companies, this is their first experience working remotely and without easy access to their coworkers and team leaders. Many are struggling to be effective leaders in a virtual environment rife with technology hiccups. There are also significant and understandable concerns regarding how to manage employees and their productivity without less tangible oversight.

The following tips can help company leadership overcome remote work hurdles during this unusual adjustment period.

Establish Communication Protocols

Small walking meetings and water cooler meetings happen all the time in a typical office environment. Popping in to chat with a coworker about a project, or a small talk over lunch can establish work plans; however, they no longer happen in a remote environment. Employees and company leaders will need to communicate more often than ever before through chat programs, emails, or collaboration applications meant to facilitate conversation between teams.

Make sure your virtual technology is working properly, then train employees on the effective use of this technology. Whether it's Zoom meeting, instant messaging, or a conference call solution, make sure they understand the technical nuances, and proper remote meeting etiquette. This will help improve both the effectiveness and comfort level of all users.

Written communication isn't enough either. People talk with their bodies and their tone just as much as their words. Having phone conversations and video chats can provide better insights into priorities and help avoid miscommunications. Recording meetings can also be effective for team members trying to balance homeschool schedules alongside their work responsibilities as it allows them to review meetings at their convenience.

Find Ways to Improve Engagement

Employees who've never worked from home before are going to struggle with feelings of isolation. They're also likely to have periods of extreme productivity followed by periods of burnout if employers don't establish clear working hours. However, even when keeping work and life responsibilities in balance, it's easy for remote employees to lose interest in their work. Motivation will likely be at an all-time low as many employees may ponder the future impact of the current pandemic.

Finding ways to improve engagement can be as simple as recognizing a job well done or as grand as mailing boxes of snack items personalized to the employee's preferences. Setting expectations at the outset can also help reduce stress as employees try to figure out their new workflow. Encouraging frequent, virtual social contact can also help keep loneliness at bay.

Build a Long-Term Contingency Plan

COVID-19 has proven repeatedly that flexibility will be key for businesses to survive the numerous changes and challenges this virus presents. This includes having a plan for the litany of potential contingencies such as:

- What are the company's priorities during the crisis – have established priorities changed?
- What happens if business can't resume within a few months or longer?
- How can the company help their employees better deal with the crisis?
- How will the company manage significant decreases in revenue among other potential business interruptions?

Having answers to these questions and many others can help prepare businesses better prepare for the uncertainties ahead.

Identify How to Address Primary Business Risks

Business risks are in a state of flux, as many companies' risk models don't include managing operations during a pandemic. COVID-19 has created unprecedented risks for businesses and their employees. Patriot Growth Insurance Services and our partner agencies understands the diverse insurance needs businesses require in these uncertain times. [Contact our expert team](#) for more guidance on this or other industry-related topics.

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