

Distributed Workforce Businesses Are Facing Challenges as They Adapt to Remote Employees

[According to one recent study](#), nearly half of all employees switched to working remotely in 2020 during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost overnight, local and state lockdowns went into effect on all services deemed non-essential — meaning that people suddenly had to adapt to a working situation that couldn't be more foreign to them at the time.

While it's certainly true that some jobs have proven more than adaptable to the current COVID-19 situation, many sectors are simply not well-suited for the remote environment. Some jobs need to be performed on-site — at least as far as maximum efficiency is concerned. More than that, some workers have home lives that present overwhelming productivity challenges. It's difficult to give your best to your job when you also have to be a part-time caretaker and school teacher for your children.

Because of that, some managers may be finding their roles more difficult than ever — and they're making the lives of those under them stressful as a result. Thankfully, managing these challenges is not impossible, but it does require you to keep a few key things in mind.

The Era of Remote Work Is Upon Us. It's Time To Embrace It, Not Fear It

One of the major reasons why it's so important to attempt to overcome these challenges — as opposed to just waiting for the remote work era to "pass us by" and for things to "return to normal" — is that those two things won't be happening.

[Another recent study](#) indicated that an estimated 25% to 30% of the workforce will still be working from home at least two days per week by the end of 2021. All of this points to one trend that shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon.

[One study conducted](#) by the team at the Harvard Business Review indicated that many of these issues stem not necessarily from the remote workers but from the managers themselves. The results showed that roughly 40% of supervisors and managers who participated in the study said that they had low self-confidence in their ability to manage their telecommuting employees. An additional 16% were unsure of their ability.

Obviously, none of that is the employees' fault — though as previously stated, there are certain positions and even people who are not suited for this type of situation. Still, countless others are, and it would be a shame to penalize them for one's own lack of self-confidence.

Overcoming These Challenges, One Step at a Time

From managers' point of view, one of the major ways to overcome these obstacles is by changing the way they think about what "productivity" actually means. For years, they've used the "headcount" method to get a sense of someone's performance. Are you showing up on time every day? Then you're probably a productive worker.

But what those managers need to understand is that they're not actually managing anything with that approach, and the remote work trend may represent an opportunity to change the conversation for the better. Taking a results-based approach to management changes the question above to ones like "Are you turning your work in?" and, "Is it pleasing clients?" If the answers to those two questions are "yes," nobody has anything to worry about. If one or both of them is "no," then a manager will have to step in and have a conversation with someone.

This approach needs to start at the highest level of the organization possible — not just with the

managers themselves. If organizational leadership is having a hard time with work from home, it stands to reason that most immediately beneath them will, too. Therefore, the problem needs to be addressed from the top down for the best results.

Likewise, managers need to provide both practical and moral support for those who will be working remotely within the organization. Sometimes managers have an issue where they don't see someone working fully remotely as a "real" employee and will thus stop engaging with them. That person won't get invited to the weekly meeting — they'll get an email about it afterward, maybe. They never get invited to social functions. The list goes on and on.

This goes beyond the fact that managers often don't have sympathy for the extra challenges remote employees may face that in-person ones do not — like those related to their family.

In the end, managers need to be prepared to support remote employees just as much as they do those coming into the office every day. If additional training for those remote employees is needed in cyber security or other matters, it can and should be provided. Not only does this help show that the company has a genuine belief in the benefits of remote work, but it also helps managers rise up and become leaders to all employees — something that is perhaps the most important benefit of all.

If you're interested in learning more about the challenges that distributed workforce businesses face and how to potentially overcome them, or if you'd just like to find out more information about important topics in a bit more detail, please don't delay contact us today.