

Even Small Businesses Can Have Remote Employees

By Richard Weinberger, PhD, CPA



“ *The biggest challenge that any business faces with remote employees is accountability and commitment.* **”**

We are living in an age where state of the art technology and the Internet have made the world increasingly smaller, so it is easier and cost effective to have remote employees. With the high cost of owning or leasing “real estate” to provide employees a place to work, companies of all sizes are realizing the cost benefit of having remote employees in addition to increased productivity that results from positive employee attitudes. Employees, likewise, find numerous benefits – no commute, flexible hours, and the feeling of job independence.

The biggest challenge that any business faces with remote employees is accountability and commitment. When systems and processes are in place, however, remote employees can be managed with efficiency, which produces quality results for the company and highly satisfied employees.



Key enablers for managing remote employees are:

Roles of company and employee –

Managing remote employees requires detailing what each is expected to contribute, and what the employee is expected to accomplish. Specific objectives must be clearly defined and communicated to achieve satisfaction for both parties. What will the company furnish in the way of support and equipment? What will the remote employee be expected to produce and when? Ambiguous goals result in hit-or-miss performance.

Tools and support –

A remote employee must have the right tools (equipment) to perform



the job function and the necessary support to complete assigned projects. The right “tools” might be computers, printers, phones, Internet, technical manuals, company catalogs, office supplies, and other essentials needed to properly perform various assignments. This will also include support from the company in the way of contact personnel, IT assistance, marketing, databases, or travel arrangements, as examples.

Schedules – Schedules for project milestones, completions, reports, and available hours (telephone, instant messaging, or email) are required of the remote employee. Though work flexibility is an advantage for a remote employee, specific work and schedule objectives must be adhered to. Depending on the location of the employee, headquarters, and customers, a remote employee may be required to keep a non-traditional work schedule at times. Working across various time zones might be inconvenient for a remote employee but necessary to accomplish desired results.

Flexibility –

Offering remote employees a flexible workplace and schedule are beneficial for recruiting, employee satisfaction, and motivation. Although the concept for employees is the convenience of working from home or another remote location, results must still equal or exceed what would be expected of the same employee working from a company location. As companies understand that final results are more important than the physical presence or hourly work schedules of employees, then the option of having remote employees becomes a possibility.

In a study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (2012 National Study of Employers) the following facts emerged:

- The percentage of companies allowing (at least some) employees to work some of their regular paid hours at home on an occasional basis increased from 34 percent in 2005 to 63 percent in 2012.
- For 2012, 10 percent of small organizations (50-99 employees) allowed all or most employees to work some regular paid hours at home occasionally compared to 3 percent of

large organizations (1,000 or more employees) allowing the same.

Objectives and goals –

One of the most important elements that must be shared with remote employees are organizational objectives and goals. Every business has different goals, visions, and missions that must be communicated to and understood by all employees regardless of location. Everyone must be “on board.” Since remote employees do not see daily reminders, the company must clearly articulate these through clear, concise, and frequent communications. Delivering results is the end product for any remote employee, but can only be accomplished with a thorough understanding of both company and personal objectives.

Depending on the type of business, a small company might have remote employees performing:

- Sales
- Administrative functions
- Payroll
- Customer service
- Technical assistance
- IT programming
- Marketing
- Recruiting
- Accounting
- Travel arrangements

Having remote employees is certainly not for every business. Nevertheless, there are many businesses that can realize substantial benefits from having some functions performed remotely either some of the time or most of the time. If a small business has never tried using remote employees for some business tasks, it can test the possibility by first determining what functions would be the easiest and least costly to implement. A review can be made of:

- Each employee and majors functions performed
- Additional costs required for remote equipment and communication
- Any cost savings attributable to not having an employee on company location
- Need for remote employee supervision
- How remote employee results will be calculated
- Overall benefits for the company, as well as the remote employee

Once a determination is made that it is in the best interests of the company and employee, a test can be conducted for a pre-determined period. Of course, the employee must understand that the test period may or may not become permanent based on a review after the test period is completed. Considering all the different ways of effective communication today, remote employees for at least some functions are a possibility for all businesses – even small ones.

About the Author

Richard L. Weinberger, PhD, CPA, has over 30 years experience as a financial and management consultant for small businesses. An esteemed thought leader, speaker, and former college professor, he is the CEO of the [Association of Accredited Small Business Consultants](#). His new book, *Propel Your Small Business to Success: Accelerated Actions to Maximize Profit*, (www.aampapproach.com) gives small business owners a step-by-step method for reviewing and analyzing all aspects of their company in order to ensure survival and success.