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Paul McDonald • Sep. 10, 2015

Higher morale, increased productivity and a better retention rate are just a few of the benefits of offering telecommuting options, according to a Robert Half survey of chief financial officers. So popular is this option that more than one-third of the executives said remote work opportunities at their company have increased in the past three years. Yet some employers are concerned about staff management issues that will undoubtedly arise if workers aren't physically in the office.

While the benefits of greater staff autonomy typically outweigh the potential disadvantages, managers need to adjust their strategies to make things work when

team members are offsite. Here are some do's and don'ts of managing remote

Do use video conferencing whenever possible.

Nonverbal cues and body language are an important part of verbal communication. Short of in-person sessions, nothing beats face-to-face meetings, even if they're virtual.

If video isn't practical for your staff, schedule regular phone meetings. Just be sure to develop strategies to keep remote workers engaged during conference calls.

Do address cybersecurity issues.

Because remote workers rely heavily on mobile apps, non-company servers and possibly their own equipment, they face a different set of security issues than onsite employees. At the very minimum, make sure your company's IT audit takes into account these security risks. But you'll also need to arrange training sessions for remote workers on topics such as virtual private networks (VPNs) and best practices against computer viruses.

Do maintain a good "office rapport."

Staff who work together in an office usually develop a tight-knit camaraderie through shared coffee breaks and lunches, chats by the water cooler, and desk-side small talk. A virtual workplace, on the other hand, requires more effort for a similar level of rapport. Whether it's hosting an online hangout or featuring individual employees in the monthly newsletter, find ways to strengthen ties among all staff members.

If feasible, schedule monthly or regular in-office meetings to bring all employees together. In addition to discussing business priorities, use the time for team building, such as with a lunch or other group activity, and to help staff bond.

Do get feedback from your remote workers.

No two remote teams are exactly alike, so you shouldn't make assumptions about

to acknowledge the efforts of your entire staff. Those who are out of sight shouldn't be out of mind.

Don't hold remote workers to different standards.

Offsite employees will resent being treated differently from their onsite co-workers. For example, don't expect telecommuters to check email after their quitting time when you restrict communications with in-office employees to just normal work hours. Deal with your entire staff consistently and equitably.

Don't miss warning signs.

It's easy to pay attention to your staff when they're in adjacent cubicles. But when you don't see them often, it could be easy to miss warning signs that all is not well. What to watch for:

- They start arriving late or not showing up for phone or video conferences.
- It takes them much longer than usual to respond to your emails, instant messages or phone calls.
- They miss deadlines more frequently and/or turn in sloppy work.

When you notice these or other signs, address them immediately — before the situation gets out of hand.

Don't think that everyone wants to work remotely.

While many employees prefer to work from home at least a few days a week, others do better in a structured office environment. As examples, extroverts may feel isolated if they don't have frequent in-person interactions with other team members. And employees who have trouble focusing may struggle without some direct supervision.

Thanks to tech advances, many companies find it increasingly easy and more

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