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## FIRM MANAGEMENT

# The Top Myths About Remote Work And How To Overcome Them

Amy Vetter • May. 18, 2017

In [a previous column](#), I talked about an important part of creating an environment within your accounting firm where everyone can thrive: allowing opportunities for remote work. When thinking about remote work, this can apply to either an associate who works solely at home or one who works remotely when needed. Even though demand for these opportunities today is high (listings for remote positions on Accountingfly receive [eight times more applicants](#) than traditional listings) there remains still quite a few misconceptions about how remote workers spend their day.

The virality of '[BBC News dad](#)' shows the fine line remote staff often try to tread between work and home. But, working from my home in Cincinnati, Ohio, through my role at Xero, I've found that it's much easier to strike a blend between work and life. I and many other remote workers aren't watching TV, we're working just as hard as our in-office counterparts. In order for remote work to succeed in an accounting practice, both the firm and the remote employees need to work to dispel the misconceptions around working away from the office, so the same respect is given to a remote employee as it is to someone who comes into the office and has regular facetime. Here are some of the myths about remote work, and how to overcome them:

### 1. Remote Workers Are Watching TV In Their Pajamas All Day

Video conferencing is becoming more widely accepted as a tool for conducting meetings. Using software like [Google Hangouts](#) or [Zoom](#), meetings can be held just as if the participants were in a room together. Accounting practices should make the option to join all relevant meetings via video conference a standard. Unlike conference calls, through video you are able to see who is engaged and hold staff accountable. On the other side, it's important for participants joining remotely to look presentable. This doesn't mean you have to wear a pantsuit, but it's important for your colleagues to know you're putting in the effort. By implementing video conferencing tools and dressing presentably, staff can still interact with clients where practical as well.

## **2. Working From Home = Working Fewer Hours**

Some may think that a worker's attention is more divided at home, and while there can be distractions at times, I've found that I work more hours at home. It can be really hard to mix your workplace with your home life. With your computer in the next room, it can be tempting to open it up and keep working past regular business hours. I try to mitigate this by keeping a strict schedule, dictated by my calendar, so when it's time to stop I get a reminder. I actively schedule the time to get out of the house to work out, and try my best to avoid eating lunch at my desk. It's important for accounting practices to implement practice management tools to enable their staff to check work in and out so people can work whenever they are available, whether at home or in the office. This enables everyone to be up to date from wherever they are and know what is being worked on and by whom.

## **3. Not In The Office, Not Part Of The Team**

One of the little things that many working in an office can take for granted are the casual conversations that happen in the workplace. Deskmates have time to talk about things outside of work, but in virtual meetings, everything is generally on a much stricter timeframe. It's the responsibility of accounting firm leadership to think about social initiatives to help remote workers feel involved.

Consider putting time on the calendars of staff firmwide, where, in a casual environment, everyone can get to know each other to talk about what their families are like and their hobbies. Think of it as a virtual happy hour or similar. Ten minute kick-off meetings every morning are a great way to start the day also. In my practice, I had time set on the schedule called virtual "coffee breaks" where we would pair up staff in different locations to spend 30 minutes getting to know each other and brainstorming new ideas for the practice. I also know of firms that make the

investment to bring their staff to conferences together and organize extracurricular social activities for them to get some valuable face-to-face time. It's all part of creating a great culture.

#### 4. There Aren't As Many Leadership Pathways For Remote Workers

Accounting firm leadership should offer the opportunity for remote workers to take on projects or jobs that will give them not only a feeling of accountability but the experience so when they do take on a new role, they're ready. Instant Messaging services like [Slack](#) are a great place for everyone to interact and touch base – if you implement them make sure everyone is active on these channels. [Trello](#) is a great project management tool for assigning projects and jobs. By using these programs, everybody can interact and get things done no matter where they are, while having more equal footing as far as career growth. Coaching remote workers is another area where video conferencing should come in, as it enables those involved to read each other's body language and react as if they were in the same room together. Weekly one-on-one video meetings between managers and their direct reports ensures feedback can be given in real-time.

Work-life integration is difficult to accomplish, but one of the most important things to help foster as an accounting practice looking to recruit the best talent. With the availability and widespread use of cloud technology, there should be no reason for remote workers to not be provided the same opportunities as those in-office. Thanks to these tools, you can transform your practice so employees can benefit from working from wherever they are, while continuing to deliver the same level of service to your clients, if not better.

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