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Work Is About Results, Not Location

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Jim Boomer • Mar. 10, 2019



The first thing many people do when they wake up is reach for their smartphone. In fact, your smartphone probably is your alarm clock. But we also use it to send and receive email, check our calendar and so much more. Before we officially sit down at a desk, we may get some work done on another device, like a tablet or laptop.

Cloud and mobile technologies have catapulted us into an anytime/anywhere work environment. We're no longer bound by the four walls we call an office to check things off our to-do lists. It's a significant shift because it means work is now entirely about *what* you do, not *where* you do it.

Trends in remote work

How does this shift impact you and your firm? It's driving a number of trends in our profession that will have lasting impacts.

- **Virtual accounting firms.** We're seeing more firms (and businesses in general) give up their brick-and-mortar locations altogether and move to virtual offices. Two factors are driving this shift. First, as the Baby Boomer generation retires, we're backfilling with professionals who are tech-savvy and don't accept many of the traditional barriers to working remotely. They aren't motivated by money or the status that comes from a corner office. They are driven by freedom and lifestyle.

Second, as traditional accounting services become more commoditized, clients are seeking advisors beyond their physical location. This means firms must embrace remote platforms to remain relevant. As remote environments become the norm, fewer firms see a benefit to paying for physical office space.

- **Lower barriers to entry.** The cloud has lowered the barriers to entry for new accounting firms. In the past, accountants looking to go out on their own faced huge up-front expenditures for technology. Today, nearly anyone can get a subscription to a cloud accounting solution and start onboarding clients the next day.

Benefits and challenges of remote work

Shifting away from thinking of work as a physical location requires new mindsets for workers and their organizations. Each can enjoy some unique benefits if they successfully address the challenges inherent in measuring work in terms of results rather than "face time."

Benefits

To workers

- Flexible schedules
- Retain talent, knowledge and investment
- Tool for recruiting/retention
- Larger talent pool
- Reduced real estate requirements

To organizations

- Increased productivity
- Retain talent, knowledge and investment
- Tools for recruiting/retention
- Larger talent pool
- Reduced real estate requirements

Challenges

To workers

- Turning work off
- Isolation/loneliness
- Effective collaboration/communication
- Distractions at home
- Staying motivated
- Time zone changes

To organizations

- Maintaining a strong culture
- Communication/connection
- Managers actually have to manage
- Cost of travel for face-to-face
- Potential security threats
- Training/onboarding challenges

Remote work best practices

Many firms getting started with remote work make a crucial mistake: they believe remote work is all about getting the right technology. While technology is important, **trust is really an essential factor.**

Managers simply have to be better managers in a virtual work environment. Employees must be self-sufficient and focused. Competent to do the work, motivated by the right things. Committed to making the work, themselves, the clients and the firm a success. Here are a few best practices to help that happen.

Define expectations

People can't live up to expectations they don't know have been set for them. Think about, plan for and manage their success. Remove all doubt about who is doing what by assigning ownership to everything in your firm and putting your expectations in writing.

Establish goals

Individual goals must align with and support the firm's vision and strategic plan. Set SMART goals for both technical and core skills that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely.

Meet with individuals for formal goal setting and review three to four times a year, but informal check-ins and coaching will be ongoing – weekly or even daily during certain projects or times of the year.

Communicate transparency

This loops back to trust. You need a way to share your individual work plans weekly with your team and there should never be a time when you wonder what they're *really* doing.

Your team can use a combination of video conferencing, instant messaging, and social tools designed for remote teams to replicate an on-site team as much as possible. Isolation can be a problem if you're not intentional about communication and connection.

Remember, you don't have to turn into a 100% virtual firm overnight – or at all. But to keep the best talent and clients, you need to get comfortable with thinking of work in terms of what people do, not where they are. If you're just getting started, let people try one day a week, then two, etc. It doesn't have to be all or nothing, and you don't have to “stay the course” if it is not working for one person. Just don't punish everyone. Your goal should be to find ways to make it work.

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