

WORKING FROM HOME: MAKING PLANS UNDER PRESSURE



You may have been considering developing a work from home (WFH) policy for some or all of your employees but been reluctant to do so for a variety of reasons. However, the sudden rise of the coronavirus (COVID-19) may begin to force the hand of many employers who have held back on WFH, also frequently referred to as telecommuting.

There can be a lot of excellent reasons to adopt telecommuting policies. Research has shown they improve employee satisfaction. In an era of tight employment, the opportunity to telecommute can be the benefit that keeps present employees and attracts new ones. Beyond that, contrary to fears of some managers, the ability to telecommute for at least part of the work week has been linked to increases in productivity. Also, if done on a permanent basis, it can cut employer costs for office space.

However, whatever the merits or limitations of WFH, as the concern about COVID-19 increases, employers may come under increasing pressure to permit telecommuting wherever possible. Both employees who want to protect their own health and governmental agencies tasked with public health may begin to strongly advocate for WFH.

Some things to consider

Act now: Hoping it won't happen or assuming your region won't be hit is not an option. As a business person, you understand very well the need for contingency planning and risk management. If you must transition some or all of your employees to WFH, you won't have several weeks to plan it out. Start now.

Plan: Working from home is more than just using a laptop at the kitchen table. Assign a cross-functional team to begin planning how this can be implemented. Determine which employees can most

easily adopt WFH. Also, just because an employee needs to be on-site for their job, it doesn't mean **all** their duties must be done in the workplace. Anything you can do to limit their on-site presence will lower the risk of infection.

Data security: Identify how you will handle security. For instance, should you forbid employees from using any public wi-fi locations because it places your data at risk of cybercrime? Are there physical materials needed, which, when removed from the office represent a security threat? Address how to handle these issues now. Don't wait for a problem to arise and need to handle it after the fact.

Overtime rules: Don't forget that some workers may be subject to federal, state, and local overtime regulations. WFH cannot be used to circumvent, even inadvertently, these rules. Be sure to emphasize procedures regarding standard work hours and overtime.

Remote access tools, remote desktop solutions, and collaboration tools: Your team will need to agree upon the best tools that everyone will be using to handle virtual collaboration and train users ahead of time. Contact InfoTECH Solutions, L.L.C. for a consultation on how to address each of these topics. InfoTECH Solutions, L.L.C. can be an excellent resource here, as these decisions and the accompanying necessary training will need to happen fast and you may not have the available in-house resources to devote to this facet of WFH.

Communicate: Finally, make plans for how employees and their managers will maintain the appropriate level of contact to optimize productivity. Because one just can't stop by the next office and drop in to catch up on the status of projects, etc., communication can be a casualty of an ill-planned WFH policy.

It is likely you will need to address all of these things under a very tight deadline. Contact InfoTECH Solutions, L.L.C. for a consultation on how to address each of these topics.