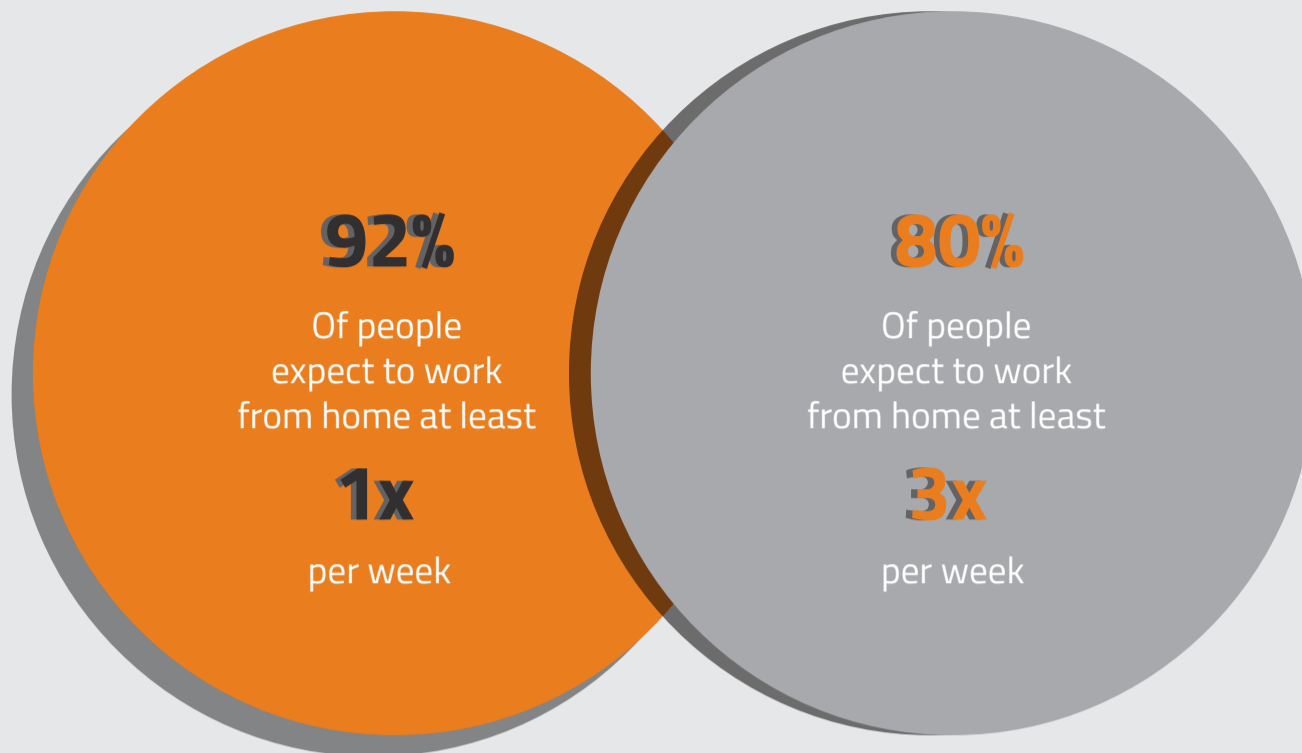




AWECOMM'S TIPS

AND RESOURCES FOR

MANAGING REMOTE TEAMS



Owl Labs.(2020).State of Remote Work 2020.
Retrieved from : <https://resources.owllabs.com/state-of-remotEwork/2020>

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be an important learning experience for many businesses. It made perfectly clear how vital it is to focus on future proofing the business and adapting to meet changing environments and needs. Since February of 2020, we have been predicting that the remote work environment most of us have entered is here to stay for the foreseeable future. Now we are beginning to see tech and fortune 500 companies like Salesforce embrace the changes and adopt different work week options for employees. Many companies are offering a hybrid or "flex" type environment – a portion of the week remote, a portion in the office. Whatever the options are, remote work is the way of the future. If you're going to get ahead of your competitors, you better learn how to implement remote work safely and effectively.

A business focused on advancement understands the importance of keeping team morale high and placing an emphasis on culture. This is even more important while managing remote teams. Setting up employees with the right hardware and other equipment is only one side of the coin when it comes to maintaining productivity and retaining staff. Work environment, productivity and collaboration tools, and team culture must all be given equal thought to make remote work successful.

Check out the tips and resources outlined in the pages below to get your business set up for success while working remotely.

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SET UP THE CORRECT WORK ENVIRONMENT

There are certain necessities that must be put in place to work remotely. The following will enable your team members to work effectively and securely:

Equipment

When working remotely, the first step to creating a comfortable working environment is to ensure you have the proper setting and equipment. It is highly recommended that you have a clean, designated workspace that is free from distractions.

Regarding specific hardware, you will want to ensure you have access to the following items –

- **Laptop**
- **Cable modem/WiFi router**
- **Designated work area/desk**

Connectivity/Network



Hardware

To establish a reliable connection when working remotely, the most important pieces of hardware are the cable modem and WiFi router. Typically, cable television services and internet services are purchased through the same provider. Your home cable modem and WiFi router are setup and managed by your home cable/internet provider. The modem and router are the central pieces of equipment that control your home internet network.

There are two important aspects to consider regarding your home network:



Speed



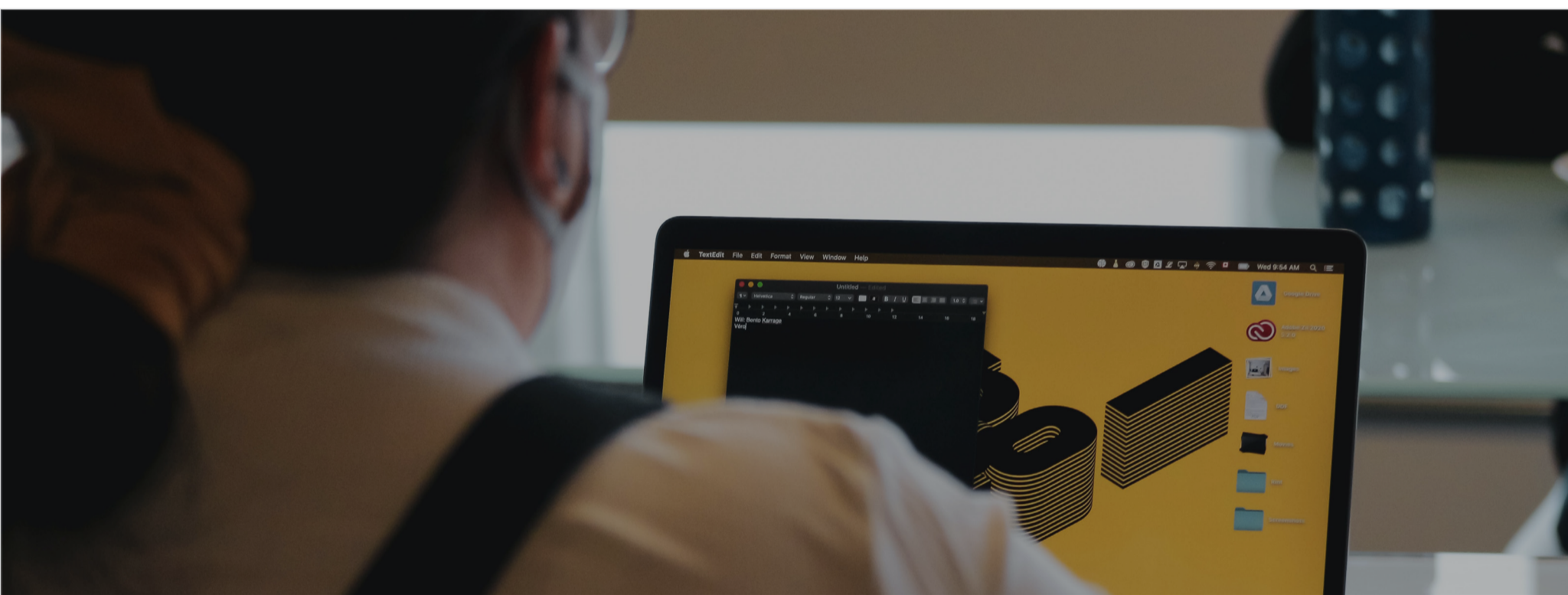
Security



Speed

Internet speeds can vary, and the more you pay monthly, the higher the internet speeds you will usually have available to you. Faster download speeds are needed if you have multiple devices connected, and your internet is used for streaming and video connectivity on a regular basis. As far as standards when working remotely are concerned, we typically recommend a download speed of about 30mbps.

Friendly tip: when working remotely, try to minimize the number of devices connected to your home network aside from your work computer if you are connected via your home network. The higher the number of devices connected, the lower the internet speeds become.



Security

One of the most important factors regarding connectivity is how secure your home network is. There are open home networks, which do not require a password to access, and closed/secured home networks that require a password to be able to connect.

It is highly recommended that you set a password to secure your home network, if you have not already done so. If you already have a password for your home WiFi, then consider changing it to a new, stronger password before you begin to routinely work remotely. An alternative to connecting to WiFi is to directly plug an ethernet cord from your laptop into your modem. This usually establishes a stronger connection and is recommended if your modem is near your workspace. If you experience issues connecting to your home Wi-Fi or are unable to set up or change a password for your home WiFi network, please contact your internet provider.



Hotspot

If you lose connectivity to your home WiFi network or are in an area where there is not a safe and reliable WiFi network to connect to, you may also connect via hotspot.

Hotspot connections are established through your mobile device (cell phone) and allow you to use your cell phone's internet data to gain access to the internet on your laptop.



Software

If you are still hosting some of your data internally instead of in the cloud, we would recommend using a Virtual Private Network (VPN). A VPN ensures connection to the company network, which enables access to drives and files. Without connecting to the VPN employees will not have access to any files or documents stored on your network drives. This helps eliminate the risk of sensitive files and data falling into the wrong hands.



Phone

We recommend VoIP phones that follow you around when remote. VoIP stands for Voice Over Internet Protocol. This means that all your voice traffic comes in over the internet. VoIP allows you to make and receive calls from just one phone number, making it a great productivity tool. If you have an old phone system, you'll need to rely on forwarding calls to your mobile phone. This is really a poor substitute for a VoIP solution, so consider implementing one.



Security

Tips and Tools

With any shift in technology, there is also a shift in risk. If you were not a security-focused organization before, now is the time to become one! Working remotely opens many threats to your business data, so putting the right policies and tools in place to prevent breaches is one of the most important things you can do.

Use a Password Manager

Urge your team to create complex, long passwords. Set up your system or create a policy that requires them to change their password every 30-60 days. Most people find remembering all of those complex passwords to be challenging. Often-times employees will write these down in a word document or in the Notes app on their iPhone. If that fell into the wrong hands, there goes all of your business's sensitive information! Instead, encourage the use of a password management tool like LastPass, Dashlane, OnePass, or another reputable tool. This method of storing passwords has proven to be extremely safe and free at its most basic level. If password management becomes too difficult, you can also consider adding a Single Sign-on Service (SSO). It can dramatically reduce the number of times you and your employees need to enter credentials, while also providing a very high level of security.

Advanced Threat Protection

ATP systems are email spam filters that provide heightened protection from general email threats. They provide real time scanning of attachments, malicious links, and data loss/leak prevention. Employees working remotely are targets for increasingly sophisticated attacks designed to steal money, credentials, customer data, and other valuable intellectual property. In addition to implementing an ATP tool, reinforce your employees' knowledge around data breaches by providing content that increases their awareness of suspicious emails, links and attachments.

Multi-factor Authentication Solution

Add another layer of protection by implementing a multi-factor authentication solution. This provides a seamless authentication experience and minimizes the number of passwords to remember while keeping data secure. When using multi-factor, you verify your identity using an additional authentication method like your mobile phone to prevent anyone but you from logging in, even if your password has been compromised.



General Security Tips:

➤ Wi-Fi Security

Always use a secure (password protected) network. Public Wi-Fi is a ripe environment for hackers. If secure Wi-Fi is not available, use the hotspot on your phone.



➤ Mobile Devices

Phones and tablets should be password protected and encrypted. Create processes and put tools in place to prevent lost/stolen devices from being hacked, and consider solutions that will automatically wipe a device that is lost.

➤ Use Company Equipment

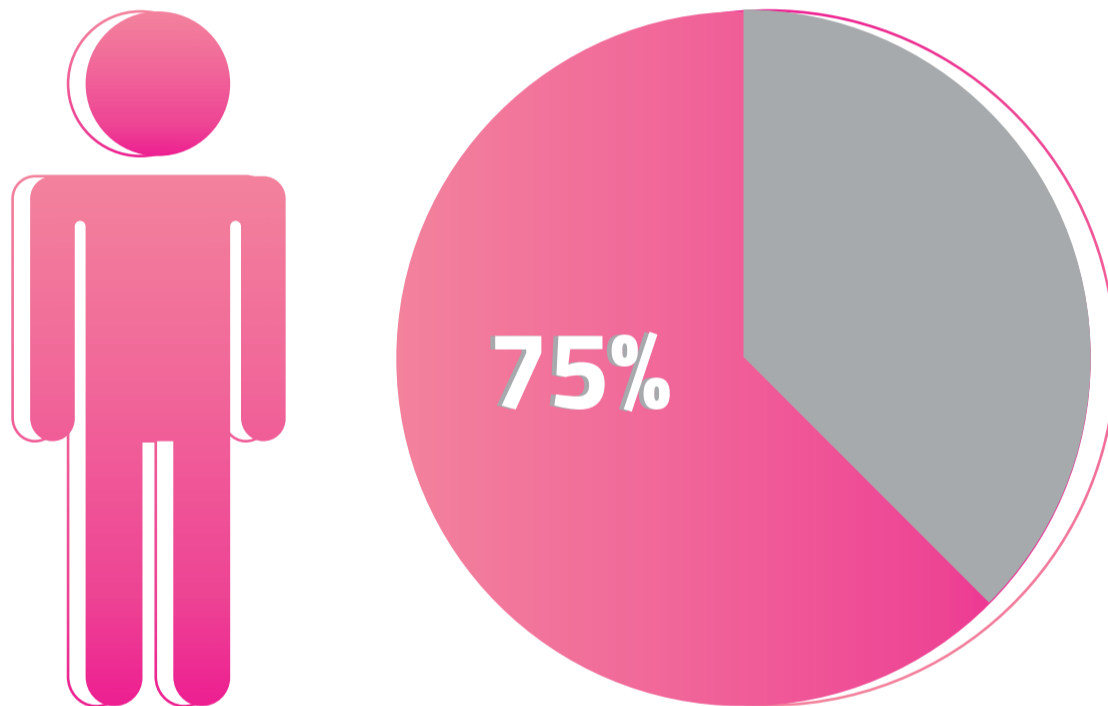
One of the best ways to keep data from falling into the wrong hands is to provide all the equipment your employees will need to work from home. If the operations manager is working on the tablet that she shares with her husband and two teenagers, that creates security risks. Additionally, make sure to encrypt equipment to further lock it down.

➤ Migrate to the Cloud

If you're still using an in-house server, it is time to move to the cloud. The cloud can be less costly, saves on time, and allows users to be much more flexible. The fact is that the companies with these large data centers, like Microsoft, have better security, better threat protection teams, and better policies overall. Your data is generally much more secure there.

Productivity Tips and Tools

One of the biggest reasons some business leaders give push back when it comes to remote work is because they're convinced employees will be less productive. But according to Owl Labs State of Remote Work in 2020, remote workers are putting in more than 40 hours per week because they prefer working from home rather than in the office. You're going to have a hard time retaining and attracting top talent if you don't allow your team some flexibility in terms of where and when they work. What you need to do is make sure they have the right training, policies, and tools to be as productive as possible from anywhere.



**Of people are the same or more productive
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Cloud Based Virtual Collaboration Tool – MS Teams

Collaborate in real time using a tool like MS Teams. Teams allows you to have face-to-face communication with your team and your clients to hash out important topics. MS Teams comes with a handy chat feature that can be used in lieu of email to reduce traffic and prompt quick responses. You can also share documents in real time via chat or using the file sharing function. This function allows other team members to securely collaborate on your document in real time, since they are stored in the cloud and not on a server. You also have the ability to add on any websites or apps that you think would be useful. At Awecomm, we use Planner, which enables us to build out meeting agendas and assign tasks that appear in email as reminders. Check out our blog post [5 Tips for MS Teams When Working Remotely](#) for more information. GSuite also offers many communication and collaboration tools. We generally find, however, that more users are familiar with Microsoft's 0365 tools and are more productive using them with less up-front training.

Document Collaboration – SharePoint

SharePoint is a great cloud-based tool used for document sharing, collaboration, and management. Emailing around different versions of a single document after you and your team have made edits gets confusing and frustrating. Instead of having to save multiple versions of one document, SharePoint enables users to edit one document simultaneously in real time, and even has a function that allows other users to see where the edits were made and who they were made by. SharePoint has the ability to support very large files and provides image previews of the document so you don't have to wait for them to open and load. It's a great time saver!

Electronic Signatures – DocuSign

Signatures are required in many aspects of business, and paperwork doesn't go away just because teams are working remotely. Identifying a secure way of collecting these signatures and passing confidential documents back and forth is crucial to business operations. DocuSign is an easy to use and relatively cheap option at about \$15 a month. Even if you end up moving your staff back into the office eventually, we guarantee DocuSign will be a tool you use for years and years to come.



General Productivity Tips

➤ Designate a Workplace

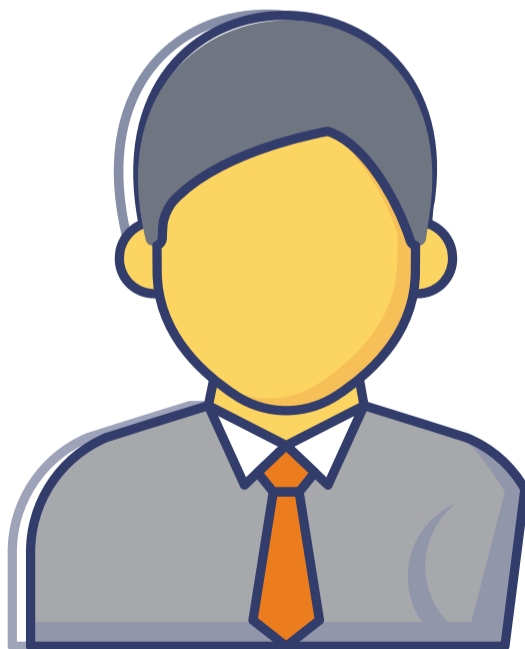
This will include a desk and comfortable chair in a distraction free area.

➤ Start Your Day the Same

This one is important. It's easy when working remote to fall into a pattern of rolling out of bed directly into your desk chair. But think about how you start your day when you're physically going into the office. You wake up at a certain time, you drink coffee, maybe take a shower, and dress appropriately for your day. Keep this same routine while working from home. It gets you in the proper headspace for the workday.

➤ Take Breaks

Taking breaks is more important while remote. Performance actually suffers when you try to power through a full day of work with no breaks. This also causes more stress. So be sure to get up and take an actual break away from your desk. Take a walk around the block or stretch for 15-20 minutes.



**REMOTE EMPLOYEES
WORKED AN EXTRA**

26 HOURS

EACH MONTH DURING COVID

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Boost Company Culture, Morale, and Motivation

If you're used to seeing your team in person every day, you've become accustomed to gauging their wellbeing just by popping into their office or having a quick chat in the break room. You've probably implemented ways to prevent burn out and lift your employees' spirits in the office – whether that be in the form of an exercise room, free snacks and beverages, or companywide trips to bars and restaurants. But challenges can arise when your team shifts to working remotely. It can be difficult to break down barriers, or even to learn to recognize issues in the first place.

Here are some tips on ways to keep your employees engaged and motivated:

1. Schedule Planned Interactions

One-on-one check ins :

Once a week or once a month, schedule a virtual check in with each member of your team using video chat. This may not be as casual as having a brief chat in the break room, but these times call for a different level of engagement. Ensure their remote work environment is safe and productive. Ask them how their work on a day-to-day basis seems – are they confused about what's expected of them? Perhaps they're afraid to approach you and admit that working from home has been difficult for them, or that they're having trouble focusing. Keep an open mind and encourage communication so that these concerns can be addressed before they cause an issue.

Team standup meetings :

Depending on the type of operations or services your company provides, you may want to consider daily/weekly standup meetings. These are very beneficial, as they keep employees engaged with one another. This is especially valuable if employees have more individualized work and don't get the opportunity to collaborate often. These meetings will help you get an idea of how operations or services are running while remote, and if any individuals need some more focused attention.

Company-wide outings or innings :

Once or twice a year, it's great to plan company wide get togethers. Providing the opportunity for your employees to socialize outside of work increases morale and creates comradery. It also lets your employees know you care about them. Hosting a picnic, going out to dinner, or even virtual coffee meetups or happy hours will go a long way.

2. Be considerate of changing schedules

Try to be considerate of a change in schedule for your employee. Maybe they take their lunch earlier or later, need to run out to pick up their child from school at 3pm, or can't get online until 10am some days. If they are meeting basic guidelines you've put in place as well as their KPI's, tracking them from 9am-5pm isn't effective.



in 2019
remote workers were

2x

As likely as in-office
Worker to want schedule
Flexibility

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3. Encourage office “challenges”

Does your team enjoy working out? Maybe they all watch a certain show, have a certain hobby, or love to cook? Create a challenge around mutual interests and push your team to participate and track their results. For example, if they're exercise nuts, put in place a sit up or push up challenge. Love watching a certain show? Create a trivia game around it. Encouraging the team to participate in these challenges together boosts their sense of connection.

4. Give them shout outs

If your team as a whole or certain members are performing particularly well or going above and beyond, give them recognition. Utilize email, social media, and even your website or blog posts to write a brief thank you. Whether they express it to you or not, employees can't help but feel a sense of pride and gratitude that their hard work has been recognized.

Set Appropriate Expectations

The belief that staff must be in the office to be productive and keep data secure has started to break down. Business environments have changed, and some of your expectations should change along with them. That isn't to say you should expect any less from your team. Instead, you should become more flexible when it comes to the route your team takes to reach their results.

Workload Based Accountability

Workload Based Accountability moves away from the idea of, "If I see you, you're working, if I don't see you, you must NOT be working". Your employees' work is directly related to some kind of business results for the company – that is why you hired them in the first place. To effectively measure productivity while teams are working remotely, business leaders must create a link between their employees and those business results. To do this, set clear expectations for desired results, and define how those results relate to the businesses success.

Expectations

If you want to see the same results from your employees when they're at home as opposed to in the office, you need to set guidelines with clear expectations for them. If you have certain mandatory times they need to be logged on, make sure to identify those times and to inform your team of the policy. If you could care less when and where they work and are more focused on their results, let them know that they have flexibility. Be sure to drive home what is you expect from them.

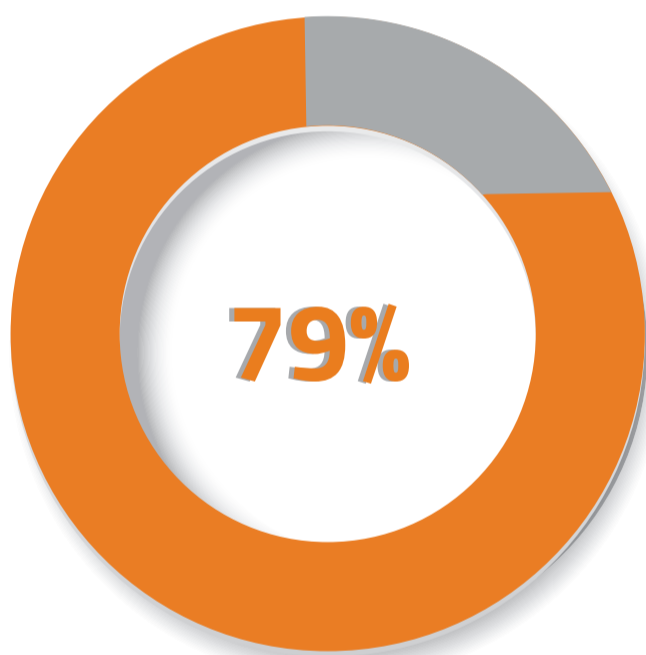
Stay Connected

Maintaining connections is going to be key to successful remote work. As mentioned in the previous section, daily stand ups with your team are a great way to keep everyone connected and collaborating, as are one-on-ones. Establish a cadence of work– what do you expect to see on a daily, weekly, monthly basis?

You will also want to set certain guidelines for video conferencing. We make it a policy to always use video whenever possible for a number of reasons :

- It's important to read non-verbal cues
- Face-to-face interactions create better connection and empathy
- Helps eliminate feelings of isolation
- Helps to enforce remote work policies (getting prepared for the day)
- Limits working in non-productive environments

Other guidelines include dress codes – does it still apply while remote? What issues need to be discussed via video vs just a regular phone call or email? Set these guidelines early on to prevent confusion.



Of people think video conferencing is at the same level or more productive than in-person meetings

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Define Best Practices

Defining best practices will help to set expectations for product and service delivery as well as create a structure for communication. Make sure that your normal business best practices have been revised (if need be) to fit a remote work environment. Provide training for your employees so that they know what documentation is needed for each process or action. Have these best practices readily available so employees can refer to them whenever they need to.

Final Thoughts

We all have some remote work experience under our belts now due to the pandemic. If you haven't implemented some of the tips and tools above, it's time to begin thinking about how you can enhance this experience for your business and your team members. You may be missing out on opportunities to boost productivity and growth.

If you're still hesitant to implement remote work, remember that having the willingness to adapt new strategies and create new processes will help you get ahead of competitors and advance your business. Remote work may be the first step in a long line of new initiatives you implement to achieve that growth, but you can begin today.

Having a great tech strategy that involves efficient remote work options will boost your company's reputation, your staff's well-being, and their productivity. The sooner you begin implementing a remote work policy, the sooner you'll be on the path to growth and digital transformation.



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