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SUPERVISOR TELECOMMUTING HANDBOOK

Supervision of telecommuters brings additional challenges with fostering teamwork, monitoring, and measuring performance. 8 Pages   20-309

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Supervisor Telecommuting Handbook

[Company]

[date]

Introduction to Telecommuting

[Company] allows telecommuting to create the opportunity for improved staff efficiency without compromising productivity, quality or cost-effective client/customer service. Telecommuting (also known as "teleworking") is the use of telecommunication to work outside the traditional office or workplace, for example at home or other space conducive to professional work.

The goal of all Department employees – telecommuters and non-telecommuters – is to serve the public and help our clients thrive by providing high-quality services. By supporting employees' ability to work from remote locations, the Department positions itself to:

- Be more resilient and productive in times of emergencies and inclement weather events;
- Improve our ability to recruit and retain high-performing employees;
- Reduce and/or optimize office space and associated costs; and
- Improve air quality by reducing vehicle-miles traveled.

Background

[Company] developed telecommuting guidelines in 1999. It is the decision of each department whether to allow employees to telecommute. Telecommuting policies are developed and managed individually by departments. Several departments have written policies, which were consulted in the development of these guidelines. Within [Company] and [name], there have been employees telecommuting since the 1990s.

The Role of the Supervisor

The role of a manager is to set expectations for performance, deliverables and outcomes; establish regular reviews of workload, assignments and progress; proactively identify any barriers to productivity and performance; facilitate good communication across a work team; and optimize performance through effective leadership.

Fostering Teamwork

As the telecommuting program begins, provide time in staff meetings to discuss it with all employees. Explain the rules for telecommuting and emphasize that not all requests for telecommuting will be approved. Requests will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and approval is dependent on job requirements, needs of the work team and department, and the employee's performance history and attendance record.

Be sure to maintain the same basic work expectations for any and all staff performing equivalent job functions, regardless of their work location. Recognizing that changes may need to be made regarding how the team communicates and functions on collaborative efforts, emphasize that telecommuters and non-telecommuters are equally important to the success of the team. Acknowledge the efforts of each individual as a significant contributor to joint goals and to the Department's mission.

Maintaining Workplace Culture

Several ideas for ensuring an appropriate level of professional engagement in office-based activities and retaining high morale among all employees include:

- <u>Notify all staff of new opportunities</u> in the Department, both routine and special assignments. Missed opportunities through lack of communication, or perceived inequities across staff when it comes to promotions or access to new projects, can undermine the telecommuting program.
- <u>Ensure the sharing of information</u> among staff members so that all employees are aware of each other's projects and activities. Opportunities for efficiency, benefitting from the lessons learned by others, and building on synergies across related projects will be lost if updates are not routinely provided.
- <u>Celebrate success and provide public recognition of achievements.</u> The accomplishments of both telecommuters and non-telecommuters should be acknowledged and highlighted.

Work Schedule and Administrative Issues

Remember that telecommuting, in and of itself, does not affect an employee's days or hours worked. In fact, telecommuters should be working their normal schedule and be available to clients and other staff during their normal scheduled hours. Any change to one's daily work schedule must be approved by the supervisor in advance.

Note that teleworkers may or may not continue to have permanent workspace dedicated for their sole use maintained within [Company] office buildings.

Payroll procedures are unaffected by telecommuting. All staff can enter their timesheets and access their payroll and benefits information from off-site locations by going to the [Company] Home Page (www.company.com), scrolling to the bottom of the page, and clicking on *My Summit*.

The number of days per week or month an employee may telecommute is a decision made by the supervisor through discussion with the telecommuter.   When telecommuting is planned for the times that in-office meetings are regularly scheduled, conference calls may be considered an acceptable means of participation. Similarly, telecommuters will be required to come in to the office if special meetings or training sessions fall on his or her usual telecommuting days and the supervisor determines that a physical presence is required by the nature of the work.

Keeping a schedule of which employees are telecommuting on which days and communicating this schedule to the team will help facilitate information sharing throughout the team.

Telecommuters will be expected to develop a system for organizing the work they will do at home and assuring they have the necessary equipment, files, and other documents they will need for telecommuting days. Any costs associated with providing this assurance is the responsibility of the telecommuter.

Monitoring and Measuring Performance

Evaluation of the telecommuter's job performance should be consistent with Department procedures, should focus on measurement of progress toward established objectives, and should not differ from performance evaluation of on-site employees. Individuals approved for telecommuting should remain on the same career path as if they worked full-time on-site and should not be held to a different standard than their peers.

The question most frequently asked by supervisors of telecommuters is, "How will I know they are working while they're out of the office?" The standard response to that question is, "How do you know they're working while they're in the office?" Supervisors who manage by objectives and focus on supporting staff to achieve their performance goals can be equally effective in managing telecommuters and non-telecommuters alike.

Finally, there is a required evaluation of a telecommuter's performance and the overall success of the telecommunicating agreement within six months of beginning to telecommute. (See the "6-Month Telecommuting Review" form included in the *Application for Telecommuting* packet.) A review of the Department's use of telecommuting should be included in each employee's annual performance review.

Application Process

The *Application for Telecommuting* packet provides guidelines and forms for the employee to complete when making a request to telecommute. The employee is expected to read the *Telecommuting Policy and Guidelines* and the *Telecommuter Handbook*, submit the completed application form to his or her supervisor, and, if approved to telecommute, work jointly with his or her supervisor to complete the "Telecommuting Equipment and Work Schedule" form. All forms and documents can be found on the _____ intranet site.

Termination of the Telecommuting Agreement

Throughout the terms of the telecommuting agreement, the supervisor retains the right to make changes to the arrangement, including termination of the agreement. Some circumstances that may lead to termination include:

- Unit, section or department need;
- Decline in productivity or quality of work;
- Changes in job duties or work team functions;
- Uncontrollable distractions in the home and no alternative telecommute work space is available; and
- Feelings of isolation on the part of the telecommuter.

If it becomes apparent that the employee cannot continue telecommuting for any reason, the "Termination Documentation" form (included in the *Application for Telecommuting* packet) should be completed with input from both supervisor and employee, and the employee should return to the office environment as soon as possible.

Tips for Supervising in a Telecommuting Environment

1. Be supportive of the program and open to discussing it with all interested staff, keeping in mind that not all staff will be eligible.
2. Have a good understanding of telecommuting policy and guidelines.
3. Demonstrate trust in those employees who are approved to telecommute that they can be successful working under that agreement.
4. Keep the lines of communication open with all staff.
5. Provide opportunities for show-casing the activities and accomplishments of both telecommuters and non-telecommuters.
6. Ensure effective communication across your entire team.
7. Be creative and flexible in scheduling meetings that accommodate the work schedules of all staff, whenever possible.
8. Work with support staff on how to handle phone calls and mail for telecommuters.
9. Use the telecommuting program to strengthen your own supervisory skills; for example, continue or enhance the extent to which you manage by objectives and results.
10. Focus on developing job skills in telecommuters and in non-telecommuters.
11. If needed, request additional training or information on equipment or procedures from your supervisor.
12. Remember that an unsuccessful telecommuting experience is not grounds for punitive action against the employee, and supervisors retain the right to terminate agreements at their discretion.
13. Set realistic goals and outcome-based performance expectations with all staff.

Implementing the Telecommuting Policy:
Questions and Answers for Supervisors

Is telecommuting new? Why are we talking about this?
Telecommuting is not a fad. It is safe to say that in many public and private entities telecommuting is institutionalized in the work place. Telecommuting continues to receive attention in the public and private sector, and there are numerous management publications that have evaluated this method of working. Within [Company], and the _____ department specifically, there have been employees telecommuting since the 1990s.

Can all staff telecommute?
Approval is entirely at the discretion of one's supervisor and supervisors determine which positions are appropriate for telecommuting. In making this determination, factors such as the nature of the job, the need for a face-to-face presence with the public or co-workers, and the employee's performance history may be considered.

How does my job as a supervisor change?
It may change in several ways.
- Supervising the telecommuter. You may not be seeing telecommuting staff as often. Without frequent face-to-face contact, you may need to focus even more on results. Do I have a clear set of expectations for telecommuting staff? How is each one doing? Are there any barriers getting in the way of good productivity and performance? If someone is experiencing problems, how would I know?

- Communications. If in-person contact is reduced, you may need to find new ways of keeping in touch with telecommuters – about workload, activities of the work team and changes across the department. What's going on? What's changing that the worker needs to know about? How will his/her job be affected?

Of course, the telecommuter, like all staff members, needs to ensure effective communication as well. For example, by:
- Attending work team and Department meetings
- Checking e-mail and voice mail regularly
- Attending training and participating in other important activities
- Making it a point to read [Company] newsletters

- Unit teamwork. Another change relates to how your unit works as a team. Telecommuters share the same goals and may do the same kind of work as in-office staff – only from a different location. Some adjustments in how unit staff work together may need to be made. Through it all, make it a point to maintain unit cohesiveness and teamwork, with a focus on providing high-quality services to our clients.

What are possible downsides to telecommuting that I should be aware of?

Watch for signs of disapproval or resentment on the part of non-telecommuters in your unit. Stress that in-office staff are as critical to the success of this program as are telecommuters. The work of your unit requires equal commitment from all members of the work team.

Work with your telecommuting staff in establishing some general guidelines for "emergency" or "immediate action" situations. Non-telecommuters should not be expected to perform all of their duties while also taking care of "putting out fires" for telecommuters.

The feeling of isolation is one of the major complaints of telecommuters. Frequent communication by the telecommuter will increase the networking and information exchanges critical to developing a secure telecommuting arrangement. As a supervisor, you may want to create formal or informal methods of keeping the telecommuters included in the social aspects of working on-site.

What if the telecommuter's home life is creating distractions from work priorities? Am I expected to inspect their off-site work location?

Children, spouses and other personal issues should not interfere with the ability of the telecommuter to complete work assignments. If you sense a problem with home-life distractions for a telecommuting employee, meet and openly discuss any concerns you have. Reinforce the need for a professional, quiet atmosphere for the telecommuter. If the home situation cannot be changed, perhaps the employee will have to postpone telecommuting until the problem is rectified. Other options may be for the employee to work from a local library or other space outside of their home that meets the needs of their workplan.

Similarly, telecommuting is not a substitute for day care. If the employee has a preschool or elderly family member needing care at home, telecommuting is not an answer to this situation. While it provides more family time, it would be difficult to focus on work if the employee is attending to the needs of a child or an aging relative in the home.

While supervisors are not expected to inspect a telecommuter's off-site work location, maintenance of a professional work area during designated business hours by the telecommuter is expected. Employees are expected to clearly communicate to family members and others the need for their work schedules and space to be respected in order to minimize interruptions and distractions.

What IT/technology support is needed to allow for telecommuting?

This will vary by employee and section capacity. Specific questions can be answered by your IT support staff. The cost of any equipment or other support is the responsibility of the telecommuter.

What if one of my employee's is injured in their off-site work location? Would he or she be eligible to submit a worker's compensation claim?

Yes, an employee injured at an off-site location while engaged in an activity that is furthering the employer's purpose is eligible to submit a claim for worker's compensation.

Is there a minimum of work experience required before an employee is eligible for telecommuting?

No – see Application for Telecommuting packet for a list of qualifications that must be met.

What if I have employees currently telecommuting who do not meet these eligibility requirements?

Review the employee's performance against his or her workplan to determine if "grandfathering" is appropriate in the case of employees already telecommuting prior to implementation of this policy. Supervisors should make this determination on a case-by-case basis.

Who determines if the eligibility criteria are met? Some of these are somewhat subjective (e.g., "little need for face-to-face presence")

Telecommuting is entirely at the sole discretion of one's supervisor or his/her designee. Supervisors are encouraged to discuss specific criteria with the affected staff and use their best judgment in interpreting any subjective language in a way that best meets the needs of [Company].

What about an employee who requests a schedule that changes week to week?

Decisions about an employee's work schedule are separate from a telecommuting agreement; all employees require approval from one's supervisor to adopt a work schedule other than the [Company]'s regular business hours of M – F, 8:00 -4:30.

Does the definition of Telecommuting include an out-of-town location as an acceptable off-site location?

Yes. Telecommuting refers to work conducted outside the traditional office or workplace that is conducive to professional work.

Is there a separate agreement for Mobile Worker and Temporary Remote Worker?

No. Per the definitions provided for these terms in the Policy and Guidelines document, any and all staff *may* be eligible for these designations. The day-to-day management of staff with these designations is at the discretion of their supervisor.