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The COVID-19 lockdown has allowed many people to work remotely for the first time, and explore if they want to do this long-term. While remote working doesn't suit every business or every role, the lockdown has forced many companies to radically change working practices, opening up the possibility of working remotely for more people in the future.

Having worked from home part-time for many years and managed teams in different countries, my experience has been overwhelmingly positive. The time and money saved by not commuting and the flexibility to adjust working hours around other life commitments are significant benefits. Offering flexible working arrangements is also a great way to attract, retain and motivate employees.

One of the fundamental principles of flexible working arrangements is that they will only be successful if it is mutually beneficial for the business and the employee. If you think remote working is the right solution for you, here are some tips to set you up for success.

5
steps to remote working success

AS OFFICES BEGIN TO RE-OPEN, SOME PROFESSIONALS ARE LOOKING FOR WAYS TO RETAIN AN ELEMENT OF REMOTE WORKING. IN THIS ARTICLE, **TERESA STAPLETON** SHARES HER TOP TIPS TO PERSUADE YOUR EMPLOYER AND MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR NEW ARRANGEMENT.

1 KNOW THE TERMS

Companies offering remote working should have a policy document outlining the terms and conditions to ensure consistency and avoid disputes. This typically describes the aims of the policy, eligibility criteria, the application process, how decisions are made, the appeals process, trial periods, and notice timelines for altering working arrangements to support changing business needs.

Remote working applications typically involve the completion of a thorough risk assessment to review potential health and safety issues. The remote working policy should describe how the risk assessment will be completed, who is responsible for providing and maintaining furniture and equipment, and outline any other relevant factors (such as core working hours, insurance, expenses, confidentiality, security, and data privacy).

2 STRUCTURE YOUR DAY

It takes time to get used to working remotely and find ways to stay productive. It's essential to have a schedule and to stick to it. Having a designated quiet space where you can concentrate is also critical, as is good online connectivity with high-speed broadband, video conferencing, and access to company apps and data. Anticipate technology issues and have a back-up plan. For example, have mobile numbers ready so you can stay connected and keep working while offline.

Discuss your remote working plans with family or housemates to minimise disruption and get their buy-in. Avoid getting into the habit of constantly checking emails or taking calls outside designated working hours, so you don't get sucked into long workdays with no time for family, friends or anything else. To avoid cabin fever, take breaks regularly and go outside for walks or exercise to clear your mind, relax and recharge.

3 SET BOUNDARIES

Many people say they work harder and get more done when working at home. This is sometimes a result of extending the working day, by using the time saved not commuting to get more done. Some find it easier to concentrate at home, with fewer interruptions than the office. Others work through lunch and don't take many breaks by choice to finish early and free-up time for childcare or other activities. It's common for remote workers to say that they feel a need to work longer and respond immediately to calls and emails over extended hours to demonstrate their commitment to doing a good job. This 'always on' mentality can be draining and may lead to anxiety, stress and even burn-out in extreme cases. It's a good idea to set boundaries in terms of your availability and share the details with colleagues to manage expectations around reasonable response times.

4 DEMONSTRATE RESULTS

Managers will only support remote working if they believe employee performance will be as good, or better, than if the employee was office-based. Having clear objectives and targets is key to any performance management process, but it is even more important for people working remotely when their contribution is less visible. Agreeing up-front the results that are expected and understanding how performance will be assessed are essential for remote workers to ensure that they are fairly treated in performance appraisals and rewards decisions.

The most common concerns raised by remote workers during coaching discussions are losing out when it comes to rewards and career progression. Office-based colleagues have a natural advantage as they can interact face-to-face with management, enabling them to build stronger working relationships and raise awareness of their impact, aspirations, and potential. To avoid being left behind, make your impact visible to your manager and others involved in assessing your performance. This typically involves more structured reporting, regular update calls with your direct manager, frequently connecting with stakeholders, and looking for other creative ways to raise your profile.

5 ENCOURAGE TEAMWORK

The main concerns raised by managers of remote teams are that teamwork will decline and employee engagement will drop, ultimately reducing performance levels and business results. It takes sustained, conscious effort by everyone to prevent this from happening. Implementing a communications programme at the individual, team, and organisational level is essential to keep people connected, collaborating and engaged. There is, of course, a risk that some employees will become disengaged, and some may miss social interaction with colleagues. Companies new to remote working should raise awareness of the benefits and pitfalls of remote working and explore ideas to make it successful for all concerned.