



Top 10 Steps to Taking Your Company Mobile



By Catherine Roseberry

Using mobile work options is a way that many companies can continue working even when Mother Nature is at her worst. It can also be used as an alternative method to helping employees save money with the rising cost of gas. Companies who have never used telecommuting will have to make changes to enable their workers to access their system remotely. Providing workers with the option to telecommute can create good will with employees & some employees will save money as vehicle expenses are lower.

1) Reasons to Mobilize

Companies that consider mobilizing their workforce should look at a variety of issues. These tangible and intangible benefits will help companies succeed and move into the future with a productive and well-balanced workforce.

1. Customer Relations
2. Increased Productivity
3. Improve Morale
4. Technology is Available
5. Real Estate Savings
6. Government Incentives
7. Positive Impact on Environment
8. Improve Hiring Practices

2) Preparing for Mobile Work Programs

Companies considering mobilizing their workforce need to examine a variety of issues and understand them. This process will help a company determine budget implications and readiness of workers to be mobilized.

While every company may not face the same issues, awareness of the potential problems which can arise, or can be avoided before mobilizing workers, is important part for every company to work through.



3) Create a Mobile Work Policy

Include the responsibilities of the company, employee, employer and HR dept. Each person or group involved with a remote work arrangement should know exactly what is expected of them and how they will be held accountable.

An effective policy should clearly state the following:

1. Worker's Compensation
2. All Standard Work Rules Apply
3. Who Provides Equipment & Insurance Coverage
4. Reimbursable Work Expenses.
5. Non-reimbursable Expenses
6. Remote Work Program is Strictly Voluntary.
7. Hours of Work
8. Termination of the Remote Work Agreement.
9. State/Provincial Tax Implications
10. Home Office Tax Issues
11. Remote Work Determination
12. Benefits & Compensation
13. Information Security

Smart companies will have their Remote Work Policy reviewed by their legal counsel before making it available to all employees. Companies that uses an ad hoc remote work program and does not create a Policy can leave themselves open to disputes regarding any of the above issues. It is worth the time and expense to create a Policy with involvement from legal personnel to ensure that there are no question marks or grey areas within the Policy.

Remote work Policies should be posted where all employees can have access to it, on a Company Intranet and on physical bulletin boards. There should be no restrictions to who can have access to the information.

4) Mobile Work Agreements Should Be Mandatory

The Remote work Agreement sums up what is contained in the Policy and includes specifics that will vary from each mobile worker in some situations. Additional clauses not listed below may be required under certain circumstances. If your company does not have a Remote Work Policy or Agreement in use, then it is now time to create them



- **Outlines specific remote work schedule.**
Providing specific dates when remote work will enable everyone to work better and be prepared for days when the employee is remote work. Projects can be planned in advance with the knowledge of when the telecommuter is offsite or onsite.
- **How employee can be reached and full contact information.**
This should include telephone number, pager number, cell phone (if applicable) and at least two email addresses. One email address is the work address and then another email address should be set up as a back up.
- **What work will be done.**
While it may be possible for most remote workers to do the exact same job offsite as they do onsite in some circumstances this will not be the case. Specific projects or assignments may be assigned the telecommuter.
- **What equipment the company is providing.**
List all equipment provided by the company and insurance information.
- **List reimbursable expenses.**
Listing these expenses eliminates any questions that may arise later.
- **Termination of Agreement**
How agreement is terminated and responsibility of each party for termination. This details if the termination notice is in writing or verbally. Using the written method is preferable.
- **A separate, designated workspace is required.**
Ensure that the telecommuter has a designated workspace and is not using their kitchen table or other temporary measures. It is difficult to do a job properly when you do have not the proper working environment.
- **Employee is responsible for checking zoning by-laws to make sure they are not breaking any laws.**
Each community, city and town is different in this regard. While it may be permissible for employee A to telecommute, employee B who lives in a planned community may be prohibited from remote work. This information can easily be obtained by calling your city planning department or by-law office. If you live in a planned community it will be in the information you signed when purchasing or renting the property, or in the Community Charter.
- **Overtime or time off must be approved in advance by a supervisor/manager.**
It is important to remember that you still answer to your supervisor. If you



decide to take a day off and haven't notified anyone, it looks bad on you. With overtime, if you needed permission onsite before working any, then why is it any different offsite?

5) Make Mobility Work with the Right People

Another reason that mobile work arrangements may fail is that the people selected to work remotely and those who end up supervising the remote workers are just the wrong people!

The reasons a person has been allowed to work remotely vary greatly and in companies with no set policy or guidelines on how remote workers are selected, it may often be a result of favouritism instead of the best person for the task.

A person that is chosen to work remotely must be one that has the right qualities for mobile work; which will help ensure their success in this role. Picking a person just because you like them is usually the quickest way for things to backfire. When this happens, the person that is least suited usually ends up not carrying their own weight, but is covered by the supervisor. This results in bad feelings with both the in office staff and other mobile workers.

6) Prevent Mobile Work Problems Before They Start

When a company has tried using a mobile work program and did not have success, it is usually very difficult to convince them to try again. "Once bitten - twice shy" is an appropriate description for their attitude. There are a number of reasons that mobile work programs do not succeed and we'll look at some of them.

There are a number of reasons that mobile work programs do not succeed and we'll look at some of them. This is not an exhaustive list as there may even be situations that have occurred and were never reported or recorded. The reasons here are the most common.

The number one reason that mobile work does not succeed is that there has been a failure to prepare both those who will be working remotely and those who will be supervising the mobile workers. When people first began working remotely there was very little done in the way of "teaching how to work remotely".



7) Maintaining Successful Virtual Relationships

Expecting or anticipating that everyone will get along perfectly is unrealistic. Can providing an opportunity for telecommuters to meet in real life can provide a means to better understand each other and improve their working relationships?

When you have worked onsite and then moved into a telecommuting arrangement you have the advantage of knowing your co-workers and their work habits. You may keep in touch more often and make arrangements to socialize outside of the work environment. Personal relationships will have developed as a natural part of working alongside others.

In a virtual work environment it can be more difficult to cultivate these types of relationships. You may only have the options of chat, e-mail and sometimes video conferencing capabilities. Despite improvements in technology these methods are not the same as working alongside someone in an office. This is why so many companies feel it is important to work onsite for a period of time before commencing a telecommuting arrangement.

8) Supervisors Can Make Remote Work Programs Succeed

In order for Supervisors to successfully manage remote workers and ensure that everyone is pulling their own weight they require some additional skills.

- Knows what is required of their own position.
- Knows how to evaluate on end results.
- Comfortable supervising a remote workforce.
- At ease dealing with emails and phone calls from remote workers.
- Ability to determine when and where there may be problems and to act accordingly in such a situation.
- Knows what is required of the specific position - mobile worker's job.
- Knows and trusts the personnel selected to work remotely.
- Does not second guess mobile worker's choices or decisions.
- Ability to clearly articulate expectations and goals to remote workers.
- Approachable - not just in person but by phone or email.
- Skilled with technology tools available and able to provide basic troubleshooting if required.



9) Ideal Remote Worker Qualities

Some workers are better suited to working in a remote environment and this is because they have well developed job skills and inherent qualities which make them adapt to remote work. These qualities include:

- Self-motivation.
- Can handle working alone.
- Highly developed organizational skills.
- Ability to multi-task.
- Very good knowledge and experience in software used.
- Can quickly adapt to changing scenarios.
- Self discipline.
- Ability and confidence to make independent decisions.
- Time Management skills
- Ability to troubleshoot basic problems.
- Ability to learn quickly and apply what they have learned.
- Meet deadlines and work well under pressure.

10) Management Tips

This list may seem overwhelming at first glance but remember the end result is a smoothly running team that will accomplish it's goals and get the job done.

Selection Process:

- Get to know the people as best you can. Use email, phone interviews and even video conferencing to get a better feel for them.
- Check work references and employment history.
- Has this person worked as part of a virtual team before? Was it successful? If it was not successful - why? Why does this person think a previous virtual team experience succeeded or failed?
- Does the person take responsibility seriously? Does it appear they tend to blame others quickly and for things they should have been responsible for?
- What is their level of commitment? Are they interested in short or long term involvements?
- What is their motivation for being part of a virtual team? Try to gain an understanding of what is motivating them.
- How independent are they?
- Are they a Leader or Follower?



Team Activities & Monitoring:

- Identify team leaders. Make provisions for alternates in advance.
- What will be the methods of communication used and the frequency of meetings?
- Require regular updates from all team members. This is the best way to ensure you get a complete picture of activities.
- During regularly scheduled meetings use this time to discuss the negative and positive.
- At the first indication of a problem - take action! This action may be in the form of direct intervention with the members involved or letting the entire team know that you are aware of what is happening and that it will be resolved.
- Most importantly - don't distance yourself from team members. Be available to them, this will increase the trust they have in you and let's you show them that you respect them.

Managing mobile workers isn't as difficult as most would think and if managers create a plan and stick to that plan - virtual teams will succeed.

About Catherine Roseberry



A Mobile Office Consultant, she advises companies and individuals on the deployment and administration of mobile work teams. From small to large businesses, she assists with decisions regarding the mobile office equipment companies should purchase to employee selection processes.

She has been interviewed numerous times regarding mobile office technology, consulted by authors regarding her views on mobile work and mobile office technology and appeared on TechTV's Call for Help via web-cam.

She has successfully worked in a mobile environment for almost 20 years and brings her expertise and knowledge to the content you will find here.

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