

June 01, 2021

Time to Hit Reset on Remote Worker Expectations?

Finally, the time is at hand when many employers may safely resume on-site work for most or all employees. But knowing now how effectively many employees can work remotely, organizations are rethinking workforce management strategies and allowing employees much greater flexibility to work from home part of each week, all the time or simply as business obligations allow. Being intentional about setting shared expectations can help your employees make more informed choices about whether to take advantage of flexible work options and avoid unpleasant surprises at evaluation time.

As employers evaluate 2020 employee job performance, many recognize that some of their top talent was simply not in a position, given unexpected personal commitments created by the pandemic, to put forth full and best efforts toward work responsibilities. Because of the extenuating circumstances COVID-19 created, some employers have departed from traditional performance management principles and gone to some form of a “pass” or “pass plus” rating scheme to recognize those who went above and beyond to meet business needs without penalizing those who were simply less able to do so.

We are now in a cautiously optimistic phase of settling into renewed and, in most cases, revised modes of work. Many employees who worked remotely in 2020 by necessity will have the opportunity to continue in that arrangement, at least to some degree. Employers who by necessity adopted a “do the best you can” standard of performance for 2020 now need to make sure that all employees understand how remote work will be managed and evaluated.

The good news is that there is plenty of time left in 2021 to get everyone on the same page. Be clear and explicit about the fact that performance standards will be applied without regard to whether work is done remotely or on-site. Start by recognizing everyone’s efforts in carrying on during the turmoil of 2020; then, provide a gentle

reminder that with society returning in so many respects to something very close to pre-COVID-19 activity, all employees are expected to devote full efforts and focus to their job responsibilities.

That means that employees who work remotely on an ongoing basis should maintain the same level of productivity, responsiveness and work quality as those working on-site. That may involve adjusting personal arrangements and habits that developed when so many people were sheltering in place. Employees may need to seek support resources (for dependent care, pet care, etc.) to focus fully on work responsibilities, particularly during core business hours.

Employers can support employees in this process by making sure they are aware of any services the organization provides, such as employee assistance programs, on-site child care or child care referral services. Encourage employees who feel they will not be able to balance the expected level of job performance with personal commitments or unavoidable distractions at home to be proactive in discussing their needs with their managers and human resources. There may be alternatives worth exploring, such as flexible schedules, reduced schedule arrangements or some redesign of roles. No one wants to see an employee who is doing his or her best to meet work expectations go into the performance management model. Creative thinking about job structure and working conditions may prevent that situation from developing. Human resources leaders should evaluate programs and policies to ensure they are sufficiently family-friendly for the ongoing needs of employees with young children, elder care responsibilities, family medical challenges and the like.

Thoughtful communication —with people leaders aligned to provide support, including timely, constructive and fair feedback —can pave the way to good employee relations as we emerge from the extraordinary circumstances related to COVID-19. Giving some thought to hitting reset on a performance management program can set both the organization and its entire workforce up for greater success going forward.

MEET THE AUTHORS



Susan W. Kline

Partner

+1 317 237 1059

Indianapolis

susan.kline@faegredrinker.com

Services and Industries

Labor & Employment

Related Topics

[Coronavirus Resource: Labor and Employment](#)

[Coronavirus Resources](#)