UNDERSTANDING, DEMYSTIFYING AND ENJOYING WORKING REMOTELY

Introduction

Remote working is simply doing your work in any other environment other than your traditional office setting (e.g. home or hotel room, lawn etc.). It is an arrangement in which you perform your usual job related tasks at home or elsewhere, using electronic media to communicate with others in your team, outside your team within the organization and outside the organization. Sometimes employees are trained by their employer or pay for themselves to learn how remote work.

There was a time when remote work wasn't a possibility, because the technology didn’t exist. Now, technology affords us the ability to get the same job done, no matter where in the world we are. [It has] enabled us to be in contact with co-workers or clients at any time." Technologies for seamless remote work like video conferencing. Live video feeds help out-of-office workers see and speak to one another in real time, anywhere with an internet connection, which is the next best thing to a face-to-face meeting. But this capability wouldn't be possible without the widespread broadband internet adoption of the past 10 to 15 years. The technology advancement has led many companies to do away with traditional offices and instead run their businesses out of co-working spaces to accommodate their largely remote workforce. Remote work has made it possible for work to continue in the face of crisis, such as a natural disaster or an epidemic. The advent of COVID-19 and its rapid spread globally has let most the workers to perform their job duties entirely from home, to help protect themselves from being infected by the virus and protect others.

What are the benefits of working remotely?

1. Increased productivity; we become flexible workers than traditional employees
2. Team work continues; we become effective virtual teams
3. Meeting our clients’ needs; remote working and flexibility makes it possible for us to work 24/7 hours, connecting different time zones
4. Reduced business travels
5. Matching customer expectations; we can meet customer expectations by being available and timely
6. Agile infrastructure (reduced need for office occupancy) and cheaper

What else do we gain by working remotely?

1. Increased engagement; we can devote more time, fit work as we want and utilize time saved from commuting.
2. Greater retention and attraction of senior experienced staff; stress is reduced due to flexibility and the ability to change work habits
3. More women can multi-task; sustain employment as well as support families. More over more senior women, who left job due to motherhood, can retain their jobs due to flexibility.

4. Generational working style; both senior and young employees can work together and effectively due to remote working style of delivery. This can provide for smooth intergenerational work style interface.

5. Flexible retirement; remote work can offer smooth transition to retirement, as it may reduce loss of tacit knowledge, which would be the case if one just left their job suddenly.

What Mental Health Benefits do we accrue from remote working?

1. Healthy work-life balance
2. Financial benefit (saving money on fuel etc.)
3. Reduced commuting time (gaining personal extra time that can be dedicated to another activity)
4. Work on the go (work does not stop at any time even while on travel)
5. Workshops, webinars etc. “collaboration with other remote workers”
6. Any place is working place “No more fixed place” & no limitation in terms of ambience, you create your work environment.
7. Less distraction, because you create your work space and control any form of distraction

What are the challenges of remote working?

IT and Technology related:
From the short period of implementing remote working, we can all attest that we not all techno geniuses. So, what do we do when we encounter IT challenges?

- Ask for help with IT or from a colleague, and use IT equipment provided by employer, avoid the temptation to change or transfer settings without guidance and permission.
- Use the provided online training by Microsoft and other remote working software consult with Talent Management Center (TMC) for specific training needs.
- Where and whenever possible try to use video calls, this will give you a contact with a human face, WhatsApp video calls, phone calls, short texts and skype calls can also provide an opportunity for collegial connectivity.
- Try and keep your work channels clear and work topics
- Create social channels where others can connect with you socially (informally)

The Discipline of Remote working for a productive employee
Working away from traditional office requires discipline, realistic routine and structure! How do we get to work remotely smart?

- Identify a place to work, free from distractions
- Establish a routine for remote working / a clear time planning (the whens of your work tasks and / or activities for the day)
✓ No matter how tempting avoid working in your pajamas, though at home decency is still a virtue to uphold, wake up and shower as usual do not postpone to a later hour because you’re in your comfort zone.

✓ Set clear tasks for the day, while maintaining ongoing tasks as well. Have a WEB – list i.e
   What you **Want** to achieve
   What you **Expect** to achieve
   What you had **Better** achieve that day

✓ Have a proper lunch break

✓ Make proper use of your diary to indicate when you are working and when you are available to interact with others

✓ Keep a journal (incorporate gratitude, learning, what needs to be fixed next time)

✓ When you are done for the day, close and leave your work space

✓ Separate family / children support from work. Where you should support children with their school work, let your supervisor know this as it can take toll on your remote working and cause work-home role conflicts

**How to keep Formal and Social flow of work**

✓ While working remotely as a manager agree with your teams on how you will run supervision, Check-ins, sign offs remotely, and when team members can contact you, stick to this until a routine is established in your team

✓ Use video for all formal discussions

✓ Follow up video chats or calls, a quick note with a summary of the actions to be taken, keep things clear and verify issues to avoid misconceptions

✓ Create videoconferencing time for a new starter in your team for orientation/induction. you can have a virtual lunch

✓ You can have a break or lunch buddies

✓ Separate work and personal issues

✓ If you have existing physical or mental health challenges, even if not disclosed, your employer has a duty to care, make reasonable adjustments, hence use the support systems provided by our employer (e.g. home working, extra support from managers, or equipment)

**Challenges of remote working as experienced and reported by teams and individuals:**

✓ Collaboration and communication with others (isolation is being experienced by many)

✓ Technology challenges (ranging from internet connectivity to equipment failure and information safety)

✓ Balancing work-life demands (underworking or overworking, lack of time to self-care)

✓ Finding information, and unavailability of face to face consultations, slow access to needed business information, or some documents not being available especially if the organization is not fully virtualized

✓ Organizing time – if one is not a good time manager, one can feel messed.

✓ Discuss teams time management, individual and teams’ performance evaluation
Best Practices for working remotely

- Workplace: Choose a place that prevents you from distractions and makes it possible to work better and be more productive.
- Consider what ergonomic adjustments or work tools are needed and request for assistance if necessary.
- Workload control: agree on the priorities with you manager, and among yourselves as team members and stay focused on deliverables. If you are in distress because of a heavy work load, alert your manager.
- Consider the value of your work, what is the worth of what you do? If it’s valuable spend time perfecting.
- Learn to manage your work as a business, exercise control over expenditures, whether of time or any other resource.
- Autonomy: Set your criteria and quality of your work.

How to remain effective and productive:

- Acknowledge the impact of remote working to your home environment and adjust accordingly.
- Create routine.
- Manage your information intake by:
  - Deleting social media
  - Turning off notifications
  - Stop checking your emails while working unless they are part of your work.
- Recognize your needs.
- Streamline.
- Keep your good practices.

References:

1. Strategies and tools for approaching remote work by Alexandra Cote: https://www.paymoapp.com/blog/working-remotely/

For help and support with Working Remotely:

Call: JMS/Staff counselling service: +254 728 961 939 / +254 793 484 333