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Remote work is changing the employment landscape

By USI Affinity

One of the most significant and lasting workplace changes from the pandemic is the recognition that remote work is not only possible but may be necessary to recruit and retain talent.

In a recent Gallup report, 54% of employees who work remotely at least part of the time prefer a hybrid at-home/in-office arrangement, while 37% want to work from home exclusively. Only 9% want to return to the office full time, which means that, like it or not, remote work is something that almost every employer will have to weigh.

In this article we will go through some of the major considerations that should be part of the remote work relationship.

Which Positions are Capable of Remote Work?

The belief that all jobs must be performed on-site is no longer accurate. Some positions can function 100% remotely, some can do so using a hybrid model, and some can't be performed remotely at all. However, some managers still cling to old assumptions, so it is important for employers to take an unbiased look at which positions can and can't be performed remotely.

Once the positions eligible for remote work have been determined, employers need to decide which employees in those positions will be successful working remotely, since some employees may be more successful working from home than others. If you're going to choose between employees in the same position, be sure to base decisions on objective and verifiable reasons. Doing so will help you manage the employee relations issues likely to develop, while helping you address the appearance of discrimination. For instance, denying remote work to an employee with a history of anxiety and depression, but allowing it for someone without such a history can be problematic without an objective basis for distinction.

What Are the Legal Issues Related to Remote Work?

Employees working remotely are generally subject to all the same legal requirements as any other employee. They are covered by your workers' compensation insurance, they may be entitled to medical or religious accommodations, and if they are non-exempt (hourly), you will be responsible for carefully tracking and paying for every minute they perform

work. About the only exception is that OSHA requirements generally do not extend to home working spaces.

Things get more cumbersome if the employee is working out of a different state, since you will need to set up a tax and unemployment account with that state, may have to register separately with the state, will be subject to that state's employment laws, and may need to update your work comp insurance to make sure it provides the minimum coverage required.

How Should Remote Work Relationships Be Administered?

Remote workers and their managers must have the same understanding as to what success in the role looks like and how it will be managed. That starts with establishing clear and objective ways to measure performance and work output, including such things as when employees should be available and how often they may have to report to a physical work site.

Employers should adopt policies and procedures that cover the administrative aspects of remote work relationships, including such things as:

- What equipment will be provided and how will equipment be recovered in the event an employee quits or is fired?
- Will you reimburse employees for any remote work expenses such as phone or internet service?
- Will you make it clear that remote work is a benefit, not a right, and that authorization can be revoked at your sole discretion?
- Will you use some sort of evaluation form to determine whether the employee is a good fit for working remotely?

With a little consideration, your organization can fully embrace remote work as part of your long-term recruitment and retention strategies. ■