

**The new normal:**  
**Working from home with COVID-19**

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When the World Health Organization was alerted to a mysterious virus that had appeared in the city of Wuhan, China in December 2019, no one could have predicted the events that would follow. Since then, the world has felt the effects of the COVID-19. Businesses, neighborhoods, cities, states, and even entire countries are shutting down to combat one of the most contagious viruses we have seen in the last century. However, we must continue living in several areas. While some places are closed for business, others are essential to keeping the world in some kind of working order. For these, major adjustments are needing to be made. Working from home, or telecommuting has almost become the new norm for many industries. While there are many issues with working from home, the benefits show that this is an option that every possible profession should be taken under advisement.

Before anyone wants to make the adjustments necessary to enable an entire staff to work from home, an employer must consider other alternatives. The problem is those alternatives may carry just as many risks as telecommuting. For example, if you were to start cutting hours or flexing hours (this is when you move employees from a set work schedule to an ever-changing schedule that would change day-to-day) employees could end up having to take on second jobs to maintain their financial stability, or leaving the company altogether. Then, when things return to normal, the employer would be faced with rebuilding their staff. Telecommuting, however, may come with its risks, but the benefits can be so much nicer. An article published by the *Business News Daily* website states “remote employees work 1.4 more days per month than their office-based counterparts, resulting in more than three additional weeks of work per year” (Caramela, 2020). We also must consider the fact that not allowing employees to telecommute

could lead to the virus spreading through the group. This would only lead to more issues and less productivity.

It is easy to make an idea sound like a good one when we talk about the bright side, but as it tends to be with any idea, some risks come with allowing employees to move from an office-based employment to a remote environment. Issues vary from distractions keeping employees from meeting important deadlines to companies taking advantage of employees not needing to clock in or out. Huang et al. (2020) tells us how, many Chinese businesses expect what they call a 996-work-week—9 AM to 9 PM, six days a week (bullet list 1). This has left many with fewer hours in the day to enjoy the life that they are working to build. However, American labor laws are in place for a reason. Hopefully, that will keep employers from taking advantage. On the flip side, distractions like social media, children, phone calls can make it difficult to focus on the task at hand when working from home. Conversely, Caramela (2019) tells us that those who work from home are shown to be 17% less distracted in their home-work environment as opposed to those who are distracted in their office-based jobs (para. 12).

Then, of course, you have other factors that need to be considered when working from home. Examples of this include the network infrastructure, the VPN (Virtual Private Network), which resources the employee needs to access, and the best practice to secure them. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, numerous businesses are in situations where many of their employees are working remotely, and all of said companies are having to consider these issues. Things like the VPN gateways use licenses, and you have the purchase and deploy these to be able to handle the larger number of connected users. Some suppliers like Cisco are offering free temporary licenses during this time to their existing customers who only need to expand their user base for the time being. While a lot of businesses typically provide employees with stationary desktops, there is

now a need for laptops to be purchased, set up, and deployed. Then, for those who have laptops in the office, it is not as simple as taking them home. At this point, it is the responsibility of the IT department to secure remote access, manage security, implement policies, and deploy the resources that are needed. IT professionals are put in a position where they must find a balance between what is needed and what is desired without sacrificing productivity and efficiency. This is a lot of work suddenly thrown on the shoulders of IT staff. The real problem lies with companies and businesses that have small, low budget, or non-dedicated IT departments. Now, those same IT workers are seeing a 5% rise in demand for hardware and network infrastructure needed to properly support the sudden increase of users (Rash, W. 2020).

From a logical standpoint, there is a lot of data that shows the numerous benefits that come from telecommuting. The savings employees can make by cutting their daily commute out of their routine is something that could give anyone pause. Thousands of dollars are saved by the time the cost of fuel and wear-and-tear on a personal vehicle are added up. The lack of need to commute can also free up ample amounts of time for employees to use in other areas. Studies even show that remote workers tend to have better workout schedules and exercise routines (Caramela, 2019).

In truth, working from home in any profession is going to have pros and cons. However, the bottom line is that the COVID-19 has changed our reality; no matter how temporary we hope that it will be. Changes must be made by everyone if we hope to stop the virus in its tracks. Thanks to research that has been done by many all over the world, we can only hope to learn from the mistakes that have been made by so many others. Working from home may not be a permanent solution for some issues, but it can be the solution for today.

## Reference / References

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