



FLEXIBILITY WITH ACCOUNTABILITY

How to transition quickly and seamlessly to working from home

As vital Covid-19 measures, including social distancing to #FlattenTheCurve, have been introduced around the world, millions of employees (and students) will work from home for the time being.

Whilst we have seen more and more businesses and organizations embrace flexible work arrangements and explore virtual collaboration models over the past few years, the current unprecedented situation is not a transition that employers were able to thoroughly prepare for through strategy maps and change management plans. In many cases, decisions had to be made in a matter of days or hours, arousing - very understandably - lots of questions and anxiety about the impact of working from home on business as well as people's personal lives.

A picture of remote or virtual working often goes hand in hand with technology, and most of the conversations I've had over the past few weeks were focused on what apps, tools, programs and platforms were best to deploy for virtual teams. Although technology is absolutely key, going virtual is far more than just that.

As a virtual PR & Communications agency, remote working is part of our DNA. We purposely set ourselves up as a virtual business 10 years ago to bring together an all-senior team of international communications professionals with expert skillsets to service our clients.

The internet has infinite articles on the benefits of flexible and remote working, the best tools and technology to use and the productivity hacks and pitfalls to look out for. What I would like to share is a key lesson we've learned over the past decade – through lots of trial and error - that may help you navigate this sudden transition to working from home, whether you're an employer, an employee, or a parent that's helping their child learn remotely.

For us, the key to successful remote working is *flexibility with accountability*. As people adjust to the new normal of staying home, their regular routines change. Many of us are now home with our children 24/7, which impacts our ability to adhere to regular office hours and work schedules. This situation calls for flexibility on all fronts; from the hours we work and the type of work we can do to the way we communicate and collaborate with each other. For employers, the biggest hesitation about flexibility is fear; for lack of control, productivity drops, a slipping company culture and substandard quality work.

Rather than introducing rigid rules to retain control or trying to maintain the same structure and work practices as you had in the brick and mortar office, focus on creating accountability.

Here are four things you can do to today to instill a strong culture of accountability as you transition to working from home:

1. Set crystal clear expectations: It's super important to create strong line-of-sight to the company vision and business goals so people know how their own work contributes and connects to the organization's priorities. Make sure to set clear guidelines for performance, deadlines and outcomes, not for the number of hours that need to be worked. Research shows that remote workers are often more productive and able to fulfil regular tasks in less time than they would in a regular office environment. It's a shift in mindset to pay for performance, not hours.

"Accountability is the glue that ties commitment to the result"

- Bob Protor

2. Enable self-organization: Ask employees to develop their own schedules and objectives on a daily, weekly or monthly basis to plan their workdays as efficiently and effectively as possible to deliver on the expectations set, and hold them accountable for the delivery of their own plans. Through clear line-of-sight you can empower your teams to align their individual tasks and projects to focus their efforts towards the achievement of the business objectives and priorities. Communicate regularly through agreed meeting rhythms and check-in often to see how the team is getting on.

"Accountability breeds response-ability"

- Stephen Covey

3. Foster the sense of belonging: Reinforce your company culture and core values through frequent communication and virtual team activities and try to retain some of the informal / social aspects of work, even though you're not physically together. This can be as easy as hosting a daily (optional) 15-minute google hangout coffee break for example. Being alone but feeling together will energize teams and provide a strong sense of belonging. The human factor in a virtual environment is so important.

"Great companies have high cultures of accountability"

- Steve Ballmer

4. Facilitate not mandate: Communicate often, give (even more) feedback, foster best-practice sharing across teams and continue to celebrate results. In doing so, make sure you provide the tools, information and support that's needed to facilitate seamless work from home. Platforms such as

Google's G Suite or Microsoft Teams are ideal to bring communication, collaboration, file sharing and application management together in a single place, accessible to all. Make sure to share important news and updates daily so everyone is on the same page and provide access to online training resources so your teams continue to sharpen their skills. Lastly, make sure there's ample tech and HR support as people go through this transition.

"Freedom is not the same as lack of accountability"

- Kevin Powers