

## Working from home – Make sure you get it right

The current battle for talent in many sectors has seen businesses competing for the best candidates by offering more and more innovative employment arrangements.

With the trend for not only job candidates but existing employees to put work/life balance preferences on the agenda, the issue of working from home (or remote work arrangements) is an issue that a number of our clients are seeking advice on.

Our advice is that employers need to carefully assess this issue from a number of directions including work flow, communications, risk management, precedence for other staff and OHS.



### What benefits can our business expect?

#### *Staff Retention*

Many businesses report that formalising workplace flexibility arrangements provides them with a valuable incentive in their menu of staff retention initiatives. For staff making the transition from maternity or family leave back into the workplace, the ability to work from home for one or two days a week may mean the difference between a company being able to retain their skills and experience – or losing them forever, possibly to a competitor.

#### *Greater pool of job applicants*

Being able to offer the ability to work from home will increase the pool of applicants you are able to attract from the market. Some people who would otherwise be preferred candidates may be unable to work in a five day a week role at the office due to demands with a young family or elder care. Offering these candidates the opportunity to combine working from home arrangements with three or even four days at the office could be enough to make them available to your business.

Likewise, with many staff needing to commute considerable distances, especially for those working in Sydney or Melbourne, the ability to work remotely for one or two days a week would be a very attractive proposition and may lead to them choosing your company to work with over another.

### What roles are best suited to remote work arrangements?

One early decision by management is what types of jobs are suited to working from home arrangements. It is perhaps easier to look initially at the characteristics of jobs that are seen as not generally suitable ie :

- ⇒ Face to face customer service ( internal and/or external )
- ⇒ Responsible for direct supervision of staff
- ⇒ Not easily split into defined projects or outcomes

- ⇒ Need specialist equipment to perform work
- ⇒ Management responsibility

Experience has shown that remote working is best suited to roles that require minimal supervision and which are able to be accurately assessed according to performance criteria. Sales and telemarketing jobs that are measured by results are one example of jobs that could be performed at least partially from home.

## Identifying staff who can work from home

It is most important to assess the suitability of individuals for remote work. Even if the employee has a role that has been identified as suitable for working from home, they may lack the behaviours and skills that have been associated with individuals who can successfully work away from the office. Characteristics to look out for include:

- ⇒ Good at time management
- ⇒ Above average communicator
- ⇒ Performance and results driven
- ⇒ High motivation
- ⇒ Able to work autonomously
- ⇒ Has the trust and confidence of their manager.

## Getting the period right

The next consideration is to look at the attendance requirements of staff offered the ability to work from home. Except in very exceptional circumstances, such work arrangements should combine working from home with time spent in the normal workplace. This is essential for good two way communications of work issues, managerial interactions and just keeping up with what is going on in the business.

For this reason, working from home would normally be limited to one or two days per week – and in turn, the flexible work arrangement should be for a specified period ie 6 to 12 months for parents returning after maternity leave or a set duration for those with young children or elder care responsibilities.

## Risk management issues

As you can see, careful planning is needed to optimise the benefits of working from home or remote work arrangement in a business. Some risk management issues to consider include:

- ⇒ Develop a policy on working from home/remote work – this can then be used to guide your managers on the process to be used as well as the types of positions best suited to these arrangements.
- ⇒ Train/brief your managers on the policy and provide guidance on how they should assess whether prospective employees or existing employees are suited to remote work. Managers may also need assistance in how to performance manage the work output of the remote employee with the emphasis being on agreeing on quantifiable results/outcomes.

- ⇒ Ensure all arrangements are fully documented. This documentation is to cover the agreed period of the arrangement together with the performance management expectations of the business and local managers for the continuation of the arrangements.
- ⇒ OHS conditions – this is a key area and will be subject to a separate item in our next ENews

In summary, workplace flexibility in the form of working from home or remote work arrangements can have a positive benefit to your organisation. The key is to go into such arrangements for the right reasons, choosing the right job roles and the right people and of course, looking after the risk management issues up front – rather than having to deal with them when things go wrong.

### **How we can assist**

Corporate HR Solutions can provide additional advice on this complex issue, including processes to assist deal with the unique OHS implications of having staff work away from the office.

#### **Corporate HR Solutions**

Level 20, 99 Walker St, North Sydney NSW

**Phone:** 02 9510 0066

**Fax:** 02 9510 0067

**Web:** [www.corporatehrsolutions.com](http://www.corporatehrsolutions.com)

*This article is intended only to provide a summary of the subject matter covered. It does not purport to be comprehensive or to provide legal advice. Readers should not act on the basis of any matter in this article without first obtaining specific professional advice.*