

The Remote Revolution: The Challenges with Virtual Employment

By Jared Coseglia

The following is part two of a two-part series on remote employment and work. Part one, "The Remote Revolution: Jobs in the Cloud," exposed the advantages to both employer and employee of building a remote workforce or taking a job as a virtual staffer.

Remote employment developed a bad reputation in 2013 after Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer instituted a "no work from home" policy for her 12,000 employees. This demonstrated that if the person in charge of the company does not subscribe to the philosophy, it won't work. Before beginning to build a remote team or even hire a remote individual, one of the biggest challenges is getting top-down executive level buy-in to deploy a staffing model that integrates or holistically reinvents a team with work from home employees.

Scott Zimmerman, manager of Automated Litigation Support for Haynes and Boone, and advocate for WFH staffing, notes, "Hiring remote employees is not a decision to be made without thought and calculated planning; it is very different from the way law firms traditionally operate and will require significant change within all levels of your organization."

Managers of litigation support departments, IT and help desk operations and even document review teams are best positioned to get approval for this staffing strategy by first creating an airtight business plan. Additionally, a great strategy for developing attorney trust in remote workers is to allow existing employees the ability to work remotely. Since trust is already established between the lawyer(s) and a proven staff member, integrating remote support through current staff is a great starting point to building buy-in. Zimmerman reiterates, "Trust is the cornerstone

and greatest challenge of deploying a successful remote staffing model."

The primary reason employers, law firm and otherwise, are against a remote workforce is the belief that, unmonitored at home, employees will be off task and distracted more often and thus less productive or effective. Said more simply by Dave Nevogt, founder of Hubstaff time tracking software, dismissal of remote hires "stems from trust issues and a hesitation to deviate from the common/comfortable ways to run a business."

There is a perceived leap of faith that employers feel they are taking by hiring someone to work from home. Unmonitored and remote, however, are not synonymous. Technology has begun to solve issues of accountability and employee visibility, but selecting the right technology for your organization to scale remote staffers is a critical and potentially costly initial investment.

Drew Brody, COO/CFO for TRU Staffing Partners, believes "no one technology will solve all your remote management problems." Instead, Brody contends that "the key to successfully managing a work from home staff is in selecting the right combination of tools and technologies in concert with detailed and documented processes and protocols for using these chosen technologies."

Virtual Management Technology

There are several reasons to use virtual management technology: a centralized place for companywide information (CRM tool, Intranet, SharePoint), communication tools (video and audio), time tracking, screen sharing (group or individual training tools), documentation of efforts and accessibility. Some



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tools solve several problems at once. Paul Prewitt, director of client services for Contact Discovery Services, also an advocate for WFH staffing, has "found that the advanced IM applications that have voice, video and screen share capabilities help to close the gaps" in areas of accountability and communication.

Prewitt, like Brody, is a big fan of Skype for Business because it "gives (his) team the ability to communicate in a variety of ways one-on-one or as a group and allows (him) to have insight into who is online and available." Skype for Business, formerly Lync for Microsoft, will indicate if an employee is "available, busy, off work, do not disturb, on a call" and more. The tool also allows each user to IM screen share with multiple internal employees at once making training and demonstration simple and easy.

The tool also boasts a mobile app so employees can always stay connected and in

communication (even when they take advantage of being away from their desk). Cloud providers, like Microsoft 365, allow employees to access their email and data from anywhere. Cloud solutions also generally address issues of security. "It is highly recommended for going remote, to go to the cloud and choose a top-tier brand to support your virtual infrastructure," professes Brody.

Technology solves and automates many issues of remote management regarding accountability and accessibility, but cannot enforce or dictate employee behavior. Remote staffing is not for every role or every individual. Zimmerman knows all too well how challenging finding the right candidate for remote employment can be: "Now that you have made the decision to hire remote, you may find yourself being flooded with resumes."

He is right. According to [globalworkplace-analytics.com](#), "80 percent to 90 percent of the U.S. workforce says they would like to telework" at least part-time. In an informal survey taken by TRU Staffing Partners in 2011, the number one motivator for employees to change jobs in legal technology was "compensation," followed by "vertical mobility," with desire to "work remotely" in fifth place. The same survey in 2015 found that desire to work remotely moved to the number three motivator for legal tech pros.

Bottom line: legal tech professionals, like the rest of Americans, want to work more from home. Desire, however, does not always equal aptitude for remote employment. "The interview process holds even greater importance when looking for people who can self-manage and self-motivate," adds Prewitt. "Asking traditional interview questions about the candidate's experience won't give you the info you need to determine if the person is the right fit for a remote position," he continues

Some questions to consider: "Tell me about how you organize your calendar. How much time do you spend on the phone a day? Do you enjoy that? What does the area in your home that you would work remotely from look and feel like? Does it have good sunlight? What kinds of technology do you interact with daily, hardware



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and websites?" Often certain people thrive on being "in the room" in order to feel creative and fulfilled, and while these might typically be fantastic hires, their need for face-to-face human interaction will ultimately make them ill-suited for the position.

Virtual Interviews

Hiring someone who will work from home doesn't mean you should only interview them from home. Zimmerman urges employers to "still meet the candidates in-person during the interview process because there is a lot that you can gather from an in-person meeting that just doesn't translate via a video conference call." Body language, eye contact, handshakes, apparel and more are always indicators of professionalism and fit.

Just because an employee works from home does not preclude them from potentially meeting clients or other employees in person down the road. Do not cheat yourself from making smart hiring decisions by shortcutting the interview process. Additionally, spending some time in-person after being hired is an important part of creating and defining company culture. Prewitt believes "it helps to plan at least two events a year that bring everyone together under one roof in a collaborative effort." He contends that these quarterly or semiannual

events "make it that much easier for resources to reach out and collaborate while hundreds or even thousands of miles apart."

In closing, Zimmerman draws important attention to a community of professionals that have always thrived on remote employment and had little struggle with employer buy-in for the model: sales professionals. "If after reading this article you are still in doubt or cautiously optimistic, I encourage you to look at the sales profession."

Most salespeople work remotely and are not measured by how much they work but rather by their production. When you evaluate the types of tools salespeople use, most have a cell phone, computer, secure access to the office network from home, email and a CRM tool. That's it — and all these tools can be made available to other employees.

Clients are always looking for cost reduction and efficiency without sacrificing results and integrity. Vendors are always looking for ways to increase their margins in an increasingly commoditized market. If remote employment can create savings of time and money while increasing retention and maintaining client satisfaction, then it is perhaps a model worth exploring — not just for law firms and corporations — but more pointedly for the service providers who support them.