



HR Examiner

*Examining practical HR issues business owners
and managers encounter every day*

Question of the Month

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Other Work At Home Considerations

- ▶ If you offer this arrangement to one person, will others also request the same?
- ▶ If you okay this request, you may have opened the floodgates. Determine in advance how many similar requests you

Allowing Employees to Work at Home

I recently received a call from a client. Her employee went out on maternity leave and decided that rather than return to work on-site after the leave, that she could perform the work at home in order to take care of her newborn and not have to send the baby to daycare.

There are lots of red flags that went up on my side of the telephone. In some organizations employees working at home on a full-time and/or part-time basis is a very successful, mutually beneficial arrangement. But it's an arrangement that can't be entered into lightly.



Each organization can decide whether or not to allow employees to work at home on a regular basis. The organization receiving this request from its employee has no obligation to accept the employee's proposal. Many organizations determine

can allow. Is this a one-time accommodation or a new pattern of work for the organization?

▶ Check with your Workers' Compensation carrier to see what your legal obligations are regarding employees working at home?

▶ If they get injured at work/home, what is your obligation and your financial liability?

▶ Do you have the staff to perform remote support on her computer, telephone, and other systems when they inevitably crash?

that arranging for employees to work at home is not in their best interest.

I have one client who allowed several employees to perform their work responsibilities at home. The employees' work production required focus and concentration that was not available in their busy office. However, once the client determined that the work-at-home arrangement no longer benefited the company, the remote employees rebelled. They resigned immediately and much of their talent and expertise was lost. One employee perceived all the work to be his own and deleted all the company's files before returning the company computer. On the other hand, another employee still resigned but at least assisted by training new staff before leaving.

I'm sure for every horror story, there are many many tales of successful at-home work arrangements. To help you, here are some of the questions to ask before making any decisions. Of course, I've included some commentary as well:

- How is the employee's job performance? If it's not perfectly stellar while she's in your office, it is likely to decline without supervision or face-to-face accountability.
- How is work currently delegated to the employee? Does she need to meet in person with her supervisor or others in order to work effectively, or is the work independent requiring little or no supervision?
- How many hours will the employee need to work in the office to attend meetings, deliver information, collect documents, forms, tools, or other information to get her work done?
- How much work is performed on the phone? Does she work with internal and/or external clients who need her immediately? Will they be offended

▶ What kind of written agreements might you need to define the employee's obligations and performance expectations?

▶ Can you create a trial period to see if it's working?

▶ Is there a limit to the number of employees who can work at home per department?

▶ Do you have an "exit strategy" if the arrangement doesn't work?

Seems like I keep asking questions, but don't offer direct solutions. But there are so many unique issues that you need to consider before making this major decision, I thought my best approach would be to

when she places them on hold or calls them back because her baby needs her attention?

- Since this arrangement is at her request, you may not have to provide computer equipment – perhaps she has her own – or you may have to provide a duplicate office. You may also need to address Internet access, confidentiality of documents in the employee's home, etc. And as with the example I described above, you'd also need to address how to back up the employee's work to your company server to ensure all work and data clearly belongs to the organization.
- Does the employee have dedicated space in her home to work, or would she be sharing the dining table with the job? The absence of a dedicated area with appropriate storage, etc. may not be conducive to the level of productivity you need from the employee.
- It's important to determine whether this is a short-term fix for a couple of months after the baby is born or does the employee see this as a permanent arrangement?
- If time is spent during the day caring for the baby, can the person accomplish the balance of the work after hours and still be effective to your organization? Unless the employee has other day care, it is nearly impossible for the employee to be available for 8 hours during normal working hours.
- How will you be able to monitor whether the employee is actually putting in the hours that she's committing to?
- How will you effectively supervise the employee? Is the current supervisor someone who has the skills, abilities and/or time to effectively supervise an

pose leading questions rather than try to answer every scenario you may encounter.

If it all works, you have the opportunity to create a great win-win situation for both you and the employee. So take your time to think it through to make it work for you. Tread slowly and carefully.

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**If you're not
having fun
with your**

someone who has the skills, abilities and/or time to effectively supervise an employee from a distance? How much additional time might this supervision take? Do you have the technology to accomplish remote supervision and meetings? How will employee results be measured?

- Will the employee's absence from the workplace be disruptive to the people she needs to contact to get her job done – or vice versa – will they be able to reach her when needed? Is the work environment conducive to a remote operation?
- It's important to explore how allowing employees to work at home will benefit the organization. This may be a good solution for a long term employee with lots of valuable skills and information that you don't want to lose. But how will you handle the same request from a short term employee who's looking for a convenient way to stay home with pay, but who is not truly committed. Can you institute performance or service standards for employees who request to work at home?

There are so many considerations to this important decision. If you need help considering the options, feel free to give me a call. You can do more research and find someone in another organization who has gone through this process and incorporate their experiences into your decision making.

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