



Overcoming the Challenges of a Remote Workforce.

How To Improve Productivity & Profitability Using Time Tracking Technology.

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Introduction:

Remote Work: Old Concept, New Normal

While remote work is considered “the new normal” for companies because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is actually not new. In fact, remote workforces have technically been around since the **beginning of man**. And, like humans, remote work has evolved over time and, in the 1980’s, companies officially started to test out the remote workforce concept, starting with **IBM**.

As technology progressed, remote work did too -- transforming from an occasional need for employees, to a “perk,” to an actual way of conducting business, to an essential way to maintaining the economy during a pandemic.

The pandemic has opened up many companies that never contemplated or supported the idea of remote work, to explore maintaining a partial or permanent remote workforce in the future. While we don’t know what the future holds for any of us, we do know remote work is here to stay in one form or another. While there are many opportunities a remote workforce can provide for companies, there are also many challenges, especially when it comes to managing a team from afar.

We will address those challenges and offer solutions and tools that can help you transform your remote workforce into a streamlined, successful team that can benefit your business.



Remote Work: Past, Present & Future

Remote Work Before COVID-19

Before Coronavirus forced companies to adapt to a remote workforce, **3.2%** of the American workforce were already working remotely. In fact, here is where remote work stood before the pandemic:

Before COVID-19

- **4.3 Million:** People in the U.S. work from home at least half the time
- **140%:** Increase of people who work from home since 2005
- **16%:** Percentage of global companies that were 100% remote
- **54%:** Amount of U.S workers who worked remotely at least 1 day a month (2019)

Remote Work During COVID-19

60% of US employees have switched to remote work because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As of mid-March, an estimated **16 million workers in the U.S.** started working remotely due to COVID-19.

The Future of Remote Work

- It is estimated that **30-40%** of workers will continue to work remotely full-time after the pandemic ends
- 74% of companies plan to permanently shift to more remote work post COVID*
- Upwork's "Future Workforce Report" predicts that **73% of all teams will have remote workers by 2028.**



“ Our best estimate is that **25-30%** of the workforce will be working-from-home multiple days a week by the end of 2021. ”

- Kate Lister, President of Global Workforce Analytics

Benefits of Remote Work

Remote work actually can benefit companies and employees through cost savings, employee retention and overall flexibility that can yield higher productivity.

Cost Efficient

According to [Global Workplace Analytics](#), almost 6 out of 10 employers identify cost savings as a major benefit of a remote workforce.

Companies can save:

- **\$11,000** per part-time remote employee annually
- **\$44 billion:** How much employers saved by allowing employees to work remotely in 2015

Flexibility

According to [Buffer & Angel List's State of Remote Work 2020](#) survey:

- **40%** of people say a flexible schedule is the most significant benefit of working remotely
- **82%** of all remote workers suggested that they never planned to return to an in-office setting

Employee Retention

- **57%** of remote workers are more satisfied with their job
- **25%** decrease in turnover rates



Challenges of a Remote Workforce

While there are many benefits for employers when it comes to a remote workforce, there are also challenges as well. Here are the top three.

1. Diminished productivity

According to Buffer's 2019 State of Remote Working report, distractions at home ranked fourth in common problems affecting remote workers. Distractions can include:

- Other household members
- Household chores
- Running errands
- Increased use of technology, like mobile phones, non work related

Despite these distractions, an Airtasker study revealed that remote employees work **1.4 days more** per month compared to employees in an office. And although remote employees take longer breaks it actually boosts their productivity.

2. Time Theft

A study reveals that US employers lose approximately **\$11 billion** annually in lost productivity while another indicates that **4.5 hours** per employee/week is lost to time theft. Time theft takes place when workers are paid for time they did not work. It can take various forms. Here are some examples:

- **Buddy punching**
- Taking longer breaks
- Starting late
- Finishing early
- Engaging in personal activities during work hours

Remote workers have a much higher likelihood of engaging in time theft because they are usually working from their own home unsupervised.

3. Managing Remote Workers

Managing workers from home and handling remote staff can be overwhelming. But it's important to maintain order and communication, as stress and helplessness can create a **trickle-down effect** on employees, meaning **employees look to managers for cues** that impact their emotions. This is why it is essential to maintain control while assigning projects, scheduling shifts, tracking progress, approving timesheets, sending invoices, tracking billables and keeping employees engaged so you can help reduce turnover rates.



Overcoming Challenges

We have addressed the challenges that come with managing a remote workforce. But how can you overcome them? It comes down to three things: setting standards, tracking productivity and communicating effectively.

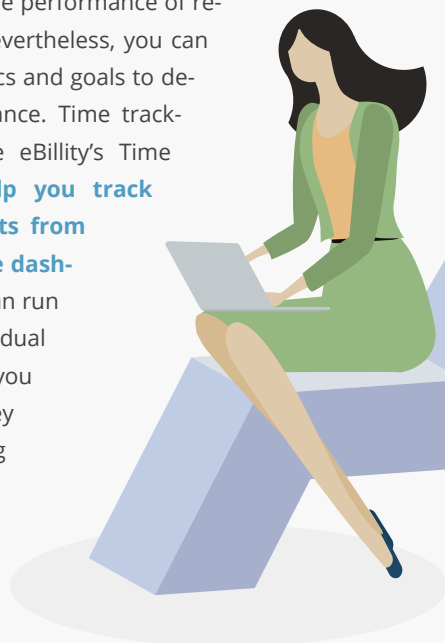
1. Set New Work Standards & Boundaries

Office policies have to be adjusted to accommodate the new normal of remote working. This is why it is so important to establish the standards and rules up front. As a manager you need to establish what is expected -- from work hours, breaks and communicating progress on a project.

As a leader, it's important to get input from your team as you set up the standards and boundaries of a remote work environment. Ask about your team's preference for meeting times or what ways they like to communicate as you build a plan.

2. Track productivity

Once the rules are established, the next thing you need to do as a leader is track productivity. It can be challenging to track the performance of remote workers. Nevertheless, you can use specific metrics and goals to determine performance. Time tracking software, like eBillity's Time Tracker, **can help you track employee insights from the customizable dashboard**, and you can run reports on individual employees so you can see what they are accomplishing in their day.



You can also use this technology to message your team, schedule shifts, and remind them to submit their timesheets. You can also use Time Tracker to manage remote workers through **online geolocation tracking**.

3. Communicate Effectively & Often

Losing face-to-face communication is a major challenge. That is why it is essential to use tools to meet throughout the day to communicate. From low-bandwidth communication, like email and chat, to high-bandwidth communication like video meetings, you need to make sure you have the technology in place to make the team accessible to you and each other. Example technologies include: Slack, Google Hangouts, Skype or Zoom.

*High-bandwidth communication increases productivity. In fact, a face-to-face request is **34x more successful** than an email.*

It's important to note that while remote team members may sometimes be shy about turning on their cameras, it is beneficial to make sure cameras are on during video meetings, so encourage this as a manager.

Working in different time zones? Recorded video messages are beneficial to make sure the face-to-face communication continues.

How Time Tracker Can Help



Utilizing Time Tracking Technology to Manage Remote Teams

Technology, communication, set boundaries -- these are all needed in order to establish a successful remote team. Implementing time tracking software, like eBillity's Time Tracker, allows you to do all of this on one platform.

In order to keep your team on track and maintain profitability for your business, transitioning to a time tracking system is essential. It allows you to:

Keep an accurate record of hours

If no one at your company is tracking time spent on tasks, projects or clients, how do you know where you stand financially? How accurate are your projections? Are you charging enough for an employee's time to cover their benefits?

Time Tracker helps by giving you the tools to determine:

- How much revenue an employee is bringing in versus how much they're costing (realization reports)
- Whether you're charging enough and preventing scope creep for a particular client (profitability reports), and
- If you're paying too much for overtime when you should be staffing up (labor cost report).

Those tools not only allow you to make the best business decisions, but also to show your employees why you're making changes, and to guard against unnecessary overtime, which protects an employee's work-life balance.

Be transparent with your team

eBillity's Time Tracker app offers geolocation and GPS tracking which is ideal for adding accountability when managing a remote team. It allows you to:

- View the location of your team in real-time and know their status
- Records the location which eliminates payroll and billing disputes
- Increase employees accountability for their time and whereabouts
- Add a geofence so time can only be clocked within the boundary

Provide employees with flexibility

A 2014 study revealed 64% of employees would choose added flexibility over a 10% raise. That speaks to how important work-life balance has become to Americans, especially in times where the flexibility of remote work has become more of a necessity.

eBillity's Time Tracker helps by allowing employees to:

- Shift work schedules to accommodate doctor appointments, errands or emergencies without losing hours
- Take breaks when they need to without worrying they'll appear unresponsive, and
- See how many hours they've clocked for a specific work period so they — and their manager — know exactly where they stand.

While this provides employees with the flexibility they want, it also allows managers to track employee hours remotely, avoid unnecessary overtime and approve payments swiftly.

Conclusion

Remote work is and will continue to be the new normal for businesses around the world. But that isn't necessarily a bad thing. If you are worried about it impacting the productivity of your team, think about this: studies have shown that employees who work in the office were not at their desks 50-60% of the time.

For every obstacle a remote workforce poses, there are solutions, including implementing time tracking technology. In order to maintain and increase accountability, production and profitability during the pandemic and after, tools like

eBility's Time Tracker can help keep your team stay on course no matter where they are working.

By having one platform that can help you communicate with your team and track productivity, managing a remote team will not only become easier, it will become more effective. How? Time tracking has been shown to reduce productivity leaks by 80% which means everyone works better when we all know the rules, follow the rules and are held accountable.

*When clients ask "How will I know if they're working?"
I ask "How do you know they are working now?"*

- Kate Lister, President Of Global Workplace Analytics

