

# Remote Work & The New Landscape

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The pandemic had a significant impact on our personal and professional lives. It caused us to rethink the way we live as well as how and where we work. Remote work became the norm for many during the pandemic, but as business begins to get back to normal, what does the new working landscape look like? Many business leaders are reimagining the workplace and deciding if all or some employees can continue to telecommute. Anna Towne, co-founder and chief compliance officer with Bizhaven, an HR and safety compliance firm, joined us for a discussion on the nature of remote work in the post-pandemic world and guided us through the most important considerations employers should explore as they make decisions about their new normal workplace environment.

The pandemic was the impetus for the Great Resignation, a term that describes the mass exodus of employees who are leaving jobs at a significant pace. We are still seeing the fallout. The pandemic caused a paradigm shift for employees as they reevaluated work/life balance, found more time in their day by avoiding long commutes and redefined "home office" to include other states and international locales. Employees are reprioritizing benefits to include flexible work options, and businesses that aren't nimble may lose valuable employees.

Work-from-home requests have increased since 2020. Working from home may have been a necessity for the past two years as offices, schools and daycare facilities were shuttered. Many employees are ready to come back to their desk, some can't return to the office, and others would prefer a hybrid option.

Employers need to decide to what degree they can operate with remote employees. Every organization is unique, and not every job can be performed virtually. If you are considering remote options, Anna suggests you first determine which model works best for you and your employees: 100% remote, hybrid or flextime. Hybrid models have been the most popular post-pandemic options for businesses.

There are many considerations when choosing a remote workplace model. First and foremost, businesses must provide a work-from-home experience that is not only safe for employees but also provides the tools and technology they need to be successful. Developing clear guidelines and expectations, adjusting policies and procedures, understanding and following state and federal guidelines, and creating strategies to maintain company culture are all key to making remote workplaces effective.

Here are some things to consider:

## **Time Zones/Employees Working in Multiple States**

Many people have moved to different states during COVID, how are you considering this when scheduling meetings and client visits? In addition, there are numerous state-specific regulations

around payroll and tax requirements, Worker's Compensation and minimum wage, just to name a few.

### **Reimbursement Policy**

What are the state guidelines on reimbursing remote employees for reasonable expenses such as cell phone and internet expenses and supplies? Do you have a reimbursement policy in place?

### **Culture and Engagement**

Surveys showed that some employees who were required to work from home during the pandemic expressed having challenges unplugging from work because they couldn't physically leave work at the office. Others expressed difficulties with team collaboration and communication. Some stated they were lonely and had a hard time staying motivated. It's critical to have strategies in place to understand how coworkers are interacting with each other and the team. Are there weekly meetings with supervisors? What tools are being provided to bridge the communication gap? Are you conducting employee surveys to gain valuable feedback on how it is going? What can you do to keep morale high (virtual happy hours or team building exercises)?

### **Communication**

Do you have a system in place to keep projects on task and employees connected (Slack, Microsoft Teams, Zoom)? Are there recurring meetings so employees can stay connected?

### **Hours**

How should you adjust the attendance policy? Is there a range of time when employees should be available? Are alternative workweeks, such as four, ten-hour days, an option?

### **Compensation**

Hourly, non-exempt employees could be affected by a hybrid or remote work arrangement. Compliance with overtime hour regulations, determined by the state, could be a factor. How is time being tracked? How is time being approved?

### **Performance**

What expectations are in place in terms of employee performance?

### **Security**

If confidential data or heightened security measures are in place onsite, how does that translate to home offices and laptop computers?

### **Safety**

When employees are working off site employers are still responsible for ensuring their safety. Organizations should provide diagrams on ergonomically safe workstations as well as information on properly connecting equipment into electrical systems (fire safety applies here). Workman's compensation covers employees onsite and offsite, but it is the employer's responsibility to ensure employees are set up for success, with proper technology and tools, in a safe environment no matter where they are performing their work.

## GUEST SPEAKER

### Anna Towne, Co-Founder & Chief Compliance Officer, Bizhaven

Anna has spent over 20 years working in the Human Resources space and has become a subject matter expert in California Labor Law and Employee Relations. Since graduating with her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in Human Resources Management and attaining her PHR certification, Anna has worked with more than 200 businesses in California and across the nation bettering their internal processes, lowering exposure and strengthening teams and overall culture.

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