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THE VA INDUSTRY

A Model in Successfully Transitioning Your Company's Administrative Team to Remote Work

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COVID-19 has changed everything. There's no debating that. What has become debatable, however, is how soon companies should re-open their offices, whether employees should be allowed to keep their positions or apply for unemployment benefits if they feel returning to work is hazardous to their health, and if they will be given the option to continue working from home temporarily – even indefinitely. That includes your admin support staff.

AskChela

For some companies, what's not up for debate is that there is actually something to this whole work-from-home thing after all! That, for several reasons, there is a case for transitioning all or some employees to a remote workforce. If that's something your company is considering, what does that even look like, specifically when it comes to your administrative team?

Fortunately, there's a successful model to follow, and it's found within the virtual assistance industry, which has been growing and thriving since 2003.

Virtual assistants are small business owners who provide – among many things – administrative and creative marketing support to other small business owners. They work from their own home-based offices, use their own equipment and software, and juggle tasks from several different clients from around the country; sometimes even the world. They meet with clients over Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, and other such video conferencing tools. They are reachable during normal business hours, create processes that keep them on top of their to-do lists, and deliver work product according to whatever method they and the client have determined is best for that client's particular needs.

Many of them come from Corporate America and have successfully integrated what they learned in their employee roles into the work they do as independent contractors. And with the lack of commute time – not to mention the flexible schedules they create for themselves based on their needs and the needs of their clients – they are able to find the time to continue honing and adding to their professional skill set, something that is often left neglected in full-time employee roles. And something that makes them more marketable over time, which benefits both themselves and any current and future clients they serve.

Of course, while there are many advantages to working from home, there is admittedly a downside as well – lack of focus, a perceived, or even legitimate, struggle with productivity, etc. And, as several recent weeks under stay-at-home orders that have also interrupted daycare arrangements for many families have demonstrated, the real challenge of having young children underfoot throughout the day. These are legitimate concerns that would need to be assessed and addressed, not just in the initial stages of transitioning an admin

team, but most likely at regular intervals well into such arrangements.

Yet, even with the obvious downside of working remotely, unknowns currently and quite unexpectedly facing the world right now have forced many companies to explore long-term work-from-home arrangements where none previously existed. In doing so, here's a helpful preliminary checklist of questions (in no particular order) specific to admins and inspired partly by the way the virtual assistance industry has been operating for years:

- What arrangements need to be made to enable your admin team to work remotely? What, if any, are the additional company expenses involved in enabling them to do so?

- Does the employee have a quiet home office space in which to work?

- What will be the protocols (including frequency) for remote interaction with and within your admin team? And for communicating with clients, if applicable?

- What if a member of the admin team is unable or unwilling to work remotely?

- What if a member of the admin team becomes unproductive?

- For those admin team members with children,

"With creativity and a great plan, it can be done."

how will they handle working at home if the children are also at home?

- Would there be a need to modify/allow some flexibility to their work schedule?

- What will be the arrangement for tracking the employee's time each day?

- How will the employee guard work of a sensitive nature?

- What network security issues would need to be addressed before the employee is allowed to work from home?

- What would the process be for an admin employee who leaves the company while under a work-from-home arrangement?

- How will your company mitigate any work-from-home risks that may arise?

- What work-from-home wellness programs will the company provide?

- Will remote admins ever have to go into the office, and if so, what will be the procedure for that, considering social distancing may go on for some time?

This list is by no means exhaustive. There are certainly other factors to consider, many of which would be specific to your organization, and all of which should be well-documented in a Digital Employee Handbook. But it's a great start for employers who must come to a quick decision about how their workforce will move forward as the world begins the difficult task of getting back to work during a pandemic that has yet to show true signs of getting under control.

Thankfully, as savvy virtual assistants have proven time and again, with creativity and a great plan, it can be done. Just ask any one of us!