

Flexible Work Practices

What Employees Need to Know

This document discusses the benefits and challenges of teleworking and offers advice for employees about how to manage the special requirements associated with working remotely.

Benefits and Challenges

There are many benefits to being a remote worker, including saving time and money as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions by avoiding the commute to work. Working remotely may also enhance your quality of life, increase your flexibility, save fuel costs, and help you concentrate and accomplish work without interruption.

Working remotely comes with challenges, especially during the initial transition. These challenges may include isolation, difficulty setting work boundaries, and difficulty staying up-to-date on key information such as changes in project deadlines.

Employee Strategies and Working with Your Manager

Two keys to success are using the right strategies and taking the right approach with your manager, which can be accomplished with Flexible Work Practices (FWP). Here is what you need to know:

- **Examine the facts.** Your first task is to determine whether you are personally ready to become a remote employee because not all jobs can be adapted to telework and not all employees will work effectively in a remote work environment. Do your research and list the pros and cons of your decision.



- **Discuss the remote work option with your manager.** Approach your manager before requesting a formal FWP arrangement and discuss work options that include flexible hours and days during the work week. Determine if your organization has remote-worker agreements that need to be completed and approved.
- **Emphasize your availability.** Let your manager know you are ready, and come prepared with contingency solutions in emergency situations.
- **Create formal performance assessments.** Set clear objectives with your manager. Check in regularly with your manager to ensure business needs are being met.
- **Exceed expectations.** Your FWP arrangement sets clear expectations. Do your best to exceed them.
- **Maintain or increase your productivity.** This shows that you can be highly effective in a FWP environment.
- **Keep the momentum going.** Check your email multiple times during the business day and try not to leave projects untouched for more than three consecutive days.
- **Protect your time.** Only read emails or participate in conference calls that are pertinent to your deliverables.
- **Set a work schedule.** Be sure to communicate this schedule to your manager and key stakeholders. Although you now have flexibility, try to keep a consistent routine. This will help raise your effectiveness.
- **Adapt as business needs arise.** This may include coming into the office when you are not scheduled to do so, traveling, or occasionally working late to complete tasks.
- **Own your schedule.** As needed, schedule calls and meetings when you will be in the office. Likewise, consider your personal strengths when deciding which work hours are best for you. If mornings are most efficient, try to schedule work early.
- **Use the right mode of communication.** This will help avoid conflict and help you better manage tone. It is best to ask colleagues which mode of communication they prefer: email, phone, instant messaging, texting, and so on. Be proactive, timely, and consistent in your communications.
- **Forward calls.** Consider having all your office phone calls forwarded to your remote contact number if applicable.
- **Use video for calls.** When possible, consider using a camera for calls or meetings as a means of communicating to remain highly visible.

- **Stay up-to-date on best technologies.** For example, using instant messaging to signal your availability is one of the most valuable tools remote workers can take advantage of to stay in touch with other employees and be highly productive.
- **Get to the point.** Including a brief request or statement in the subject line of your emails will help your message stand out in a colleague's crowded inbox.
- **Take short breaks throughout your workday.** Many remote workers find that a large amount of time is spent consistently on the phone or working at their computer (sitting). Taking quick breaks to move around and refresh yourself can be helpful.

Working with Colleagues

Doing business from a distance requires special attention on your part. Here are some guidelines you should always keep in mind.

- **Communicate to succeed.** Communicating your availability to others is important. Be clear and consistent about when you may be available via phone, email, and instant messaging. If you have an office at work, a helpful practice is to keep a sign or some notification outside of your workspace to indicate when you will be working remotely and how to best reach you during those times.
- **Be responsive.** Return voice messages and emails in a consistent and timely manner.
- **Expand your connections.** Be proactive in remaining connected to existing team members, and make an effort to reach out to new members.
- **Remember to forward calls.** Have all phone calls forwarded to your remote contact number, if applicable.
- **Maintain visibility with colleagues.** Effective strategies include occasional in-person meetings, leading conference calls, and speaking with team members individually.
- **Pick up the phone.** Consider calling your colleagues occasionally (rather than only emailing them) to maintain a more personal connection.
- **Address the questions.** If your colleagues ask about your FWP, explain that it is an individual arrangement developed by your manager and you. Emphasize that your FWP allows you to fulfill both business and personal needs. Direct them to their managers if they would like to consider a FWP or have further questions.
- **Explain your arrangement candidly.** If you believe a colleague has concerns about your FWP, have a candid conversation emphasizing your commitment to the team and addressing any concerns your co-worker may have in a professional manner.

Your FWP Working Environment

When you telework, your work environment is still a critical factor. Keep these points in mind.

- **Manage the ergonomics.** Make certain your FWP workspace is ergonomically suitable and technologically compatible with your organization's systems.
- **Plan for a smooth transition.** To avoid complications, ensure your transition to a FWP is as seamless for other people as possible.
- **Go virtual.** Consider focusing on live, virtual communication such as Cisco WebEx® video or phone calls (as opposed to email communications) at the start of your FWP to help maintain healthy relationships.
- **Avoid distractions.** Protect your time when you are working away from the office. Minimize distractions and maintain productivity. Ensure you have a quiet workspace, as outside noises (for example, lawn mowers, fans, construction) can affect the quality of your calls.

Shipping and Receiving Inbound Mail

If you could be receiving postal or packages at your building location, here are three tips for shipping and receiving your mail.

- **Make sure mail is forwarded.** Your organization's mail services should maintain a database of remote workers who have requested their mail to be forwarded to an alternative address.
- **Stay in the loop.** Confirm that your mail services group will contact remote workers periodically to ensure address information held within the database is both current and accurate.

Web Conferencing Best Practices

Web conferencing enables all participants to see the same thing through real-time desktop sharing. This meeting application is effective both for groups and one-on-one virtual meetings.

Web conferencing also gives each party the option to be visually present during the meeting via live streaming video. Remember to:

- **Identify yourself when speaking**, especially if there are multiple people in one room.
- **Set an alternative host to start the meeting** if you are unavailable.
- **Use the virtual meeting room to share information** during your calls rather than distributing large files to everyone via email.

- **Arrive at your conferencing session early**, five to 10 minutes ahead of the scheduled meeting time to allow for uploading presentations (or be sure to prepare in advance).
- **Terminate instant messaging** or place the application in a Do Not Disturb mode. Likewise, be sure mobile phones are in silent mode or turned off.
- **Avoid using IP communicators** or other computer-based phone capabilities during a conference call.
- **Do not place mobile devices near IP telephones** or speakers in the conference room.
- **Do not bridge web conferencing calls together**, as you may experience lower quality sound when doing so. Bridging web calls means someone dialing someone else or a conference room into a conference call vs. having everyone dial in directly.
- **Mute your conference phone when you are not speaking** to reduce background noise and improve the meeting experience.
- **Restrict side conversations** during web conferences so remote workers can hear the primary speaker.
- **Use video options whenever possible** during a web conference to help facilitate relationships with others.

Working remotely can be a highly successful way to conduct business. If you have made that choice, keep these guidelines in mind and give it your best.

For more information visit:

- Cisco Telework Solutions – www.cisco.com/go/govtelework
- Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) – www.cisco.com/go/psbyod
- Cisco Virtual Experience Infrastructure – www.cisco.com/go/psvxi