HR TOOLKIT

Remote Employee Well-being

Provided by: New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc.

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Introduction

An employee's well-being is defined by various factors, both inside and outside of work—including physical, mental, social and financial well-being. Overall well-being is something that employees desire but can be challenging to achieve. Not only can employees who achieve well-being thrive in their personal and professional lives—they offer immense benefits to organizations.

The good news for employers is that the efforts they take to ensure employee well-being can not only help their employees and their bottom line, but are also very attainable. A Harvard Business Review survey found that 95% of employees feel that their organization has at least some control over employee well-being, with 38% reporting that they feel their organization has a high degree of control.

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, many employers find themselves revamping their remote work arrangements. According to a study from PwC, 55% of executives plan to have employees work remotely at least one day a week post-coronavirus. Likewise, the same survey found that 72% of employees would prefer to work from home at least two days a week. While some employees may desire to go back-and-forth between an on-site and remote location, 32% of employees reported that they would prefer to work entirely remotely. That means that, as leaders plan to achieve a high level of employee well-being, remote employees should be accounted for.

55% of executives plan to have employees work remotely at least **one day a week** post-coronavirus

72% of employees would prefer to work from home at least **two days a week**

32% of employees reported that they would prefer to work **entirely remotely**

Those who are working remotely have many of the same desires as any other employee. However, they also face unique challenges. According to Gallup, a top concern for remote employees is loneliness—which can impact many of the different facets that make up employee well-being. Ultimately, whether an employee is on-site or remote, employers should consider how to best provide support accordingly, and it is rarely a one-size-fits-all solution.

How do employers prioritize well-being for all employees—both on-site and remote? Appropriate efforts will vary by organization. To aid you, this toolkit offers an overview of well-being, how well-being uniquely applies to remote employees, and steps that employers can take. Also, the Appendix offers infographics, checklists and a scorecard.

Remote Employee Well-being

Well-being refers to wellness in all aspects of life, including, but not limited to, physical health, mental health, social health and financial health. The concept of well-being can have implications on an employee's overall quality of life, health and happiness.

While employees' choices will have a substantial impact on their well-being—the same is true for their employers. There are a variety of initiatives that employers can offer to boost employee well-being, such as wellness programs, education initiatives, employee engagement efforts and more.

Just like for on-site employees, well-being is important for those working remotely. Generally, both camps have similar desires, but remote employees have unique challenges to address. The best practices listed throughout this toolkit will serve as examples for how you can incorporate initiatives that will address and support the tenants of well-being: physical, mental, financial and social.

The Importance of Remote Employee Well-being

Whether an organization's workforce is on-site or remote, employee well-being is not only beneficial for employees, but it can positively impact the bottom line of an organization. For example, employee well-being efforts can help with employee engagement, recruiting and retention. Employers know the impact that retention has, and well-being efforts can reduce the impact that poor retention has on an organization, as employees who report high engagement and well-being are less likely to seek employment elsewhere.

Research from Gallup shows that well-being can significantly impact employees' "job search intent," as 33% of employees who reported lacking engagement and high well-being reported that they are likely to seek other employment opportunities. Fortunately for employers, steps can be taken to reduce this number, as only 13% of employees who reported being engaged intended to seek employment elsewhere, and employees who also reported high well-being brought this number down to 8%. Employers who are committed to employee well-being can save on turnover-related costs and recruiting costs, since an organization's brand is boosted by employees who are strong ambassadors for their culture.

Also, an employee's well-being is directly related to the quality of their work and their engagement, performance and productivity. According to a Gallup poll, organizations with highly engaged employees outperform their competition in earnings per share by 147%.

Research from the Harvard Business Review further highlights the importance of employee well-being. The research, conducted in 2019, focused on how workforce well-being can drive business value. Key findings were:

Eighty-seven percent of respondents felt that workforce well-being could **give their company a competitive advantage.**

Seventy-nine percent of respondents agreed that unhappiness among some of their workforce **hurt productivity.**

Seventy-five percent of respondents agreed that unhappiness **led to unwanted turnover.**

Seventy-six percent say expectations about workforce well-being are **higher now than five years ago.**

While many well-being components are applicable to both remote and on-site employees, there are ways that remote employees can have their unique needs addressed. Employers should thoughtfully review employee well-being and consider how well-being impacts their remote employees.

Physical Well-being

Creating a culture that supports employees' physical well-being goes beyond offering gym discounts and implementing weight-loss, smoking cessation or wellness programs at your organization. It's all about giving employees the tools they need to manage costly chronic conditions and to make healthy choices.

Health care costs continue to increase on a stable basis, and that trend likely won't stop anytime soon. And, many people wrongly assume that treating catastrophic accidents or illnesses are what's driving costs to increase. Rather, chronic conditions are the primary driver of health care cost increases.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, chronic diseases are health conditions that require ongoing management over an extended period of time. Some chronic conditions have very few symptoms, while others severely limit a person's ability to perform normal, routine tasks.

Here are four top costly chronic conditions plaguing employees across the country:

Diabetes   **Heart disease**   **Musculoskeletal injuries**   **Opioid use**

Chronic conditions not only deeply affect those who suffer from them, but can also lead to increased medical expenditures and lost productivity for employers. The good news is that, in spite of their devastating effects, many chronic conditions are preventable. While some factors such as age, genetics and environmental triggers may be unavoidable, controlling modifiable risk factors such as smoking, physical inactivity and eating an unhealthy diet can play an important part in preventing chronic conditions.

By targeting high-cost health issues, you may be able to mitigate some of their related health care costs and, in turn, help your employees become healthier. There are a variety of initiatives that employers can take.

What Employers Can Do

Employers can play a large role in providing remote employees with resources related to physical well-being, and these efforts can have a tangible impact on the organization. On average, employer health care coverage for an employee with a chronic condition is five times higher than coverage for those without a chronic disease. So what can employers do to reduce health care costs for themselves and their employees? Think prevention. Treating chronic diseases involves physician visits, extended hospital stays, prescription drugs and expensive treatments. Chronic diseases are serious, costly and often preventable. Once they are fully developed, these conditions may be managed, yet never cured. Despite this, there are safe, cost-effective interventions to avoid chronic diseases altogether.

These small things may not seem important at a quick glance, but it's the small things that will help you incorporate well-being into your organization's culture and, subsequently, into your employees' everyday lives. There are some simple small tweaks that you can introduce at your organization to subtly make physical well-being a top-of-mind concern for employees. To support physical well-being for remote employees, tips for employers include:

Take a multichannel approach to physical well-being initiatives—When launching initiatives, take steps to ensure that these efforts are communicated effectively with all employees—including those working remotely. This includes sending out emails, directly discussing in a virtual meeting or sharing brief videos with employees. A multichannel communication plan will help ensure as many employees as possible receive your message.

Establish a remote-friendly wellness program—Employers can consider offering a wellness program that rewards employees with monetary or non-monetary rewards for efforts to improve their physical health. Employers should ensure that all employees have the tools and resources to participate effectively regardless of location.

Provide educational resources on physical well-being—Many employees may not be fully educated on the best actions to promote and improve their physical health, and employers can help. By sharing up-to-date content and resources with employees, leaders can ensure that their employee base has the knowledge and resources to make good choices. Consider sharing content in a way that can reach all employees, such as through an employee intranet or email.

Provide educational resources on chronic condition prevention—To avoid productivity loss, presenteeism, absenteeism, disability and early retirement for your employees, you should educate them on the value of chronic disease prevention. By targeting high-cost health issues, you may be able to mitigate some of their related health care costs and, in turn, help your employees become healthier. Like with other initiatives, consider how to best share these resources in a way that reaches all employees.

Offer flexible and accessible health-related discount programs—Employers can create partnerships with businesses to allow for employee discounts. Examples may include gym memberships, stress-reducing massages, acupuncture or more where employees can receive these services at a lower cost. Employers can also consider efforts that offer flexibility for remote employees who may not be local, such as offering a stipend for gym or health club access.

Make remote work ergonomics a priority—Since remote employees will be spending the majority of their Monday-Friday routine at their workspace, giving them resources to plan a workstation that promotes physical well-being is a great way to show that you're committed to their wellness. Ergonomics is addressed in more detail later in this toolkit. Also, in the Appendix is an Ergonomics Workstation Checklist.

Social Well-being

Social well-being is multifaceted and focuses on an individual's relationship with their peers, community and environment. Social well-being is a direct challenge for remote employees, as the nature of their role means minimal, if any, in-person contact with co-workers and peers.

Research from Gallup shows that, of newly remote employees, the most common challenge is loneliness, with 21% reporting this as their biggest struggle with working remotely. Loneliness can be a detriment to not only an employee's mental well-being, but also their social well-being.

However, employers can take actions to help address social well-being for their workforce—even for remote employees. For organizations supporting remote employees, efforts to improve social well-being can include volunteering, living sustainably and finding ways for remote employees to socialize with their peers.

What Employers Can Do

The concept of social well-being is one that's commonly forgotten about, mainly because not many are familiar with it. But what does high social well-being look like in the remote workplace? To support social well-being for remote employees, tips for employers include:

- **Host virtual workplace events—**When employees are able to engage with each other virtually, it can help build camaraderie. Many effective video platforms exist, and non-work conversations

can help build relationships and facilitate an environment for positive interactions to take place in a remote environment.

- **Create virtual workplace clubs or organizations**—Just because employees are remote doesn't mean that they can't be part of a club. Workplace clubs are one example of a popular employer-sponsored activity that promotes workplace networking. Workplace clubs typically:

  o Are organized by employees, but funded by employers.

  o Support employees' emotional, physical and social well-being.

  o Build employee engagement and motivation.

  Another positive effect of offering or endorsing workplace clubs is that they give your employees an excuse to participate in an activity that they would not otherwise. Common examples of workplace clubs include:

  o Book clubs

  o Food and wine clubs

  o Exercise clubs

  If you're interested in endorsing workplace clubs, make sure to formalize the process and be fair to avoid discrimination. If you're not going to endorse a club, be sure to give a clear explanation as to why.

- **Promote online discussion**— Employers can open channels using virtual communication tools for employees to connect—and even discuss topics that aren't work-related. Such platforms allow for organizations to create groups or channels for employees to chat with one another openly.

- **Promote volunteering within remote employees' local communities**—Promoting or offering volunteering opportunities helps attract and keep talented, socially conscious and ambitious employees. Volunteering can be both fun and rewarding. While it may be logistically challenging for remote employees to volunteer together, employers can consider initiatives that allow remote employees to volunteer in their local communities. Efforts might include organizing volunteer opportunities for employees or allowing them time off to volunteer for a cause they are passionate about.

Humans are inherently social beings, and providing a work-sanctioned opportunity for remote employees to connect is a great way to facilitate professional relationship development and networking. The remote workplace is and will be different from an on-site environment, but employers can take steps to help employees feel connected.

Mental Well-being

According to the World Health Organization, there's not a specific definition of mental well-being. However, various studies agree that achieving a state of mental well-being includes being able to:

⭐ Realize one's full potential

⚙️ Work productively

🚫 Cope with normal stresses of life

🏠 Contribute meaningfully to one's community

Mental well-being goes far beyond treating mental illness. One main roadblock that employees face when it comes to their mental well-being is chronic stress, which can lead to a lack of sleep and, in turn, can exacerbate workplace stress.

When employees are on-site or remote, mental well-being is a significant issue. Employers should consider how to address topics that might impact the mental health of their employee base and can offer resources that help meet the individual needs of employees.

What Employers Can Do

As an employer, you can take several steps to help remote employees reduce their work-related stress and achieve mental well-being. To support remote employees, tips for employers include:

- **Ensure managers are checking in with remote employees frequently**—Remote employees face unique challenges such as loneliness, but managers can take steps to help. Frequent check-ins focused on encouragement, positivity and listening to the employee's needs can go a long way. The Managing Remote Employees section of this toolkit outlines steps that leaders can consider.

- **Train managers on addressing mental health with their employees**—To ensure that no stigma surrounding mental health exists at your organization, it's important that you properly train management in recognizing the signs of mental illness, excessive workplace stress, workplace bullying and fatigue. These issues won't always be easy to identify in the remote environment, but aware and alert managers can play a key role. Moreover, managers should be trained to handle potentially difficult conversations with employees surrounding their mental health. Ultimately, they should be prepared to speak openly about mental well-being rather than avoid the topic.

- **Review workloads for fatigue**— In the remote environment, this can be challenging as managers may have more limited visuals or a lack of information to make judgments—but managers can discuss workloads openly with employees and can consider using project management platforms or communication tools to ensure that their employees don't have a detrimental workload. Take

a look at your individual job descriptions and workloads to see if there may be a reason why a certain person or department may be struggling with fatigue.

- **Offering work-related resources to remote employees**—Provide employees with the education and tools to manage time and tasks, cope with daily stressors and prevent stress from damaging their health. You can consider offering a virtual stress management class or providing remote employees with educational materials.

- **Address illegal actions in the workplace immediately, including virtual behaviors**—Do not tolerate bullying, discrimination or any other similar behaviors. Unfortunately, the remote workplace isn't immune to these types of behaviors. To help clarify expectations, employers can even consider putting remote-specific dialogue into employee handbooks or policies. Ideally, preventive measures can reduce these behaviors, but employers should be prepared and equipped to respond directly when necessary.

- **Offering accessible mental health resources**—Among other mental health resources, employers can consider establishing and promoting an Employee Assistance Program, which is discussed later in this toolkit. If an employee is significantly stressed, it's possible that they may seek unhealthy ways to cope with their stress. Offering an EAP can help employees get the help they need. Additionally, consider what mental health resources your workplace can offer that are remote-friendly and easily accessible, including telemedicine.

- **Consider how benefits offerings can meet the needs of remote employees**—Benefits can profoundly impact employees' well-being. Consider what benefits meet the needs of remote employees. Efforts might include an expansion or adaption of health care benefits, voluntary benefits or other specific benefits that are easily accessible. The Benefits Considerations for Remote Employees section of this toolkit discusses benefits that may be relevant to remote employees in more detail.

Don't be afraid to openly communicate your organization's commitment to cultivating your employees' mental well-being. Too often, employees refuse to seek mental health services because of the perceived stigma. By communicating your commitment to mental well-being, you will incorporate this idea into your organization's culture and everyday remote work environment. Doing so will help encourage employees to seek the services they need. By giving your remote employees specific tools and resources they need to reduce their workplace stress, you can help them be well on their way toward fostering mental well-being.

Financial Well-being

Saving money for the things we want is a well-understood concept. If you want to buy a TV or go on vacation, you'll have to save up for it. Simply put, you can't expect future expenses to pay for themselves. Yet, despite this basic idea, people are still not saving for the really important expenses—emergencies and retirement. It's easy to abstain from buying coffee for a month so you can afford new shoes, but it's harder when the end goal is so far off. Many people believe Social Security will be enough to cover them during retirement, so they don't buy into their retirement plans. In fact, only 54% of workers are earning retirement benefits at work, according to the Department of Labor (DOL).

Behind work-related stress, financial stress is the next biggest stressor for employees. Employee financial instability affects workplace performance. Imagine trying to focus on work when you don't know how you'll make your monthly car payment. Imagine how productive you'd be if you had a pile of bills waiting at home. These situations illustrate the impact financial wellness can have on job performance and overall well-being.

Moreover, financial wellness is important because the majority of Americans cannot pass a financial literacy test, according to a Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) study. The FINRA study found that many people had trouble calculating interest and putting away money for emergencies. This underscores how badly employees need financial education. It's one thing to offer financial services like a defined contribution plan, but it's another to inform employees about financial issues like when to take out a loan.

Employers can help by offering initiatives and programs designed to help improve their employees' financial well-being. Employers can consider a variety of efforts, and it's important to consider remote employees when planning or considering financial well-being options.

What Employers Can Do

According to a study from Prudential, over 80% of employers offer some sort of financial wellness program. The study notes that these programs vary by employer, and common programs include retirement and saving calculators, and access to financial advisors. These programs can help employees understand basic financial concepts and avoid making risky decisions, like taking payday loans.

How do employers assist those who are working remotely? When designing programs designed to address their employees' financial well-being, employers don't necessarily need to design remote-specific initiatives. Rather, employers can focus on efforts geared to help their entire workforce, regardless of their work location. To support remote employees, tips for employers include:

- Share financial wellness resources with employees via channels accessible regardless of their work location.

- Hold a webinar or virtual class on budgeting basics.

- Survey employees about financial concepts to gauge employee understanding.

- Offer access to financial planners through an Employee Assistance Program.

- Hold a virtual meeting to explain retirement benefits before open enrollment.

You don't need to spend thousands of dollars to implement an effective employee financial education campaign. Even small, informative offerings can be enough to get employees thinking about their savings goals.

Establishing a Supportive Remote Work Environment

To allow remote employees to thrive, employers should consider how to establish a supportive remote work environment. Not all employees adapt to the remote work environment in the same way. As such, employers should consider how to support both the overall needs of their remote workforce and each employee's individual needs. A supportive environment not only requires planning effectively and considering appropriate initiatives, but also ensuring that managers and leaders are prepared to manage effectively. While the previous section gave an overview of components within employee well-being, this section outlines actions and considerations for employers to establish an effective and supportive remote work environment.

How Remote Employees Are Adapting

Though remote work has been a growing trend, even pre-coronavirus, the pandemic has pushed many organizations to expand their telecommuting practices. Many employees have adapted well. The Harris Poll conducted a survey on behalf of Glassdoor among nearly 1,000 employed adults during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that 60% feel confident in doing their job efficiently from home, even if it means doing so indefinitely. The same survey also revealed that 50% believe they would be equally or more productive working remotely.

However, while numerous studies show that expanding telecommuting options can offer benefits for both employers and employees, findings show that not all employees adapt to the virtual environment equally. The Harris Poll conducted a study on behalf of Zapier to see how employees are transitioning to remote work. Results show that:

Sixty-six percent prefer working in the office or workplace.

Forty-two percent miss socializing with co-workers.

Twenty-seven percent report working more hours.

The same study found many positive attributes of expanded remote work—but this data indicates that not all employees adapt with ease. While many employers thrive, others face challenges unique to the remote environment.

Challenges of Working Remotely

Remote employees face unique challenges. While numerous studies show that remote employees can achieve productivity levels that are the same as or higher than their non-remote peers, obstacles do exist. According to the Harvard Business Review, common challenges remote workers face may include:

Reduced motivation

Lack of face-to-face interaction

Social isolation

Limited or lack of access to necessary information

Distractions within their home

Many employees can overcome these challenges, and often even thrive when working remotely. However, this won't easily be the case for all. Managers should focus on identifying issues their team members may be having and create a plan to address them.

To help achieve well-being for remote employees, there are many steps that leaders can take. These actions scale a broad range of topics, but serve the unique needs of remote employees.

Remote Work Planning

When implementing remote work, employers often first address obstacles such as establishing remote work expectations and ensuring all employees have the technology they need. Once initial challenges are addressed, employers often begin to consider how to maximize the remote workplace—including how to best lead remote employees and teams, and achieve employee well-being.

When planning for how to best lead organizations, teams and each employee in the remote workplace, employers should begin by ensuring tactical planning is completed. Initial steps for remote work planning include topics such as creating expectations for remote work, developing appropriate policies and ensuring remote employees have the technology they need to succeed.

Schedules

Ensure that employees receive clear expectations about the hours they are expected to be online. Schedules will vary depending on your organization and the position. Regardless, schedules and hour expectations are a core component of any remote work planning.

Policies

Employers using the remote workplace should consider having a written telecommuting policy. By having employees review or even sign a policy, employers can ensure that employees are aware of expectations.

You may also want to consider including remote-specific expectations in policies and literature, such as remote-specific dialogue in your employee handbook. For example, other remote-specific policies may include a remote anti-harassment policy.

When making any changes to policies, employers should consult with local legal counsel.

Employee Workstations

Technology preparations will include planning for each employee's workstation, as well as software and required access. Detailed technology planning can remove headaches ahead of time and create a smooth experience for employees beginning remote work.

Employers will want to determine which components of the workstation they will provide and which components will be provided by the employee. As employees will be spending a significant amount of time at their workstation, take steps to help ensure that it is comfortable and safe, with high-functioning technology. Common components of a safe workstation include:

Computer—Ensure remote employees have a high-functioning computer with adequate capabilities for their roles and responsibilities. If the employee will be engaging in video calls, ensure the computer includes a webcam.

Supporting technology—While a workstation setup should include a charger, headset and mouse, optional considerations include an external monitor setup, a printer or other equipment relevant to the employee's responsibilities.

Reliable broadband connection—A minimum of 1.5 Mbps (megabits per second) is a good benchmark for bandwidth requirements. For reference, one popular video-conference tool recommends a minimum of 1.2 Mbps of bandwidth to best use their software for high-definition video calls.

Ergonomic work location—Employees should have a space with minimal distractions for a home office. This will include an ergonomic location, with room for all necessary equipment.

For a reference of standard components of a remote workstation setup, review the Remote Workstation Checklist, which is included in the Appendix.

Ergonomics

Working from home comes with its own set of challenges. If an employee finds themselves working from home for a prolonged period of time, it is especially important to take steps to prevent ergonomic injuries. Taking small steps can go a long way toward injury prevention at home.

Ergonomics is defined as the science of fitting a workspace to an individual's needs. Ergonomics aims to increase efficiency and productivity while reducing discomfort and the likelihood of injury.

Many factors of ergonomics may be taken for granted in the workplace and be severely lacking in a home environment. For example, while at the office, employees likely have access to a suitable desk and chair, but when working from home, they might not have an ideal setup.

Poor ergonomics can lead to not only reduced employee efficiency, but also a number of health issues that may have long-lasting effects, including damage to muscles, nerves, blood vessels, ligaments and

tendons. Musculoskeletal disorders can be caused by a wide variety of tasks, many of which may seem innocent, such as sitting with poor posture or having to bend or reach repeatedly.

Workstation Ergonomics

In order to make your home a suitable work environment, there are a number of factors that employees should consider for remote workspaces. Tips for employees include:

Chair—A sturdy chair that supports the curvature of the spine is ideal for working. Chairs should also allow for adjustments so that feet can rest flat on the floor and thighs are parallel to it. While typing, arms should be parallel to the floor as well.

Desk—Use a work surface, such as a desk or table, that has space underneath for your legs and feet. If a work surface is too low, adjust the chair accordingly. The situation may also be able to be corrected using sturdy supports to boost the legs of either the work surface or the chair. Wrists should be cushioned from the surface edge with padding or a wrist rest.

Screen—Arrange the laptop or monitor screen directly in front of you and approximately an arm's length away with the top of the screen at, or slightly below, eye level.

Layout—Organize files and materials so that you don't have to bend and strain to reach them frequently.

Equipment—When using a keyboard and mouse, keep them on the same surface. Position arms so that hands are aligned with, or slightly below elbows. Make sure wrists are straight, and your upper arms stay close to your body. If using the phone frequently, put it on speaker or use a headset to avoid cradling the phone between your head and shoulder.

In addition to arranging their workspace correctly, employees should also be aware of new risk factors that may be present, such as overloading electrical outlets or creating tripping hazards with power strips or extension cords running across the floor.

Included in the Appendix is an Ergonomics Workstation Checklist.

Managing Remote Employees

While many employees adapt seamlessly to the remote environment—others have challenges. By building their self-awareness, leaders can take steps not only to identify who may be struggling, but help support the unique needs of their employees.

As employers consider how scheduled meetings, virtual events and new technologies can be introduced, managers can also think about how they can best support their teams as a resource. An effective management strategy should include offering emotional support and providing encouragement to both individuals and teams. Asking open-ended questions to employees will allow them to speak their minds, and managers should focus on being good listeners. While it may be easy for a manager to pick up on social queues in the office, even the most effective leaders remain more distant in the remote

environment. While these challenges persist, being intentional about providing support to employees can help remove any barriers.

Supporting Each Employee

While many employees will reach out to their manager directly, some may need more direct support. Managers can support this by being proactive and connecting with each team member—the following are ways that managers can facilitate this:

- **Schedule one-on-one check-ins**—By gauging how each employee is doing, leaders can evaluate how to meet the unique needs of each employee.

- **Provide emotional support**—Asking open-ended questions can allow employees to speak their minds. Leaders should focus on being good listeners and providing appropriate support.

- **Establish expectations**—An increased level of ambiguity can put undue stress on remote employees. By establishing clear goals and objectives, employees can stay on the same page with their manager.

Similar to an in-person work environment, leaders in a remote environment are tasked with maximizing the efforts of their employees. Managers can be a great resource for their team—and for each individual team member. Despite being distant, managers can consider how to best meet the needs of remote employees, which often means taking steps to help identify any issues at hand.

Identifying Employees Who Struggle

When physically present, leaders often can identify when an employee's performance or well-being seems to suffer. In the remote environment, there are cues leaders can look for, and topics to consider:

- **What if a high performer's motivation disappears?** When an employee who is known to be an eager, high-performing team member has a sudden drop in productivity or is struggling to meet deadlines, consider whether there has been a recent change. A decrease in performance could be due to a variety of reasons—these may be some clues for managers to use when uncovering an unforeseen issue one of their team members may be encountering.
    - Has there been an organizational change?
    - Has there been a change in their personal life?
    - Has their workload or responsibilities changed?
- **What about your organization or team is worse than before?** A remote work environment can bring issues to light, such as a process that could use improvement. Consider whether an employee's struggles may be part of a broader structural, leadership or organizational issue.

While some issues may be unavoidable, leaders can be proactive by establishing clear expectations and accountability for each employee. As problems are encountered, be prepared to not only support employees in need but also evaluate and change structural issues.

Supporting Remote Employees Who Struggle

Managers can take steps to help employees. Considerations include:

Schedule one-on-one check-ins with each team member—By gauging how each employee is doing, leaders can evaluate how to meet the unique needs of each employee. Asking open-ended questions can allow employees to speak their minds. Leaders should focus on being good listeners and providing appropriate support.

Offer empathy, but avoid lowering expectations—Ensure that each employee knows they are a critical member of the team. Acknowledge their current struggles and create a plan to get back on track.

Challenge employees to make an impact—Consider how workload adjustments—including assignments that include problem-solving or experimentation—may reengage an employee who, though may be talented, is struggling in the current environment.

Meet individual needs, but don't show favoritism—It can be a fine line between supporting individual needs and avoiding perceived favoritism that may cause others on your team to feel remorse. Consider how establishing team policies and expectations might benefit the whole group.

Offer support—A decrease in performance can be a failure of both the employee and leadership. Take accountability in the situation, and offer solutions for how the employee can be better supported.

Remember, each employee is unique. Some employees may adapt well to a remote environment, while others may need individual support to achieve a high level of performance and personal well-being.

Supporting Remote Employees' Caregiving Responsibilities

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, day cares and schools shut their doors. Months later, child care centers remain closed in many parts of the country, which means that parents are tasked with juggling caregiving and work responsibilities. In fact, according to a survey from Boston Consulting Group (BCG), 60% of U.S. parents report that they've had no outside help with child care during the pandemic.

Balancing work and caregiving responsibilities can be difficult and can contribute to decreased productivity, poor mental health and increased stress among employees. As a potential second wave of COVID-19 cases looms in the future, schools and day cares may remain closed in the fall and beyond. Parents are faced with decisions about in-person education, virtual learning and home-schooling. While much attention is given to parents trying to balance their professional responsibilities with home-schooling and taking care of their children, there are also millions of people who are juggling remote work and elder care.

Employers across the country are implementing initiatives to help employees manage caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic. Due to this added burden, many employees are understandably

experiencing significant stress—which can lead to lower productivity and morale, and increase their risk for health conditions, absenteeism and higher health care costs.

What Employers Can Do

Especially if faced with hardships as a result of the pandemic, flexible workplace policies can help organizations rebound quickly as soon as business improves. Consider the following general employment best practices:

- Review workplace policies that limit employee flexibility to ensure they are necessary for business operations. Examples of such policies include fixed hours of work and mandatory overtime.

- Encourage remote employees to request flexible work arrangements and schedules that allow them to balance work and personal responsibilities. Arrangements may include flextime programs, compressed workweeks, part-time work and job sharing.

- Provide reasonable personal or sick leave to allow employees to engage in caregiving even if not required to do so by the FMLA.

- Post employee schedules as early as possible for positions that have changing work schedules. That'll help employees arrange in advance for caregiving responsibilities.

- Promote an inclusive workplace culture. Cultivate a professional work environment that recognizes and appreciates the contributions of all workers and demonstrates respect for employees' personal lives.

Remember, not every initiative will be the right one for you and your company. Be sure to carefully evaluate the pros and cons of each initiative, and realistically assess whether it's a feasible option. Employers should also ensure that they are aware of current legislation related to employee leave.

Recognizing Remote Employees

Employee recognition can take many different forms, but the main goal is to incentivize continued productivity and dedication from your employees. Recognizing and rewarding employees for their hard work is a key factor in boosting engagement among your telecommuting employees. It can have direct benefits, such as improved retention and employee engagement.

Unfortunately, 65% of employees reported that it had been over one year since they received any form of recognition for their work, according to a Gallup poll. To that end, many remote employees receive even less feedback than their on-site peers on a regular basis—if any. While leaders can take steps to use recognition informally through everyday interactions, formal recognition programs are also an option. Employers should consider how both formal and informal employee recognition efforts can meet the needs of their remote workforce and impact their well-being.

Informal Recognition

Sometimes, recognition doesn't need to be formal or grand for it to be effective. For example, a personal thank-you email or message can go a long way in making employees feel valued and engaged while they work from home.

While employees appreciate positive feedback in a private format, receiving accolades in front of their peers can be a confidence booster. For example, you could send out an email to the team or entire company detailing what an employee did and why it's exceptional. Likewise, leaders can use virtual meetings with the team or organization to share employees' accomplishments. While team meetings can be an opportunity to have candid and necessary work-related conversations, creating a positive environment will make members look forward to joining and participating in team check-ins.

Employee Recognition Programs

What are employee recognition programs? As the name suggests, employee recognition programs are formal programs designed to recognize and reward employees for doing a good job. Implementing an ongoing employee recognition program at your workplace can boost your employee engagement and assist with attraction and retention efforts. No matter where employees are located, an employee recognition program can help make everyone feel connected and valued for their work. Remote employees may work with a handful of others in their department or team, so this would give those employees an opportunity to acknowledge and praise teammates who they may not see every day.

There are several types of recognition programs appropriate for the workplace. Here a few of the most popular programs to consider:

- **Peer-to-peer**: Any employee—not just a manager or superior—can nominate or praise a peer.
- **Value-based:** Employees are rewarded for behaviors tied to organizational values.
- **Performance-based**: Employees are rewarded for behaviors tied to business objectives.
- **Tenure-based:** Employees are rewarded based on years of service to the organization.

When developing a recognition program, employers should include remote employees. Employee recognition should apply to all employees at an organization—and it shouldn't matter whether they work on-site or remotely. Remote employees often feel isolated and out of touch with things that matter to the organization, so it is essential to avoid implementing a recognition program that further isolates remote workers. However, employers can overcome these challenges by creating a cloud-based program where recognition is shared in a way that all employees—regardless of location—are able to participate and receive recognition equally. In the Appendix, a checklist is provided that outlines considerations for developing a formal employee recognition program.

Well-being Benefits for Remote Employees

Whether employees are on-site or remote, benefits play a key role in employee well-being. For employers with remote employees, it is critical to ensure that you have the right ones for the remote environment. When considering how to support remote employees' well-being, the following benefits are offerings that employers and their remote employees might find relevant and beneficial.

Mental Health Resources

According to a survey from mental health provider Ginger, nearly 7 in 10 employees cited the COVID-19 pandemic as the most stressful time in their careers.

As employees return to work, many are experiencing financial hardship, balancing new caregiving responsibilities, managing concerns over their physical well-being, and maintaining their mental well-being and health. During these uncertain times, employees are understandably experiencing significant stress, which can lead to lower productivity and morale, and increase their risk for health conditions, absenteeism and higher health care costs.

In addition to covering telemental health services and providing access to mental health professionals, some other mental health resources to offer may include offering or expanding an employee assistance program (EAP).

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

An employee assistance program (EAP) is an employer-sponsored program that offers services or referrals to help employees deal with personal problems. Traditionally, the focus has been drug and alcohol abuse, but many employers have expanded programs to include a variety of issues. EAPs can address these issues and help employees tend to their personal needs, leaving you with healthier, happier and more productive employees.

Many employers currently offer an EAP, but whether your organization is considering establishing one or revamping an existing program, consider how this program can be designed to accommodate remote employees. These considerations can impact the delivery of a program, as well as its offered services. Such services can offer benefits that are relevant to remote employees and any well-being issues they face. On top of offering relevant resources for these employees, EAPs can offer flexibility through telehealth or services accessible via online platforms for employees working in various locations.

Why Offer an EAP?

When employees are distracted by stressful personal or life situations, they are unfocused at work and tend to be absent more often. Their health may suffer as a result, leading to higher medical costs. It is

also costly to recruit and train a replacement for the struggling employee, especially if that individual was formerly, and has the potential to once again be, a valuable asset to the company.

A better solution for many employers is to offer their employees assistance in handling their personal issues, not only to improve their well-being, but also to help them regain their former productivity levels and value to the company. EAPs can provide that assistance. Once an EAP is implemented, it can help the employer attract and retain employees, lower health care and disability claims costs, increase productivity and morale, and lower absenteeism.

In addition, any government contractors or employers receiving federal grants are required to maintain a drug-free workplace. Part of fulfilling that requirement can include an EAP with a drug-free component that offers education, awareness, testing and counseling.

Designing an EAP

EAPs vary from employer to employer, but most have common elements. Some programs are limited and focus on alcohol and drug abuse, but many programs offer expanded services that address a variety of areas in an employee's life. The most important consideration is whether the problems and issues covered are ones that adversely affect the employee's job performance. Additionally, EAPs should be designed to help assist HR and managers with providing any necessary reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act, or leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act or the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. Typical issues addressed include the following:

Alcohol or substance abuse

Divorce or marital problems

Stress management

Crisis intervention

Child care or eldercare

Eating disorders

Gambling addiction

Psychological or psychiatric problems

Financial or legal problems

Consultation services and training for managers regarding employee performance

Depending on how an EAP is structured, it could offer employee education, evaluation, hotlines, counseling and/or referrals. It could be an in-house program, outsourced through an independent EAP provider, or a combination of the two. For both in-house programs and those through a provider, there are options that are accessible for remote employees—including telehealth services and online platforms.

Employers should also consider how to best communicate details regarding the EAP. While an EAP can offer immense benefits to employees, many are not aware of the program or choose not to use it. Many organizations currently offer an EAP, but can consider how to maximize the use of this program and its impact on employee well-being—notably, remote employee well-being.

Cost vs. Return on Investment (ROI)

The cost of an EAP can vary depending on which services are offered, whether it is administered in-house or outsourced, and the number of counselors employed. Also included in the cost is the time employees spend away from work while receiving EAP services. Start-up costs for an EAP program can be high because many employees might be referred for counseling or treatment all at once; however, the ROI can be well worth the initial costs. The following are ways that EAPs can reap savings for employers:

- Lower health care costs

- Fewer disability claims

- Less absenteeism

- Higher productivity and focus

- Improved employee morale

- Fewer workplace accidents

- Higher retention (saves the cost of hiring and training a replacement)

Legal Considerations

Offering an EAP could expose an employer to certain legal liability situations due to actions taken by EAP counselors or outside vendors. Employers should ensure that their liability insurance covers all aspects of the EAP program. For legal advice, employers should consult with local legal counsel.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is essential for an EAP. Employees need to be certain that participating will not damage their career or reputation. EAP records and counseling sessions should be strictly confidential, including the fact that the employee contacted the EAP in the first place. Employers are entitled to employee surveys evaluating the EAP or statistical information as a whole, but employee names should not be revealed. If the release of information or records is necessary or advantageous in a certain situation, the employee must sign a written consent form. Exceptions include situations where disclosure is legally required, such as cases involving child abuse, or homicidal or suicidal intentions.

ERISA and COBRA Considerations

If an EAP is considered a welfare benefit plan, it must comply with the reporting and disclosure requirements of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA). The key distinction, typically, is whether the EAP offers direct counseling or simply referrals. Because employee welfare plans are defined as providing medical benefits or benefits in the event of sickness, an EAP that provides counseling would generally fit that description and would be subject to ERISA standards (there is some uncertainty about these distinctions, however).

Similarly, the implications of the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) on EAPs are a bit unclear. Generally, if an EAP is a welfare benefit plan and provides medical care, it is subject to COBRA. Medical care can include the diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment or prevention of disease. EAPs that offer those services in some form (even through counseling) are likely considered health care plans subject to COBRA. COBRA regulations do not address EAPs that offer both medical and nonmedical benefits. It would seem, though, that an employer is at least obligated to offer eligible beneficiaries the option to elect to continue the portion of their EAP that provides medical benefits.

Policy Statement

An EAP should include a policy statement, which communicates to employees the services offered, how to obtain those services, an assurance that the program won't jeopardize their jobs or reputations, a promise of confidentiality and any exceptions to the confidentiality agreement.

Telehealth Benefits

Telehealth is the practice of communicating electronically with a physician, typically via telephone or video chat. The medium has risen in popularity over the past few years, but the coronavirus pandemic has proven just how valuable it can be. Many insurers are already covering telehealth under their plans, and it's a safe bet that others will do the same.

During the pandemic, telehealth services have seen a significant increase in utilization. According to a survey from FAIR Health, there was a 4,347% increase nationally in telehealth utilization from March 2019 to March 2020. As the pandemic has progressed, many providers and hospitals are encouraging patients to utilize telehealth services instead of coming to the office or hospital for non-life-threatening care.

Heading into 2021, expanded access to and coverage for telehealth services will be a priority for employees. Employers should evaluate their current offerings and consider adding or expanding this benefit. Telehealth services are not only a great benefit for remote employees, but also easier for employers to implement than ever before.

Flexible Schedules

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, employers were feeling the pressure to provide flexible workplace benefits. Even remote employees are looking for flexible work hours and generous paid time off.

Consider how flexible work practices can create a culture that supports remote employees. Flextime allows employees to have flexibility in their work schedules. Listed below are three ways organizations commonly structure flextime:

- **Flextime with core hours**—Employers can establish core hours, such as 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., when the employee should be present.

- **Flextime with daily hours limits**—Employers can establish a practice where employees must work 40 hours per week, with a cap of 9 hours per day.

- **Flextime with minimal or no restrictions**—Under this structure, employees would be expected to complete 40 hours per week, at hours of their choosing.

Giving employees flextime allows them to schedule their lives around work without sacrificing work productivity. When employees are free to get their objectives accomplished, while still working full time, they are free to focus on doing the job at hand, rather than worrying about their personal lives and how they'll get everywhere on time.

Wellness Programs

A wellness program is an organized program intended to assist employees and family members in making voluntary behavior changes that reduce their health risks and enhance their individual productivity. Wellness programs vary widely in design and may offer opportunities or incentives for improving health and wellness, such as increasing fitness, losing weight, managing chronic health conditions or quitting smoking.

Wellness programs can offer employers benefits, as investing in a wellness program may save money over time by reducing health care costs. Plan sponsors will have to determine whether the value expected to be derived from offering a wellness program is worth the cost. Depending on the scope of the program, it can be a relatively low-cost way to encourage healthy behaviors among participants.

Wellness programs must be carefully structured to comply with both state and federal law. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) (as amended by the Affordable Care Act), the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) and state discrimination laws will all impact the design of a wellness program. How state and federal laws apply to an employer's wellness program is highly fact-specific and depends on the structure of each wellness program. Because of the potential risks of noncompliance, employers should have their legal counsel review wellness programs before the programs are introduced to employees.

Benefits Communications

To best engage remote employees with benefits designed to specifically help them, it's important to not only offer appropriate benefits, but also ensure that remote employees are aware of and educated about available offerings, and how and when to enroll. Employers can consider initiatives such as:

- **Communicate to employees about benefits through multiple channels**—Consider using videos, mail-home postcards, PDFs and other materials to ensure employees have all the information they need.

- **Build an internal benefits website**— If your organization does not currently have an existing benefits website available, consider building an internal digital destination so employees can have access to open enrollment resources as well as year-round benefits resources.

It's important to make sure that these benefits are visible. If employees aren't aware, it won't be easy for them to get access—thus, tying back to employee well-being. Ideally, these benefits can help support the

well-being of remote employees. While it is important to offer the right benefits, it also is critical that employees receive proper communications and enrollment opportunities to make the best decision for their situation.

Seeking Employee Feedback When Designing Benefits

During benefits planning, it's important to seek input from employees. Every organization is unique, and as these benefits will be designed with employees in mind, they'll also be a great source to help you design benefit offerings. Consider efforts such as conducting surveys, soliciting feedback or having open discussions on a regular basis.

As your organization conducts benefits planning, be sure to consider all employees. As an increased number of employees work remotely, you should consider what year-over-year benefits updates meet the needs of your employees. As employees' work locations change over time, their needs may change as well.

When evaluating what benefits and initiatives can benefit your remote employees' well-being, know that these employees may prioritize specific benefits. You can help ensure you meet the needs of your employees by involving them in the process. Consider offering a survey for employees or opening discussions to include stakeholders outside of the traditional decision-makers—such as HR professionals and company leadership. As an increased number of employees work remotely, you may find that the benefits they prioritize have changed. In some cases, this change might even be drastic.

Summary

To effectively support remote employee well-being, employers are tasked with addressing many of the same well-being challenges that all employees face while launching specific initiatives for remote employees. Employee well-being can have a profound impact on the bottom line of an organization. Fortunately for employers, there are steps that can be considered to help employees succeed. Creating an environment that effectively addresses and supports employee well-being is a challenge that requires many considerations. Leaders must consider how to meet the needs of employees—both those on-site and those working remotely. Likewise, not all employees have the same challenges, and employers should consider how to support the unique needs of employees and equip them to thrive—both inside and outside of the workplace.

As your organization strives to improve employee well-being, resources in this toolkit can help. The Appendix of this toolkit offers additional resources for employers.

Appendix

This Appendix contains a selection of resources designed to help your organization plan for supporting remote employee well-being. It features an infographic, a scorecard and checklists for employers to use.

Speak with New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc. if you have any questions about these resources.

Printing Help

There are many printable resources in this Appendix. Please follow the instructions below if you need help printing individual pages.

1. Choose the "Print" option from the "File" menu.

2. Under the "Settings" option, click on the arrow next to "Print All Pages" to access the drop-down menu. Select "Custom Print" and enter the page number range you would like to print, or enter the page number range you would like to print in the "Pages" box.

3. Click "Print." For more information, please visit the Microsoft Word printing support page.

Remote Employee Well-being

These statistics highlight the importance of employee well-being:

While **33%** of employees who report low engagement and well-being intend to job hunt in the next 12 months, only **8%** of employees who are engaged and have high well-being intend to do so.

Eighty-seven percent of surveyed employees felt that workforce well-being could give their company a competitive advantage.

Seventy-nine percent of employees agreed that unhappiness among some of their workforce hurts productivity.

Remote employees reported loneliness as their biggest struggle, with 21% saying this was their No. 1 concern.

Employee well-being efforts can help an organization's bottom-line, and organizations can take the following steps to support their remote workforce:

Engage remote employees with video calls and virtual events.

Support employee caregiving needs.

Equip managers to communicate effectively.

Offer mental health resources.

Promote exercise.

Prioritize workstation ergonomics.

Sources: Harvard Business Review, Gallup, Employee Benefit News

REMOTE WORKPLACE WELLNESS
SCORECARD

A healthy workforce is demonstrably more productive, engaged and cost-efficient. Unhealthy employees cost employers billions of dollars each year from things like lost productivity and emergency room visits. However, simple wellness initiatives designed for remote employees can help lower expenses and establish a more secure bottom line. Are you taking the appropriate steps for remote employees?

INSTRUCTIONS: Begin by answering the questions below. Each response will be given a numerical value depending on the answer. After completing the questions, total your score using the scale at the bottom of the page.
- **YES:** 0 points   - **NO:** 2 points   - **UNSURE:** 2 points

QUESTION	YES	NO	UNSURE	SCORE
1. Is educational wellness content regularly shared with remote employees?	☐	☐	☐	
2. Do remote employees have ready access to health care education materials?	☐	☐	☐	
3. Does your organization utilize wellness programs or initiatives focused on employee health for remote employees?	☐	☐	☐	
4. Does your organization offer any mental health support programs?	☐	☐	☐	
5. Does your organization offer virtual events for remote employees?	☐	☐	☐	
6. Is your organization doing enough to lower employee stress?	☐	☐	☐	
7. Does your organization offer an employee assistance program (EAP)?	☐	☐	☐	
8. Has your organization recently benchmarked its wellness efforts for remote employees against industry competitors?	☐	☐	☐	
9. Has your organization ever conducted a virtual health fair?	☐	☐	☐	
10. Does your organization prioritize remote workstation ergonomics?	☐	☐	☐	
TOTAL SCORE:				

Low risk. Contact New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc. to

Moderate risk. Contact New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc.

High risk. Contact New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc.

CHECKLIST | ERGONOMICS WORKSTATION

Presented by New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc.

Date: **Review conducted by:**

This checklist is designed to help you evaluate your computer workstation and your video display terminal (VDT) to prevent common stresses and injuries associated with use.

CHAIR	YES	NO	N/A
Chair height (up/down) and backrest tension/angle are easily adjustable.	☐	☐	☐
Chair is equipped with a padded seat and back cushion.	☐	☐	☐
Front edge of seat pan is rounded and seamless.	☐	☐	☐
Seat is at least 18 inches wide and 15 inches long.	☐	☐	☐
Chair has nonslip upholstery with porous "breathable" fabric.	☐	☐	☐
Backrest has height-adjustable lower back support.	☐	☐	☐
Backrest is at least 18 inches tall and 14 inches wide.	☐	☐	☐
Seat tilts back only slightly as the backrest tilts back.	☐	☐	☐
Chair swivels easily on casters.	☐	☐	☐
Chair is supported with five legs for stability.	☐	☐	☐
Base of chair is at least 24 inches around.	☐	☐	☐
Height- and width-adjustable armrests are provided if needed.	☐	☐	☐

FOOT/LEG POSITIONS	YES	NO	N/A
Feet are flat on the floor or on a footrest.	☐	☐	☐
You have 3-6 inches of legroom between legs and workstation.	☐	☐	☐
Thighs are parallel to floor.	☐	☐	☐
Knees are at a 90- to 110-degree angle.	☐	☐	☐

KEYBOARD	YES	NO	N/A
Keyboard is detachable and slightly sloped at about 10 to 15 degrees.	☐	☐	☐
Keyboard is prevented from slipping.	☐	☐	☐
Wrists are relaxed and straight (neutral).	☐	☐	☐
Wrist rest or parallel support armrests are used, if needed.	☐	☐	☐
Arms are close to the body with elbows at 90-degree angle	☐	☐	☐
Wrist/forearms are parallel to floor.	☐	☐	☐
Mouse is at same level as keyboard and within easy reach.	☐	☐	☐

WORKSTATION	YES	NO	N/A
Display screen is 18-30 inches away from the eyes.	☐	☐	☐
Table/desk height is adjustable if needed.	☐	☐	☐
Table/desk surface is 25-27 inches above the floor and 30 inches deep.	☐	☐	☐
There's adequate space to adjust height/location of monitor.	☐	☐	☐
Front edge of table is rounded.	☐	☐	☐
Materials used most often are arranged within easy reach.	☐	☐	☐
Document holder is at same height and distance as the display screen.	☐	☐	☐
Telephone headset or speakerphone is used if needed.	☐	☐	☐
Storage drawers located under desk/table do not restrict knee clearance.	☐	☐	☐

DISPLAY SCREEN/MONITOR	YES	NO	N/A
Brightness and contrast controls are adjusted for viewing comfort.	☐	☐	☐
Display screen is 18-30 inches away from the eyes.	☐	☐	☐

	YES	NO	N/A
Top line of display (print) is slightly below eye level.	☐	☐	☐
Display is tilted slightly to reduce reflections and glare.	☐	☐	☐
Display screen is clean and free of flickering.	☐	☐	☐

LIGHTING/GLARE REDUCTION	YES	NO	N/A
Indirect or shielded lighting is used to reduce reflections and glare.	☐	☐	☐
Window blinds or drapes are adjusted or closed when needed.	☐	☐	☐
Lighting levels are adjusted (where possible) throughout the day.	☐	☐	☐
Face of display screen is at right 90-degree angles to windows.	☐	☐	☐
Ceiling lights are located to the side of the screen (not directly overhead).	☐	☐	☐
Anti-glare screen/filter used if necessary.	☐	☐	☐
Task lighting or desk lamp is adjusted to avoid glare and reflections.	☐	☐	☐

CHECKLIST | REMOTE WORKSTATION

Presented by New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc.

As remote work has been an expanded practice, many organizations are reviewing how they can best support and plan for use of the remote workplace. Employers can use this checklist when reviewing and planning a remote workstation setup for current employees, or when planning a remote onboarding process. Remote workstation setup can vary by organization, and the employee's role and responsibilities. Employers can review this checklist to determine which components of a remote workstation should be provided to employees and what technology considerations should be planned for.

Workstation Environment and Setup	
Adequate space within the employee's home for an office	☐
Workstation area that complies with ergonomic and safety guidelines	☐
Workstation in a location with broadband network able to download and upload at a minimum of 1.5 Mbps	☐
Environment with minimal noise and distractions	☐
Desk or work area with sufficient space for equipment	☐
Comfortable and ergonomic office chair	☐

Computer	
Desktop or laptop, either provided by the employer or employee	☐
Adequate hard drive capacity and memory on computer to perform necessary job duties	☐
If video calls will be part of the employee's job responsibilities, computer includes a webcam	☐
Headset with microphone	☐
Power cord	☐
Mouse	☐
Mouse pad	☐
Keyboard	☐

Optional Workstation Equipment	YES	NO	N/A
Docking station or hub	☐	☐	☐
External monitor	☐	☐	☐
Additional monitor for dual-monitor setup	☐	☐	☐
External keyboard	☐	☐	☐
Printer	☐	☐	☐
Fax machine	☐	☐	☐

Office Supplies	YES	NO	N/A
Notebooks	☐	☐	☐
Binders	☐	☐	☐
Paper	☐	☐	☐
Pens	☐	☐	☐
Pencils	☐	☐	☐
Stapler	☐	☐	☐
Staples	☐	☐	☐

Technology Software and Services	YES	NO	N/A
Cloud-based phone subscription service or cellphone	☐	☐	☐
Virtual private network (VPN) established for employee's computer	☐	☐	☐
Internal network access given to employee for all necessary job functions	☐	☐	☐

Use this checklist as a guide when planning the remote workstation setup for employees working remotely full- or part-time at your organization. For assistance with remote work planning, contact New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc..

CHECKLIST | EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Presented by New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc.

An employee recognition program can help maintain or improve positive workplace relationships and teamwork, as well as encourage a compassionate, thoughtful culture. Employee recognition can also have a positive impact on employee retention, and often even help with efforts such as recruitment. There is no one-size-fits-all approach for developing and implementing employee recognition programs, but there may be some best practices for making it successful. As your organization considers how to launch an employee recognition program, create and adjust it with your employees' wants and needs in mind so they feel a sense of belonging in the workplace and feel appreciated for their hard work.

Use this checklist as a general guide when developing and implementing a recognition program.

Selecting a Program	
Define the business need for an employee recognition program while answering the questions: • Why is it important to recognize and celebrate employees? • What will happen if praise isn't given to employees?	☐
Tie employee recognition to the organization's core values.	☐
Tie employee recognition to talent strategies.	☐
Reinforce and reward positive behaviors.	☐

Developing a Program	
Ensure the program reinforces the overall business goal.	☐
Enable peer-to-peer employee recognition.	☐
Identify clear recognition criteria and requirements.	☐
Establish a budget for recognition efforts (for example, consider investing 1% of payroll).	☐
Select incentives (intangible or tangible).	☐
Use a platform to help operationalize actions.	☐
Use a platform for public employee recognition.	☐
Invite remote employees to participate and share their needs and ideas.	☐
Share recognition on a regular basis through expected channels.	☐

Implementing a Program	
Lead from the top.	☐
Train managers to do the following: • Help employees understand the impact their performance has on the organization's goals and how they drive the business to succeed. • Discuss the approach for managing and rewarding individual and team performance. • Explain how the program works and how employees can achieve recognition. • Learn ways to motivate and inspire others. • Learn how to communicate needs, expectations and goals clearly. • Deliver praise in a sincere and timely manner.	☐
Provide a clear, written policy and guidelines about the program and its criteria.	☐
Make employee recognition specific by providing details of the action or behavior being recognized.	☐
State the impact by explaining why certain employee actions matter and ultimately move the organization forward.	☐
Make employee recognition authentic.	☐
Make employee recognition timely.	☐
Make employee recognition frequent.	☐
Recognize the everyday actions and behaviors.	☐
Maintain the recognition process and overall program.	☐

Evaluating and Improving a Program	
Ask employees for program feedback.	☐
Measure whether certain skills or awareness levels have changed.	☐
Evaluate whether behaviors have changed.	☐
Consider both direct and indirect measures of impact from the program.	☐
Adjust the program if it is not meeting program goals or employees' needs.	☐
Keep the lines of communication open.	☐

Use this checklist as a guide when planning, developing and implementing an employee recognition program at your organization. For more information, contact New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc..

CHECKLIST | POST-CORONAVIRUS REMOTE WORK PLANNING

Presented by New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has changed many aspects of the current workplace. As organizations create post-coronavirus return-to-work plans, many employers are reviewing remote work practices. Employers can use this checklist when implementing remote work.

Remote Work Planning	YES	NO
Has your organization considered the feasibility of remote work in your workplace?	☐	☐
Has your organization considered interviewing candidates virtually?	☐	☐
Has a process for onboarding remote employees been established?	☐	☐
Have remote work expectations been established for when employees return to work?	☐	☐
Have return-to-work expectations been communicated to employees?	☐	☐

Schedule	YES	NO
Does your organization have set guidelines for working hours?	☐	☐
Have guidelines for working hours been communicated to employees?	☐	☐
Are scheduling expectations detailed in your telecommuting policy?	☐	☐
Does your organization have a plan to monitor when employees are online?	☐	☐
Are employees required to check in when they're working remotely?	☐	☐
Does your organization have a plan in place to accommodate employees who may be balancing caregiving and working-from-home responsibilities?	☐	☐

Policies	YES	NO
Does your organization have a telecommuting policy?	☐	☐
Does your policy include information about expected working hours?	☐	☐
Does your policy include information about communication expectations?	☐	☐

	YES	NO
Does your policy include information about your company's cybersecurity expectations?	☐	☐
Does your policy include information about your company's expectations for using company property at home?	☐	☐
Does your policy include information about productivity expectations?	☐	☐
Have employees received your telecommuting policy?	☐	☐
Does your organization require employees to sign a policy acknowledgment agreement?	☐	☐
Has your employee handbook been updated with specific guidelines for remote work?	☐	☐

Technology	YES	NO
Do your remote employees have access to all the technology they need?	☐	☐
Does your company have access to video conferencing technology?	☐	☐
Does your company have access to communication platforms?	☐	☐
Does your organization have a plan in place for what employees should do if they have issues with their technology?	☐	☐
Are employees allowed to request additional equipment should they need it?	☐	☐
Are technology specifications detailed in your telecommuting policy?	☐	☐

Communication	YES	NO
Does your organization have a plan for regular communication with remote employees?	☐	☐
Is your communication plan detailed in your company's telecommuting policy?	☐	☐
Are managers checking in with employees daily?	☐	☐
Are plans in place for fostering teamwide communication?	☐	☐
Has your organization provided resources to employees on work-from-home ergonomics?	☐	☐

Does your communication plan include providing companywide news regarding the COVID-19 pandemic?	☐	☐

Employee Engagement	YES	NO
Does your organization have a plan for keeping remote employees engaged?	☐	☐
Does your organization have an employee recognition program for remote employees?	☐	☐
Does your organization encourage employees to preserve their work-life balance?	☐	☐
Do managers check in on employees' mental well-being?	☐	☐
Are strategies in place to ensure employees don't feel isolated?	☐	☐
Do employees have access to telecommuting resources?	☐	☐
Are social engagement opportunities provided to remote employees, such as video calls intended for non-work conversations and team building?	☐	☐

Use this checklist as a guide for remote work considerations when creating return-to-work plans. For additional resources on COVID-19, contact New England Employee Benefits Co., Inc..