Building a Strong Remote Workforce

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As ECHOtape has evolved over the years, we have sought to not only match but to model the trends that shape the landscape for work. Estimates predict that by the time 2015 is over, approximately 1.5 BILLION people will have structured their work day so that they spend time working remotely. Indeed, we have our people scattered all throughout the country, doing a great job, finding the right balance when working remotely from our physical headquarters. While some big companies still equate facetime with productive time (ahem, Yahoo) , we at ECHOtape know that flexibility leads to productivity. Not only does it give you the freedom to work the way you work best in the environment you know the best, it also gives us a leg up in finding the best talent to fill the roles we have in our company.

We firmly believe working remotely is part of our identity at ECHOtape. That said, it's not always the easy path to winning the game. If your remote workforce is increasing, investing in a strong [cloud-based workflow](#)will be the key to maximizing productivity between teammates, and overseeing their daily activities. But here's something you probably haven't thought of – onboarding remote employees is just as important as in-house staff. I don't mean policies and procedures, although that's also important. I'm referring to giving your remote

employees the right tools for success. With no water cooler to gather around, or company break room, it's more difficult to know what's going on with the team. However, taking the time to help remote staff develop healthy workday routines will not only set them up for success, but give managers piece of mind. I work remotely myself, and over the years I have learned some things that have helped me maintain a healthy balance while working from home. Here are my top five guidelines to help remote workers be the best they can be no matter where they are.

Get organized!

I know, I know…your home is your castle, but you never know what kind of distractions can pop up when you're there all the time. Don't despair! It IS possible to create a positive work environment in your home.

Instead of thinking about it as organizational measures, think of it as reducing barriers to getting things done. One of those barriers may simply be a place to have some peace and quiet to think. Does your home office have a door? Even if you don't have roommates or children running around, sometimes it is still mentally useful to have a distinction between "in" your office and "out" of your office, so don't be afraid to close that door and shut out the outside world for a while.

Take 5 minutes either at the beginning or the end of each day to straighten up your work place. You're going to be there for most of your day, and building a workflow that suits you best is going to be hindered by messiness scattered about. It will

soon be part of your daily routine, which means your daily routine involves NOT being messy!

Don't be afraid to 'bug' your teammates

Not being in a physical office means that you won't be interacting with your teammates face to face on a regular basis. You might be surprised at how much personal interaction we use to gain simple information almost passively, and if you're in a different physical space than your teammates, suddenly easy information, isn't.

Don't be afraid to reach out to your teammates on a consistent basis as you work through your day! Did you know that we have a smartphone application called Shoretel that allows us to dial anyone's extension in the office instantly? It is an amazing app because it makes me feel like I'm dialing office to office, and I use it all day long. You may feel like you're becoming a burden or nuisance, but I'm here to remind you that it is an essential part of leveraging all of our areas of expertise in order to get things done. It can also be a nice reminder that, hey! there are people out there in the field working toward the same goals, and the more we help each other, the more we win the day.

Move!

One of the great benefits of working in your own personal virtual office is that you can get up and go wherever you need to, unbounded by the physical constraints of an office setting. Use this to your advantage! When you need a break, go

outside!

Think of it this way. If you were working at ECHOtape's office, you would have a commute time, a lunch break, and maybe even an after-work happy hour get-together from time to time. All of these things factor into what goes into making your normal work week enjoyable, but it is all spent outside of the office.

If you're working in your own home, all of those little breaks that require you to physically move around vanish, and when they vanish you may not even realize it. Take control over these parts of your day! Build in a time to go outside and take a walk. Take 5 minutes to entertain your pet. I walk my dog Daisy in the morning and at lunch instead of going out to eat. This is one of the parts of my day I look forward to the most, and the break helps clear my mind while giving me a quick bit of exercise. If you don't have a pet, run a quick errand that breaks up your mental fatigue, and grab some coffee on the way back.

By adding in these little daily events, you make your personal work space more enjoyable.

Be healthy

To go along with #3, being healthy isn't just about getting your daily walk. When the refrigerator is right around the corner and is filled with last night's leftover dessert, it can be awfully tempting to get a slice of that chocolate cake once or twice or five times during the day. While it may

satisfy your chocolate craving, your work routine may suffer.

Think about what kind of energy your body and mind will use up during the day, and then feed your body with the foods that will make that energy go up. For me, I spend time on the weekends cooking soups and then freezing them, so a delicious, nutritious hot meal can be ready in minutes every day of the week. I also always make sure to have lots of healthy snacks at home, such as nuts, fruits, and hummus, that keep my energy level high. You don't need me to tell you which foods are good and bad for you, but it's a helpful reminder to know that if you're working from home, you are in fact more free to satisfy the needs your energy requires.

At the very least, focus on good hydration. Keep that water bottle filled up whenever you go on your mid-day walks (#3!) and even consider putting an electric tea kettle in your office to avoid having to go to the kitchen every time you need a refill of your favorite coffee or tea. For me, I keep coffee limited to mornings and herbal tea in the afternoon to keep my energy high without getting the jitters.

Set your hours! KEEP your hours!

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of working from home is defining when exactly you are 'working.' The problem is, this changes for everyone! Some people need that rigorous 9-5 schedule in order to separate work from non-work. Other people are happy to solve work related problems right before bed. Maybe you're an early riser (and maybe you're not!). I personally try to work balanced hours. I have a schedule I

keep where I am "in" the office by 8:30AM and finish by 5:30PM. I'm always available via email, but I structure my day so that my lifestyle stays in balance and I won't burn out.

Whatever schedule you want to keep, make sure that this is your defined work day. If it is work time, then it is time to work. If it is NOT work time, then put down your work notebook, physically turn off your computer, and "go home." Chances are, your loved ones will be eager to see you again.

Just make sure we can reach you when we need your help!

Do you employ a remote workforce? How are you encouraging their freedom while maximizing their productivity?