4 Ways that Companies Can Adapt to Remote Work

Career Development

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce

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The legal profession has been greatly affected by the rapid and sometimes dramatic advances in technology. These advances have thrust attorneys, sometimes unwillingly, into major transitions. One change is the increase in remote work available to, and increasingly demanded by, attorneys. Technology is drastically altering lawyers' former career model, setting a new standard for legal career paths, and ultimately giving them more freedom in their work.

To some degree, based on the American Bar Association's Model Rules of Professional Conduct and based on common sense and good practice, lawyers have an ethical duty to adapt because we have an ethical duty of competence. Part of competence is remaining up to date on technology in order to use it for the benefit of our clients.

One consequence of our advancing technology is that in-person negotiations seem to, largely, be a thing of the past. Increasingly, companies realize that they can save money on travel and other costs

by using cutting-edge technology to successfully complete negotiations, often without the parties ever meeting face-to-face.



Recent advanced technology such as Zoom, allows in-house counsel members and employees from all organizations to connect globally without meeting in person. Photo by dennizn / *Shutterstock.com*

All of this should actually be an easier transition for in-house counsel than for law firm attorneys, because technological advances in work mean that "law is not solely about lawyers anymore," as Legal Mosaic CEO Mark Cohen said. In-house counsel are used to this. We are not in a law firm surrounded by, almost exclusively, other attorneys. We are already adept at and used to interdisciplinary work with a diverse group of colleagues and teammates, which is likely where remote and technologically savvy legal work is headed.

The increased remote work is promising news for in-house attorneys. If an organization can employ in-house counsel to work from anywhere in the world versus paying outside counsel (which may not be as technologically advanced as its own organization and in-house counsel), then it can significantly cut costs. That's not to suggest that there are not exceptions, like those in Big Law that have embraced the remote work trend. However, in-house counsel are well positioned to add value to their organizations while leaning on equally advanced law firms only as absolutely necessary.

Additionally, many start-ups and other types of companies have cropped up with the goal of aiding attorneys' work through the use of technology. From virtual assistants and law firms to artificial intelligence doing an initial review of contracts to the plethora of other offerings, in-house counsel have more opportunities than ever to thrive in a more flexible work environment.

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And, the good news is that much of the research shows that remote workers are outperforming office workers. In-house legal departments and the organizations that they work for can benefit from this trend by employing the right people and practices to make remote work successful. By doing so, they will attract and retain top talent who seek the flexibility that this model provides.

In order to make remote work successful, there are several specific truths about personalities involved, technological acumen, flexibility, and communication to keep in mind.

Personalities

One important aspect of remote work is the personalities involved, both of the remote workers and the office-based workers. For the concept of remote work to add value, the remote worker must be a self-motivated and available worker.

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Self-motivation is obvious: remote workers have to be people who take pride in their work and will, thus, push themselves to do their best work without a manager present.



Employees have to be self-sufficient and reliable in order for remote work to be successful. Photo by *Ground Picture / Shutterstock.com*

Additionally, the remote worker has to be available. If clients would stop by an office-based worker's office, they should be able to call, video chat, or text a remote worker. The only change in the work dynamic should be the lack of physical presence. The communication should remain as open as if all parties are physically present.

The other essential aspect of remote workers' success is the personalities, specifically the open-mindedness, of their colleagues. Office-based colleagues must be open enough to the idea of remote work to treat remote workers as though they're office-based workers minus the physical presence. If office-based workers are unable to work effectively with remote workers, the premise won't work.

In my role, I regularly collaborate with clients and vendors who have employees all over the globe, working in offices, at home, and remotely from almost anywhere you can think of. With each year that passes, everyone seems more accepting of remote work, which — with self-motivated and available remote workers — will add value for all parties in the long run.

Technological acumen

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I'm sure many of us have heard about companies that fully set up a remote worker's home as the seemingly perfect home office. However, considering that remote work is not yet an entirely accepted premise by most corporations, remote workers may sometimes feel as though they are on their own when it comes to having the resources they need to be successful.

While remote workers should feel comfortable relying on their companies to some degree, they do need to have at least a working knowledge of technology so as to do their jobs successfully without the backing of a headquarters type of facility.

Flexibility

With remote work comes a certain degree of flexibility. Some remote workers will keep traditional hours, but I recently had a remote worker tell me that he does not always work a traditional 9 to 5, Monday through Friday schedule. Instead, he works in the evenings and on weekends and, as he put it, his company "more than gets their time from [him]."



Remote work creates opportunities for flexibility and a good work-life balance. Photo by *Martin Novak / Shutterstock.com*

This brings up another employee benefit of remote work: achieving the coveted work-life balance. Of course, communication is important. If remote workers will not be working traditional hours, their boss should know and approve this. But in the right circumstances, this flexibility can be an added bonus of remote work.

Communication

Communication is one of the most crucial concepts in making remote work successful. All parties involved (e.g., bosses, remote workers, office-based workers, clients, etc.) need to have similar expectations and aligned goals for remote work to be effective and add value. In fact, if handled appropriately, communication and teamwork can improve with remote work, as Aha! CEO and co-founder Brian de Haff explains:

"Distance demands more communication. Without being able to lean on physical proximity, remote workers must reach out to one another frequently and with purpose. This leads to stronger collaboration and camaraderie."

In conclusion, many organizations are realizing that most technology based work could benefit from remote work, because the same tools are used regardless of location. As long as employees are getting their jobs done, the location becomes irrelevant in our advanced technological age. The legal industry, most certainly including in-house counsel, is primed to benefit from remote work. They just have to be open to it and execute it properly.

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Elizabeth A. Colombo



Senior Legal Counsel

Vendavo, Inc.

In her role as senior legal counsel with Vendavo, Inc., Colombo works cross-functionally with the relevant business teams and stakeholders, providing legal advice on a broad range of topics and guiding the business on legal compliance with a particular focus on drafting, managing, and negotiating client and vendor contracts of moderate-to-high complexity from the bid phase through contract execution, including software licensing and SaaS-specific provisions, as well as matters related to contractual liability and risk-shifting provisions, data privacy, intellectual property, and

products.